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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL VARIATIONS AND STUDENTS' RESEARCH PREFERENCES: A GENDER BASED COMPARISON

### *Abstract*

*As culture presents the beliefs, value systems, norms, mores, myths, and structural elements of a given organization, tribe and society, it is the most powerful element to be observed in any social phenomena. Therefore, the individual as well as the organizational behavior is influenced by the morals and attitudes that they possess and the societal customs surrounding them. Education, being a social process, is completely dependent of the culture. Hence, research in the field of education is also influenced by the cultural setting of that society. Pakistan is a state that has a wide cultural diversity. There exists a variety in the fields of language, customs, traditions, living styles and needs which shapes the heterogeneous type of educational system in Pakistan. Consequently, the nature and the style of educational research may differ from university to university in the different areas of Pakistan. The present study aims at investigating the influence of cultural aspects, like language, traditions and norms on nature and process of academic research. For this purpose a survey of the universities of four provinces of Pakistan was conducted. The analysis of data revealed that the cultural variations have significant relationship with the specification of the field of research, selection of research problem, choice of research supervisor, research tool, and data gathering procedure.*

**Keywords:** Academic Research, Students' preferences, Cultural Diversity

### *Introduction*

Every culture possesses distinctive features that help the society in attaining social goals and fulfilling the needs. There are certain things that are considered important for the survival of the culture

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and those things are the culture values. Culture influences the individuals' life along with the social aspects of the person. It reflects the thoughts and beliefs of the members of the society (Dereck, 2004). In the same way culture affects all the social institutions regardless of their nature.

It is a common thought of the social scholars and educationists that culture presents the beliefs, values, traditions, habits, myths, and structural elements of a given organization, tribe and society (Parsons, 1999; Onibere et al., 2001; Hugo, 2002). Culture is the most powerful element to be observed in any social phenomena.

Therefore, the individual and organizational behavior is affected by the values and attitudes that they hold and the societal norms that surround them. Moreover culture is neither static nor deterministic in any society. Therefore, it is continuously influencing the social aspects and systems. Thus, the area of culture and cultural differences should be handled with great caution (Nieto, 1992). Education, being a social process, is completely dependent of the culture of a particular society.

The society and its culture mutually interact to influence each other. Hence, the cultural assumptions define the relationship between the people and their environment, and amongst people themselves (Maznevski and Peterson, 1997). Moreover, there are research based evidences that culture of a nation influences an individual's insights, thoughts, behavior and beliefs (Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Hofstede, 2001; Kirkman et al., 2006).

In the same way the collective behavior of communities, groups and tribes is also governed or guided by the culture. Therefore, different types of social phenomena, like education and training, are also affected by the culture of that specific society.

Education, being a social process, is completely dependant of the culture of a particular society. Therefore, research in the field of education is an important aspect. At certain levels, especially at higher education, academic research is the prerequisite for the award of degree.

Academic research or educational research is research which studies the behaviour of pupils, students, teachers, and other participants of the system including other stakeholders. The purpose of such research is to learn about effective programmes and teaching methods to help students (Court, 2004).

Several cultural aspects like values, norms, traditions, customs, beliefs, language, local preferences and demands influence the selection and completion of a research problem. Ratner (2000) specifies five main kinds of the cultural phenomena that have an effect on the process of educational research. The first among these factors is cultural activities. Through these activities humans survive and develop themselves. These activities include goods production, nourishing and educating children, making and implementing policies and laws.

The second aspect consists of cultural values, schemas, meanings, concepts. Physical artefacts are the third factor which contributes towards the cultural diversity. This may include tools, clothing, eating, pottery, utensils, buildings, furniture, games, toys, weapons and technology which are collectively constructed. The forth aspect is psychological phenomena such represents sentiments, perception, motivation, intelligence, logical reasoning, memory, imagination, language, and personality the last aspect of culture contributing to the educational phenomena is agency.. This agency is directed at constructing cultural phenomena and it is also influenced by existing cultural activities, values, artefacts, and psychology.

Despite their collective impact these factors also have their individual influence upon the research process. The first major aspect influencing the educational research is the language. Language is one of the most important areas of human development. Communication skills set us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, and they are also what bring us together with each other (Needlman, 2004). In education language plays an important role. It helps shaping the learning materials and teaching strategies etc.

In the same way in the research it is valuable factor for the quality of research as it is directly involved in the study of related materials data collection.

No doubt research in education helps in bringing to light new ideas and thoughts which ultimately lead to the creation of new tradition or a new norm in a society. But on the other hand traditions and norms have their own significant impact on the educational research. The particular value or social norm of an area bounds the researcher to a specific and limited boundary which does not harm or clash with the local aspirations of its inhabitants.

Selection and defining a research problem is an important step in the process of research. Therefore, for the postgraduate university students, a key element of academic literacy is the ability to find, select, appraise, synthesize, and cite outside sources in their own writing (Çetiner, Kutluk, & Zeki 2012). Moreover the peer effect and traditions are also the factors to be considered while selecting a research problem.

As Peters and Boggs (1986) contend, these themes are manifested in children's lives as they engage in daily routines and interactions that are often guided by the peers or adults along with the prevailing sociocultural factors. As a consequence, they proper or integrate these cultural themes into their meaning systems and apply them to form and guide their practices, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions (DíAndrade, 1990; Serpell & Boykin, 1994).

Similar to the other steps of research, the selection of research supervisor is also of much importance. Students should choose their research supervisor in an objective way, taking into consideration different aspects, including their own priorities and interest (Ray, 2007). In case of imposed or inappropriate supervisor several problems like poor completion rates of research degrees (Burnett, 1999) and wastage of time due to delayed completion of thesis have been observed (Garcia, Malot, & Brethower, 1988).

For example, in UK forty to fifty percent post graduate students remained unable in completion of their dissertation in social sciences mainly because due to poor coordination between the researcher and supervisor (Rudd, 1985).

Therefore, a good match between student and supervisor, both academically and personally, is a key for the development of a successful relationship and in time completion of research project. Moreover, during research not only establishment of academic relationship is important, it is also required to establish some level of a personal relationship with the research supervisor.

At the same time some researchers (Ramani, Gruppen & Kachur, 2006) recommend that the student and supervisor should not become friends. Based on this view, supervisors have power and as such, the two can never be equal. A relationship on a personal level may cause complications, hurt feelings and can be, sometimes, destructive to the academic relationship. Hence, it is advised that the relationship can still be cordial, personal, enjoyable, and fun.

In short it may be said that culture is vital to be observed during the process of academic research because it enables its participants to deal with one another without any difficulty. Moreover, culture is noteworthy because during the process of research care may be taken by different parties i.e. researcher, supervisor, institution, stakeholder or the funding agency, to work with harmony and mutual understanding.

### *Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

Pakistan is a country with great diversity of culture. There are variety of different norms and traditions, customs and languages. This diversity affects the students' research preferences, especially the research in the social sciences. At the same way there might be different preferences for male and female students in different cultural dispositions, particularly in selection of research area, data collection procedure and the research supervisor. Therefore, this study was undertaken to study any possible relationship

between cultural variations and students' research preferences in the four provinces of Pakistan. Hence following research questions were investigated;

1. Is there any significant relationship between cultural variations and students' research preferences?
2. Is there any significant relationship between cultural variations and students' preferences about adoption of research type?
3. Is there any significant relationship between cultural variations and students' preferences about choosing research supervisor?
4. Is there any significant relationship between cultural variations and students' preferences about data collection instruments?

### *Significance of the Study*

The researchers expect that the study will be helpful in understanding of importance of cultural dimensions such languages and traditions for their influence on academic research decision making procedures. The work may be beneficial for the stakeholders like university teachers, particularly research supervisors, and students. Moreover, there is need to review the relationship between cultural factors and academic research, especially in culturally diverse country like Pakistan.

### *Methodology*

To study the relationship of cultural factors and students' research preferences in Pakistan. A rating scale was developed. It contained different aspects of the educational research. To conduct the study a population comprising of master level students who were working on their theses were selected from the four oldest universities, each from the province of Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KPK), Punjab and Sindh. The

universities included University of Baluchistan, Quetta, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, University of the Punjab, Lahore, and University of Karachi, Karachi. A sample of eighty students, comprising of 40 male and 40 female students, was randomly selected from the randomly selected five departments of social sciences from each university. The sample of students was selected as they are the best representatives of the culture and can report freely upon their views regarding different aspects and issues of educational research. In the same way oldest universities were purposively selected as they may possess well established and consistent traditions regarding cultural and research.

*Findings/Results*

Analysis of data reveals that a significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.648$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ) exists between Cultural Variations and students' research preferences. Gender based analysis also reflect similar kind of relationship i.e. for male ( $r = 0.243$ ,  $p = 0.018 < 0.05$ ) and for females ( $r = 0.434$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) respectively. The table given below provides the reflection of relationship between cultural diversity and students' research preferences.

*Relationship between Cultural Variations and students' research preferences*

Respondents	N	r	Sig
Overall	80	0.648*	0.002
Male	40	0.243*	0.018
Female	40	0.434*	0.000

*\*Significance level  $p = 0.05$*

As far as the type of research is concerned the female students, particularly from the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reluctant to involve them in the survey research whereas, the male students of the social sciences were reluctant in adopting experimental research. Historical type of research was preferred by the female students but the male students showed their liking for the survey type of research.

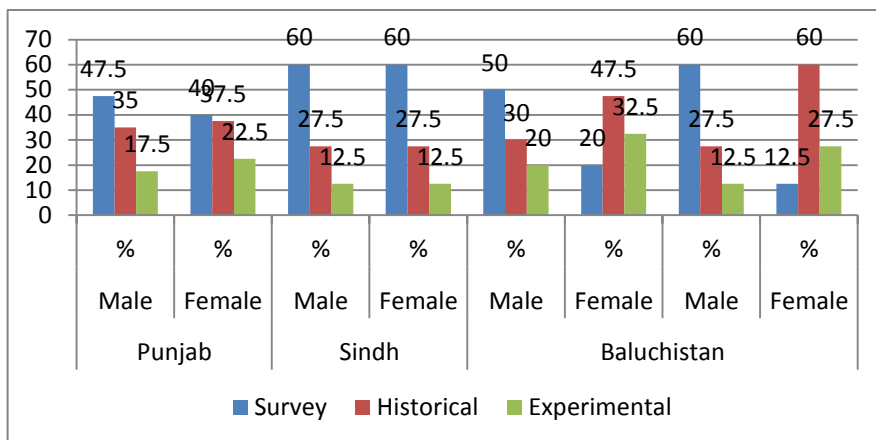


Figure 1: Research preferences of students from four different cultures

Moreover, the below table reveals a positive significant relationship ( $r = 0.341$ ,  $p = 0.016 < 0.05$ ) between the cultural variations and the selection of research type by the students. The relationship is significant ( $r = 0.512$ ,  $p = 0.025 < 0.05$ ) for female students but insignificant for male students ( $r = 0.054$ ,  $p = 0.413 > 0.05$ ).

*Relationship between Cultural Variations and students' research preferences  
about type of research*

Respondents	N	r	Sig
Overall	80	0.341*	0.016
Male	40	0.054*	0.413
Female	40	0.512*	0.025

\*Significance level  $p = 0.05$

On the other hand students preferences about the selection of research supervisor reflects that female students of Baluchistan (80%) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (87.5%) were more satisfied in working under the supervision of females, but in Punjab and Sindh no such preference was observed. The male students all over the country were ready to work willingly with both the male and female supervisors. Below table provides an over view of students preferences about the selection of research supervisor.



Table Students' Preferences about Research Supervisors

Sr. No	Gender of Research Supervisor	Punjab				Sindh				Baluchistan				KPK			
		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Male Supervisor	19	47.5	17	42.5	20	40	18	45	19	47.5	8	20	22	55	5	12.5
2	Female Supervisor	21	52.5	23	57.5	20	50	22	55	21	52.5	32	80	18	45	35	87.5

As for as the relationship of cultural diversity and students' preferences about male or female supervisor is concerned, it was found that this relationship is insignificant ( $r = 0.256$ ,  $p = 0.076 > 0.05$ ). the gender based analysis showed that the relationship is significant ( $r = 0.482$ ,  $p = 0.035 < 0.05$ ) for female students but again insignificant for male students ( $r = 0.014$ ,  $p = 0.713 > 0.05$ ).

Respondents	N	r	Sig
Overall	80	0.256*	0.076
Male	40	0.014*	0.713
Female	40	0.482*	0.035

\*Significance level  $p = 0.05$

Regarding to the nature of research tool it was observed that females hesitated to adopt interview as well as questionnaire for the purpose of data collection to complete of their research work. Male students showed their willingness for these two types of tools. Table below reflects the students' preferences about the adoption of research tool for data collection.

Sr. No	Nature of Research Tool	Punjab		Sindh		Baluchistan		KPK	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
		Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean Score
1	Interview	2.24	1.83	2.13	0.08	2.45	0.02	2.24	0.00
2	Observation	2.65	2.14	3.27	1.09	3.35	0.57	2.23	0.14
3	Document Analysis	2.02	4.11	3.50	4.13	2.37	4.65	3.10	4.72
4	Questionnaire	3.93	2.11	3.72	1.41	3.98	1.56	4.43	1.89
5	Any other	1.2	0.22	1.01	1.14	1.09	0.04	1.65	1.82

As for as the relationship of cultural diversity and students' preferences about mode of data collection is concerned, it was

found that this relationship is insignificant ( $r = 0.397$ ,  $p = 0.065 > 0.05$ ). The gender based analysis of data showed that the relationship is significant ( $r = 0.589$ ,  $p = 0.028 < 0.05$ ) for female students but again insignificant for male students ( $r = 0.149$ ,  $p = 0.505 > 0.05$ ).

Respondents	N	r	Sig
Overall	80	0.397*	0.065
Male	40	0.149*	0.505
Female	40	0.589*	0.028

*\*Significance level  $p = 0.05$*

## ***Conclusions and Discussion***

Research findings show that there is significant relationship between cultural diversity and students' research preferences. This result supports the previous research conducted by Çetiner, Kutluk, & Zeki (2012) stating that the area of research selected by the students usually their interests and expertise. Peters and Boggs (1986) also commented that cultural values and practices influence the students' behaviour in everyday life. Moreover, Evans, Heidi and Harold (2002) report that boys prefer science, math, and sports, whereas girls prefer language arts, music, and art. Therefore, not only the overall research preferences but the selection of research problem is guided by the cultural dispositions as concluded by the present study that in the selection of research problem cultural diversity affects students' preferences.

On the other hand females preferred to work with the female supervisors which is much closer to the local traditions and cultural values because in certain religion societies free mixing of male and female is prohibited. For example, Islam does not allow men and women to meet each other as per their desire and choice. Clear regulations have been laid down in this regard restricting such behaviour defining the limits of interaction between the two sexes. Similarly, the indigenous societies of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are reluctant to allow their females to work under the supervision of males, even if they are their teachers.

Finally, the study shows that for the collection of data during research male and female students showed different preferences. This result also findings of Ingahalika, et.al. (2013) stating that males have better motor and spatial abilities, whereas females have superior memory and social cognition skills. Hence, the choosing a tool for data collection during research is done differently by both the genders as per their physical strength and mental capability.

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