



RESEARCH PAPER

Accountability without Autonomy a Critical Inquiry: Why Regulatory Expansion in Pakistan's Higher Education Undermines Faculty Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effect of the growth of regulatory authority in the Pakistani higher education system, which has resulted in a state of accountability without autonomy. Hereby the faculty is being increasingly demanded to comply with new rules and regulations and yet the institutions do not have sufficient authority to perform their professional functions. It was a Theoretical study that reviewed the previously available literature to reach the conclusion. It is concluded that the centralized control and bureaucratic pressures in Pakistan's higher education have undermined faculty autonomy and quality-focused research. Sustainable improvement requires systems that empower and trust faculty as central agents of academic excellence. Reorient the Higher Education Commission toward outcome-based accountability by setting quality benchmarks while granting universities autonomy in curriculum, teaching, and research decisions.

Keywords: Accountability without Autonomy, Higher Education Governance, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Academic Freedom

Introduction

The sphere of higher education in Pakistan has increased tremendously within the last two decades. As of 2024, Higher Education Commission (HEC) estimates that there are more than 230 universities in Pakistan, and the population of enrolled students is more than 2.5 million (HEC, 2024). Paper wise this would be an improvement. But every one who has been in our universities knows that growth has not corresponded to quality. We have few institutions that feature in world rankings. The QS World University Rankings 2025 lists very few Pakistani universities in the top 1000 list in the world with most of them not being in the top 500 (QS Top Universities, 2025). The production of research, even with large numbers, is not always impactful, as the citation impact per paper in Pakistan is lower than the average in the world (Elsevier, 2024). And more disconcerting, the faculty that is the mainstay of the system are moving out in increasing numbers.

At the end of 2025, I attended a meeting during which a professor announced that he/she was resigning. She was twenty-three years old and teaching. Her explanation was not complicated: she could no longer balance the requirements of her position as a bureaucrat and the values of an academic that had made her enter the teaching profession. She spent an even greater amount of time filling out the forms that were documenting her teaching as opposed to working on her lectures. The delay in her research was that each publication had to go through a maze of approvals and reports. She described herself as a compliance officer, who by chance, teaches.

It is not a unique story of hers. Faculty members in the Pakistani public universities speak of a working environment in which accountability has lost its attachment to

empowerment. According to a recent survey of Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Associations (FAPUASA), out of all faculty members, 78 percent said they spent over 10 hours a week on administrative documentation, and only 34 percent of them were satisfied with their career advancement opportunities (FAPUASA, 2025). We are blamed in the results that we can have little influence on. Our performance is measured against measures that we never created and which tend to overlook the content of our work. And we are managed by arrangements that place us in the position of workers to be controlled instead of workers to be relied upon.

Material and Methods

This was a study conducted to review to previously available literature in order to address the phenomenon under study.

Results and Discussion

The Content analysis has been done to analyze the data. The results have been stated under the concerning study. The detail is as under:

This paper discusses how this situation came to be. I believe that this growth of regulatory control in the Pakistani higher education and specifically in the Higher Education Commission as well as provincial governments has resulted in a state I term as being accountable but not autonomous. Faculty are being pressured to comply more and lack the power to make any significant academic decision. What is achieved is not frustration but a real abrasion of the circumstances within which educational excellence is possible.

This is analyzed below based on academic sources as well as on the experiences of faculty in Pakistan. It is based on theory but informed by practice. I hope that with the realization of how we created our current system, and why it does not fulfill its intended goal, we can start envisioning some alternatives that have the potential to help serve both the faculty and the students we serve.

Faculty Empowerment

It would be good to first define what faculty empowerment means before discussing the issues with our current system. Very often when academic governance is being discussed, the concept of autonomy is considered as a mere principle, not as an actual state of work. I can also refer to the research done by organizations by drawing on my discussions with my colleagues and identifying four dimensions of empowerment that are relevant in practice.

The Liberty to Teach

The former is professional autonomy the capacity to make decisions regarding what and how we teach. In my early years as an academic, the issue of curriculum development was regarded as a fundamental element of a faculty job. Sometimes we would sit at departmental meetings discussing what texts to use in a course, how a semester would be structured, what would be the best way to assess student learning. They were tough in these discussions and equally thought-provoking. They made us describe our pedagogical philosophy and to discuss various views on our field.

Those conversations have been eliminated to a large extent today. The HEC offers model curricula which though introduced in the form of guidelines actually dictate what is being taught within the nation. A survey by Raza and Nadeem (2023) has discovered that 82 percent of professors of public universities indicated that they are implementing HEC prescribed curricula without many changes to them, which they said is due to fear of audit

or non-compliance. The faculty are supposed to adhere to these templates as opposed to creating their methods. When I inquire junior colleagues about how they design their course, most of them shrug and refer to the HEC document. So why spend time coming up with something when they are already given an approved version of the same?

This is important since good teaching cannot be standardized. A course which is successful in a large city university with students who are well endowed might crash in a small institution where students have varying educational backgrounds. Faculty should be able to be flexible in their teaching to accommodate their students. Once such flexibility is eliminated, the teaching process becomes mechanical and learning is hampered. Altbach (2016) has suggested that centralized curriculum development is essentially incompatible with professional autonomy needed by the faculty to react to student needs and developments in the discipline.

A Voice in How Institutions Run

The second dimension is the participation of governance that has significant influence in institutional decisions. Theoretically, there are structures of shared governance in our universities. These bodies are the academic councils, faculty senates and departmental committees whose role is to see that the academic perspectives are taken into consideration in shaping institutional strategy.

These structures in practice tend to be rubber stamps. I remember that I was on a committee where a new degree program was to be reviewed. It took us months to thoughtfully develop an analysis of curriculum, faculty capacity and resource requirements. Upon handing in our report, we got a short recognition. After 3 months, the program passed, although with major modifications that we had never witnessed or discussed. The academic council had been out bypassed.

This is a general trend. A study by Khan and Mahmood (2024) about the governance in Pakistani state universities revealed that despite the officialness of the governance structures, faculty involvement is symbolic, as major decisions are made by an administrator or outside parties and faculty committees are not consulted. The study reported that only a quarter of the faculty who participated in the survey believed that their input had a great effect on institutional decisions. This is eventually a learning to faculty that there is no use participating. What is the use of spending hours in committee meetings when our recommendations are constantly disregarded?

A Rewarding Merit Career

The third one is career agency the possibility to climb the promotion ladder by merit and to have a degree of control over professional path. In this case, the system of higher education in Pakistan is specially challenged. The two-step hierarchy between the Tenure Track System (TTS) and the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) faculty has developed profound inequalities. The majority of faculty about 88 percent are not yet able to move beyond the BPS system that does not have the clear promotion systems and often promotes seniority rather than performance (HEC, 2023).

The HEC replied in 2025 when the All Public Universities BPS Teachers Association went to the Islamabad High Court to have the long-promised promotion policy implemented, stating that it could not unilaterally come up with a promotion policy. According to the Commission, this would necessitate changes in the individual university Acts (Saleem, 2025). This was taken by many faculty to be an easy way out of a problem that has been simmering for years.

The effects are not limited to remuneration levels. When faculty members are made to believe that their career progress is not based on their merit but rather on elements that they cannot influence such as political connection, administration favor, or just mere fortune, they are no longer motivated to perform. The ones who do excel will seek opportunities in either foreign country or the business world. Brain drain out of our state universities is not really a matter of pay but a matter of pride and of professional respect. As a report by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) indicates, almost 1200 Pakistani faculty members left state universities to go to work in foreign countries or the private sector in 2020-24, and inadequate career advancement was cited as the main cause (PIDE, 2025).

The Space to Think

The fourth dimension is intellectual freedom the freedom to ask research questions of interest, the freedom to publish answers to questions without the threat of repercussions, and the freedom to debate scholarly. It is, maybe, the most essential dimension, since it addresses what the universities are here to do.

I have also observed that colleagues censor themselves in their studies due to their fear that some issues would be a subject of debate. I have witnessed researchers drop potential areas of research due to the bureaucracy of the approval procedures. I have also heard some senior faculty members tell their junior counterparts to work on safe subjects, which can produce publications fast instead of on truly innovative subjects, which may require years before they come to fruition.

The demands to have a publication have increased, and the circumstances of an important scholarship have not become better. The journal ranking system by the HEC which has been put in place to guarantee quality has posed perverse incentives. Instead of coming up with rigorous research, faculty concentrate on submitting articles to approved journals. In a research culture study at Pakistani universities, Ahmed et al. (2024) discovered that 67 percent of university faculty respondents said they favored to publish in quantity rather than quality to meet the HEC standards and 41 percent of the faculty participants claimed to be pressured to carry out dubious research activities to stay productive.

The Development of Regulatory Control

To figure out the reasons behind the erosion of faculty empowerment, it is necessary to consider the way our regulatory system evolved. The plot is intricate, yet some major elements are prominent.

The Reformation of the Higher Education Commission

In 2002, the University Grants Commission was abolished and instead, a new commission, the Higher Education Commission was formed to assist in the coordination and promotion of development of higher education. The initial HEC not only provided financing to universities, which were in need of it, but also facilitated faculty development initiatives and increased access to higher education (Hoodbhoy, 2023). Most of us in the academia who joined at this time recall it to be a time of hope.

However, with time the role of the HEC increased. It shifted its role to the development of the universities to controlling all the affairs of the university. The Commission nowadays decides who may be employed to be a faculty and what qualification one must have. It dictates the promotion policies that should be observed in universities. It creates the model curricula that define the teaching. It enforces journal listings that decide

which journals apply towards career progression. Through its power over funding, it exercises control over nearly all the decisions within the institutions.

The outcome has been what some critics have termed a super-ministry- an agency that has a centralized control on higher education and which is not subject to the normal checks and balances that are usually applied to government departments. According to the detailed account of the development of HEC by Hasan (2024), the Commission has gleaned powers far beyond its initial scope, and has built a regulatory atmosphere in which universities have become an implementing agency instead of an independent entity.

An illustrative incident was when the Islamabad High Court requested HEC to respond to the requests by faculty to adopt a fair promotion policy in 2025. The Commission claimed that it could not act on its own to deal with the problem since it would involve amending personal university Acts (Saleem, 2025). This reaction demonstrated the lack of clarity at the core of the role of HEC. On the one hand, the Commission has alleged that it has a large regulatory power over universities. Conversely, when it comes to a challenging structural issue, it absconds itself and refers to university autonomy. This ambiguity is very frustrating to the faculty stuck in the middle.

University Governance and Provincial Politics

In 2010, the 18 th Constitutional Amendment devolved education to provincial governments. Ideally, this was to be done to put decision-making nearer to institutions and communities. In reality, it has tended to imply more political interventions on university matters.

In Sindh, the eligibility requirements to hold the position of Vice Chancellors and Rectors would be reduced by proposed amendments to the Universities and Institutes Laws Act 2018. The alterations would even enable the nonacademics to hold leadership roles, a factor that would question the scholarly credibility of the university leaders to lead the academic institution (Ali, 2025). The HEC has been alarmed with such changes although it cannot do much to rescue the situation.

The University law in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has been amended to give the Chief Minister immense powers over the universities. The Chief Minister has become Chancellor of higher educational institutions, and the Registrars appointed by the government have an increased role in the running of the institutions. The idea of mid-term performance review and the threat of removal of Vice Chancellors is a mechanism that the faculty is concerned about and perceive as adding political pressure and weakening the independence of the institution (Rehman, 2025).

This is a larger trend seen in these provincial developments. In Pakistan, governments see universities as a part of the state apparatus and not a free entity that fulfills the welfare of people. The need to dominate is very powerful and it is realized irrespective of the political party in power. According to an editorial in *The Express Tribune*, such a strategy demonstrates a basic misconception about what constitutes the prosperity of universities. Academic institutions should be left to their own devices, and not micro-managed (Rehman, 2025).

The Bureaucratic Legacy

The model of administration used in the building of public universities in Pakistan was taken over during the colonial rule. Their large Senates and Syndicates, their complicated approval process, their hierarchical decision making structures were built not to be innovative and academically excellent, but stable and compliant.

The studies on the governance of universities in Pakistan have recorded the role of such structures in limiting the effectiveness of institutions. A survey by Hussain and Malik (2024) of Vice Chancellors established that most of them spend an average of 60% of their time on administrative and compliance issues and that they do not have ample time to engage in academic leadership and the development of their institution. Our university culture does not encourage taking risks. Those faculty members who offer new programs or new teaching ideas are easily groped by procedures which may require years to maneuver.

Faculty in this bureaucratic culture is touched on all levels. The documentation involved in the daily operations of the processes course approvals, grade submissions, research proposals is time-consuming which could otherwise be used in teaching and scholarship. The focus on procedure, whether being in the service of academic functions or not, breeds a compliance culture as opposed to a culture of creativity. Gilani (2023) has suggested that the inflexibility and risk-aversion inherent to the Pakistani university model of bureaucracy is in direct conflict with the flexibility and intellectual boldness that actual academic quality needs.

Lived Experiences

The regulatory structure I have presented is not in the abstract. It defines the day to day faculty life in Pakistan. I would like to explain how this would appear in practice in a number of dimensions.

Enter any faculty office in any public university, and you will probably run across a desk full of forms and not books and papers. Course documents on what was said during each lesson. Student attendance records. The records of examination that show all the assessments. Plans of the lesson were provided several weeks ahead. The necessity of these documents is not due to the fact that they enhance teaching but to show compliance.

One of her colleagues in Lahore just told me of her teaching routine. She offers three classes every semester of between forty to sixty pupils. Each course will require her to have a file where she will keep the syllabus, lesson plans, lecture notes, assignments, quizzes, exams, grade sheets and student feedback forms. These files are periodically audited and any anomaly of these prescribed formats makes inquiries. She approximates that she invests no less than eight hours a week in documentation time that she could use reading in her area, preparing superior lectures, or meeting with learners.

The irony is that all this documentation will not do much to enhance the quality of teaching. Faculty are taught to generate the necessary paperwork and still teach like they always did. The discrepancy between the paper and the reality in the classroom becomes larger as time passes. Caregivers learn to cope with this gap; the less caregivers just get through the motions.

The Illusion of Shared Government

Theoretically, faculty are involved in the university governance by election. Ironically, these entities are not always actually authoritative. I have sat on academic councils where significant decisions had been put across as fait accompli and faculty had been requested to give their seal of approval to what had already been decided. I have witnessed committee recommendations being disregarded or reversed by the administrators without a reason. I have observed other competent members of the same profession drop out of the governance process after discovering that their services were not useful.

One of my former colleagues in a university in Islamabad narrates an eye-opening incident. The faculty senate had taken one year to come up with a proposal of how to reform

promotion criteria in the university. The proposal was thoroughly researched based on best practices of international practices and applied to local conditions. The senate passed it unanimously. It was next forwarded to the office of the Vice Chancellor where it was held six months with a note of the same returned that it needed additional study. That subsequent research did not occur. The proposal passed away without much ado and the faculty who had given their time got a bitter experience of the extent of their involvement.

Faculty cease to invest in faculty governance when it has become ritualized. The individuals best able to help the institutions improve are the scholars who have a vision of their subject areas and their students step out of the governance game, and it is those who are either fond of procedural meetings or consider them to be a way to climb the career ladder. This negatively impacts on the quality of governance and this perception further reinforces the belief that faculty cannot be entrusted with actual authority.

Two Tier System and its Human cost

The difference between the Tenure Track System and the Basic Pay Scale faculty is not only a policy concern. It is a reality lived, which defines careers, families and professional identities. TTS faculty have a well-organized promotion path, high wages and have access to research grants. The faculty of BPS are the majority and they operate in a system where they are not sure of promotion, their salaries are behind schedule and their career growth does not depend on their control and is usually based on factors that are beyond their control.

In 2025, the faculty of BPS held demonstrations throughout the country, requiring an adoption of a long-awaited promotion policy. They assembled at the outside of the HEC office in Islamabad, they presented memoranda to the Prime Minister office and sought judicial redress in the courts. They were so frustrated. There were years of waiting in some cases decades of waiting to get promotions that apparently never came.

The Commission reacted in an educative manner when the Islamabad High Court requested the HEC to solve the problem. It claimed that it did not have the power to take unilateral action, instead of suggesting one. This was another pretext, another procrastinating measure, to faculty who had been waiting years. This system has a human cost that is manifested in the faces of faculty in the middle of their careers who have provided their best years of service in teaching and research but have little to show in terms of career progression.

Research under Pressure

The regulatory environment has changed the research culture of the Pakistani universities not necessarily to the advantage. This has led to the focus by the HEC on the quantity of publications, producing what has been privately referred to by many scholars as a culture of publish or perish in the absence of the support systems that can enable meaningful scholarship to be achieved.

Junior faculty are under special pressure. They also have to publish frequently bearing huge teaching burdens and making their way in the academic world without mentoring or assistance. The outcome is expected: numerous people are oriented on placing articles in accepted journals by all means. Scandals of plagiarism are emerging periodically, and all of them are the results of the system where the output is more important than integrity.

I have a young scholar who graduated with a PhD in a reputable university in Britain and when she came home, she was excited to be the one to contribute in her field. After two years serving in her position, she has not even started to carry out the research she intended to do. She works her days teaching four courses in a semester, attending indefatigable

meetings, and doing the documentation requirements. She does publish when she gets the opportunity, but her books are modest, secure works, which go as far as any career building is required but do not correspond to the ambitious research program she once proposed. She occasionally discusses quitting academia, about getting a job where she can do the things she has been trained to do.

Her experience is not isolated. In Pakistan, gifted students are dropping out of colleges or reducing their expectations since they do not have the environments of doing anything meaningful on the intellectual front. The Pakistani academic brain drain is not mainly related to pay, but it has to do with the capacity to do what is relevant.

Do we have alternatives? Lessons of IBA Karachi and Beyond

The image I have created is pessimistic, but that is not the entirety of the story. In Pakistan, there are institutions, which have sustained the standards of academic excellence and empowered their faculty despite the constraints of the larger system. They can teach us by their experience.

The IBA Karachi Model

The Institute of Business Administration in Karachi is one of the best institutions of the public sector in Pakistan due to its good quality and reputation. IBA is more than seventy years old, and it has been able to remain in the position despite times of political and economic instability that has wrecked other institutions.

Why is IBA resilient? There are a number of factors that are notable. To begin with, its governance structure offers a substantial autonomy. The Board of Governors is a collection of notable professionals and educationists, making it free of day to day political interference in making policy. The independence of the Board enables IBA to have merit-based hiring and similar academic standards (Husain, 2025).

Second, there are strict and transparent procedures of faculty recruitment. When an academic role is available the department conducts an evaluation of the position, candidates are presented to the department and then interviews are conducted with the leaders and finally a Selection Board consisting of external experts approves of the candidates. It is meant to select the most qualified candidates and not to fulfill the bureaucracy norms or political ties.

Third, faculty appraisal is directly related to performance. The quality of teaching, the production of research and the service of an institution are measured on a calibrated yearly system. An annual rating based on a bell-curve would have performance ratings pegged on annual increments, providing a clear incentive to excel. Faculty are made aware of what is expected of them and how their performance would be measured.

Fourth, faculty development at IBA has been invested in. The institution has worked out split-PhD programs in case faculty cannot spend the whole duration in foreign countries, increased outreach to Pakistani scholars who study abroad, and facilitated younger faculty via HEC programs (Husain, 2025). These investments are indicative that development of the faculty is a priority of the institution.

The IBA model shows that when given some autonomy that is meaningful and structures that are based on merit, the institutions of the Pakistani public sector can reach excellence. Notably, IBA has not been successful at the cost of accountability. Instead, the system of accountability is integrated into the academic processes with the help of the transparent evaluation and performance control.

International Examples

Outside of Pakistan, the models of governance that have a greater balance between autonomy and accountability than ours exist. The United States has governance boards in the public universities that appoint presidents who have academic standing and leadership abilities. Academic leadership is central but compliance and finance are handled by professional administrators. The presidents are usually chosen based on their academic achievements and have been identified due to their academic qualifications and their abilities in management (Kerr, 2019).

In Germany, institutional autonomy was enhanced in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the introduction of performance-based funding and quality assurance measures. Universities had more budgetary, staffing and academic flexibility, yet were not absolved of responsibility by having external reviews and performance contracts. The reforms were not popular yet they were effective in making institutions more responsive and innovative (Dobbins et al., 2023).

In East Asian systems that have been enjoying increased world ranking such as Singapore, South Korea, China, governments have made huge investment on higher education and have left key institutions with a lot of freedom to recruit, design and research priorities. The systems have high governmental assistance and institutional autonomy, understanding that quality cannot be enforced at the center (Marginson, 2022).

What Reform Could Be Like

Based on these examples and referring to the situation in Pakistan, it is possible to identify several directions of reform.

To begin with, the role of the HEC should be changed. The Commission can aim at quality assurance, transparency, and accountability that are data-based instead of exerting centralized control over all the operations of a university. It must be a kind of regulator referee-setting of standards and performance surveillance without interfering with how institutions can meet the standards (Rafi & Saddiqa, 2026).

Second, accreditation must be put in autonomous bodies. The evaluation would be brought closer to the disciplinary communities by having legally independent accreditation councils of the various disciplines sciences, humanities, medicine, engineering, social sciences, and lessening control centralization (Tahir, 2026).

Third, there should be de-politicalization of university leadership. It should be replaced with transparent, merit-based processes with measurable performance indicators, which can help put an end to the system in place today in which academic leadership capacity is usually overshadowed by political connections. The faculty members must be represented in the selection committees, and the appointees must be appointed on the basis of their academic qualifications and vision of the institution and not political considerations (Ali, 2025).

Fourth, there should be an issue of two-tier faculty system. An integrated career ladder that includes open promotional systems based on the quality of teaching, research output and service to the institution would eliminate the inequalities that currently exist between the faculty and the demotivation of those working in the BPS system (FAPUASA, 2025).

Fifth, there should be increased shared governance. The faculty should be significantly involved in institutional decision making by means of empowered academic councils, faculty senate and departmental governance bodies. This involves both formal

arrangements but also a cultural change in which faculty members are not seen as subordinates but as partners (Khan and Mahmood, 2024).

Sixth, quality should be rewarded by the funding mechanisms. Funding based on formulas, taking into account the quality of enrollment, faculty growth, research productivity, and institutional results would generate an incentive to excellence, and would diminish the need to have centralized micromanagement (Rafi & Saddiqa, 2026).

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Purpose of Higher Education

The problems I have discussed in this paper are not administrative only. They reach to the very core of the purpose of the existence of universities and the way they are supposed to be run. Universities are not mills that make graduates who are standardized and the faculty are not production line workers. Universities are institutions of academicians who participate in the quest of knowledge, and faculty are professionals whose skills and judgment are vital in that quest.

We miss out on something vital when we reduce universities to a bureaucracy and faculty to employees. Education becomes rote, research becomes useful, and the intellectual vitality with which academic life ought to be impregnated evaporates. The students are victimized because they are instructed by faculty that lost their zeal. It hurts the society since the universities have become non-critical and unproductive in thinking and innovating.

The growth in regulation in the higher education in Pakistan was not malicious. It was developed due to real interest in the quality, accountability, and responsible utilization of the state funds. However, somewhere in the process the ends have become the means. The quality was overridden by compliance. Judges were replaced with procedures. And professors, who ought to have been the main players in higher education, became objects of control.

To turn this trend round, the connection between accountability and autonomy will have to be reconsidered. Accountability and lack of autonomy results in compliance rather than commitment. It generates faculty members who perform the tasks being given but fail to commit themselves to their jobs. It creates institutions that are of minimum standards but not striving towards excellence.

The other option is accountability in the form of autonomy a system whereby faculty are entrusted with the ability to act professionally and be held accountable to the outcomes. This kind of system has to have institutional governance systems that are enabling faculty work as opposed to inhibiting it. It entails career paths that promote excellence and hard work. It demands an authoritative system that stipulates standards but not the approaches.

Is it possible to take Pakistan higher education system this way? These barriers are serious. There are political interference, bureaucratic inertia and the concentration of regulatory powers, which are all against reform. However, the practice of other institutions such as IBA Karachi proves that the existing system can also be changed. And the mounting impatience of academics in the nation is putting pressure on alternatives.

The last question is whether we feel that our universities are capable of being institutions of authentic intellectual excellence in Pakistan. In my opinion, they can. I have witnessed many good faculty, hard working administrators and ambitious students to understand that the potential is there. However, in order to understand the potential, it is important to know that empowerment of faculty does not spell doom to accountability but a precondition to it. Faculty trusted, supported and empowered, make the best guarantors

of quality. The system becomes deprived of the most vital resource when they become subjects of regulation.

It is our decision to make. Or we can take the same route we took, that is to hold our heads responsible without giving them freedom, and see our universities deteriorate further. Or we can take another route one that places faith in faculty, and gives strength to institutions, and forms accountability at the bottom. Higher education in Pakistan lies in the future and it is up to us to choose the right direction.

Recommendations

The recommendations are as under:

- Reorient the Higher Education Commission toward outcome-based accountability by setting quality benchmarks while granting universities autonomy in curriculum, teaching, and research decisions.
- Institutionalize faculty empowerment through participatory governance and transparent, merit-based career systems, following models such as the Institute of Business Administration.

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