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## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR PREFERENCES FOR ENROLLMENT AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study was conducted in August 2007 in Karachi and Hyderabad simultaneously to measure the extent to which the perceptions of male and female graduate students related to their preferences for the admissions to the Masters' programmes of studies at higher education institutions. It examined the common notion that students seek only the universities for the admission for higher education that have been well known for the academic results they produce and whose graduates are placed at top national and multinational organizations. The investigators probed into paradigms and variables that form the basis of students' perception while deciding which institution to graduate from for the Master degree.*

*A sample of (n = 178) graduate male and female students from various disciplines of the public and private chartered and recognized universities and DAIs participated in the study. Extensive survey methodology using 5-option Likert rating scale was used along with the follow-up interviews. Nine independent variables in the study included: HEC Recognition, Peer Pressure, Educational Cost, Effect of Media Campaign, Public Opinion and Rating, Academic Programmes Offered, Faculty Qualifications, Institutional Location and Distance, and Facilities and Activities. The study does not significantly support the notion that male and female graduate students differ in their opinions about the independent variable when seeking admission to the Masters programme at a university.*

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## INTRODUCTION

- *Background*

Perceptions of students seeking advanced academic degrees have coupled with their vested interests for many reasons: socioeconomic, environmental, psychological, cultural and pedagogical. The notion pertaining to the academic excellence amongst graduate students has persisted even in the modern society owing to the employment perspectives in particular. Rapidly changing environments and growing demands of national and multinational business organizations have pressed both the students and the educational institutions offering higher education particularly Masters' programmes of studies to be cost-effective and penny-productive. The investigators also studied the trends amongst overwhelming majority of graduate students who had been seeking the professional guidelines and expertise of concerned personnel prior to enrolling at a university for Masters' studies. This enigmatic academic scenario and the multidimensional impact of the independent variables spirited the investigators to probe further in to the matter and study the factors that influence the graduate students seeking admissions to Masters' programme of studies.

- *Research Questions*

- Why do the students prefer a particular university/institution to seek access to the Masters' degree?
- What effects do the HEC policies, media campaign and peer pressure have on the preferences of students and enrollments at public and private sector universities?
- Do the graduate students consider the cost of education and qualification of faculty for higher education?

- *Purpose*

The basic purpose of the study was to assess the extent to which the graduate students' perceptions and their preferences for

enrollment at higher education institutions related. The investigators were interested to measure the opinions of the graduate students so the common notions held high by them and other stakeholders could be verified. The other purpose of the study was to help graduate students seeking admissions to Masters' degree programme of studies and make logical and practicable decision while selecting an institution for higher education at Masters' degree level in Pakistan.

- ***Basic Assumptions***

Prior to the study, it had been assumed that:

1. Graduate students select a university for Masters' programme considering cost, faculty qualification, HEC ranking and programmes offered.
2. Graduate students associate their employment with the university ranking and the worth of their degree in the job market.

- ***Justification***

No significantly known study of this magnitude has been carried out in past in the province of Sind. Graduate students' do not have access to any national database pertaining to the faculty's professional ranking. No pedagogic endeavours have been made in this direction in the past to update the graduate students' information prior to taking admission at a university for Master's programme of studies. The study highlighted the variables that influence the perception of graduate students while seeking an educational institution offering Masters' degree programme of studies. The other justification of the study in this direction breeds from the fact that a large majority of graduate students seeking quality and standard to pursue their higher education depend on various indirect sources pertaining to the information about universities. They seek assistance from organizations that do not specialize in student counselling for academic concerns. For this very reason, the study will enhance and update the knowledge and information of these graduate students.

- **Scope**

The scope of the study is limited to the following:

1. Graduate students seeking admission to the Masters' degree programme at public and private universities and institutions
2. Parents of graduate students who require professional assistance and opinions of concerned people for the admission to Masters' degree programme of studies in various disciplines
3. Faculty members, student counsellors and educational guides of graduate at higher education institutions
4. Management and administration at various private and public universities and DAIs in Pakistan.

- **Delimitation of the Study**

1. The study is limited to the samples representing the districts of Sindh including Karachi.
2. The statistical analyses must not be confused with the average intake at public and private universities in Pakistan as the enrolment may vary
3. The perceptions of graduate students may even be influenced by other factors not included in the nine independent variables on which the data has been collected

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Graduate students' perception about the institutions can be measured through the studies conducted from the employment perspectives. For example, Graham and McKenzie (1995) and Hart *et al*, (1999) say that university graduates face the daunting task of finding their skills compatible to the actual demands of the labour market. In turn, graduate recruiters highlight personal transferable skills that graduates are required to possess, such as the ability to work in a team, make informed decisions and have commercial awareness.

Another study conducted by Abouchedid (1997) affirms that many universities are still engrossed in traditional pedagogical practices that pivot around the instructor and the prescribed textbook with little practical training and preparation for life after graduation. This study is one example to realize that graduate students' perception and preferences of higher education are directly related to the post-education skills and knowledge particularly when they are out to seek jobs. The study by Oshagbemi (1996) reveals the fact that there are at least 3,000 peer reviewed articles and dissertations published only in the west on this topic. Despite the abundance of literature in the area, there are no works that attempt to investigate the extent to which university graduates have benefited from their university training and education in the practice of their current occupations.

Graduate students' perception about the higher education institutions can also be studied from the research by two researchers Graham & McKenzie (1995). They have rightly argued that university students are really working for themselves, whereas at work they will have a manager or director to report to. This difference is critical in the application of instruments that measure quality service in an educational institution where the individual is making the effort to bring forth the quality desired. In addition, these instruments have been used to measure satisfaction in the context of work settings. There are no studies however, that measure satisfaction of university training.

Research study by Redpath (1994) says that graduates' perception of their overall university experiences is a function of many factors, including socialization, studying, dealing with the administration, professors, colleagues, and their own expectations with respect to the first employment. While addressing the issue of perception, Aldrige and Rowley (1998) question the appropriateness of service quality or job satisfaction measures that can be used in the field of education.

Nabi (2003) has also significantly advocated the change required to be implemented at the public sector universities to produce more satisfying graduates from the universities. He says that the public university should start to work on the

development of scholastic majors within business administration and computer science majors to provide graduates with the opportunity to find their skills transferable to the market place.

Bauer, Marton, Askling, & Marton, (1999) assert in their study that perceptual differences amongst university students may also occur as a result of changes introduced by the governments. Transforming universities can lead to change in the perception and preferences of graduate students too. Consequently it can affect higher education institutional conditions and academic working and values.

Bennett (1982) has elaborated the perception of students toward male and female professors at higher education level. She presented that when it comes to enrollment at the higher education institution, students judge female professors more harshly than the male professors. The contrast drawn also shapes students' perception and preferences for enrollment at a university offering Masters' degree programme.

Allen, David (1984) conducted a survey to analyze what senior students at a professional college and university prefer while they seek professional knowledge and skills. Pre-college characteristics of 99 Universities of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) freshmen were assessed based on routine pre-college admission information and a national survey of entering freshmen conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program.

One more study featuring the preferences of university students was conducted by Sander, Stevenson, King and Coates (2000). This study used a specially designed questionnaire to explore undergraduate students' expectations of and preferences in teaching, learning and assessment. A convenience sample of 395 first-year university undergraduates at the commencement of their university education was used. Overall, the similarities in expectations and preferences between the three groups were greater than the differences. Specifically, the students preferred interactive lectures. Their least favoured learning methods were formal lecture, role-play and student presentations.

Geoffrey and Julia (2002) in their research study focusing on preferences of graduate students say that tertiary education has become more competitive in recent years due to reductions in government funding and higher student fees. Pariseau and McDaniel (1997) have urged quality of service and its implications at business schools. They assert that ensuring quality of service at business schools is one of the most essential components to survive in the competitive market. According to them the quality of service at educational institutions has a direct impact on the minds of students seeking higher education.

## METHODOLOGY

- *Method*

The study was conducted using descriptive research method. A survey instrument was designed to collect data. Participants were involved in the process through Likert scale and interviews.

- *Research Variables*

The nine variables that were addressed included: HEC Recognition, Educational Cost, Public Opinion and Rating, Academic Programmes Offered, Faculty Qualification, Institutional Location and Distance, Facilities and Activities, Effect of Media Campaign.

- *Research Hypotheses*

- H<sub>0</sub>1 There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of a university's recognition by HEC.
- H<sub>0</sub>2 There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of total cost of education.
- H<sub>0</sub>3 There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of a university's ranking.

- H<sub>04</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of a university's academic programmes.
- H<sub>05</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of a university faculty's professional qualification.
- H<sub>06</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of the distance to the university from their homes.
- H<sub>07</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of university's facilities and activities.
- H<sub>08</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of media effect.
- H<sub>09</sub> There will be no significant difference in the mean perception score of male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme on the basis of peer pressure.

- ***Rejection Rule***

A 0.05 level of rejection was used using two tailed hypothesis with the paired samples of 91 male and 87 female graduates. The test value above 1.96 was used for rejecting H<sub>0</sub>.

- ***Target Population***

The target population of the study was male and female graduate students of the HEC chartered and recognized university/institutions at public and private sectors.

- ***Sampling Technique***

Simple Random sampling technique as a type of probability sampling was used. All the participants were the male and female graduate students from public and private degree awarding



institutions and universities from the districts of Sindh. All the participants were between 22-27 years, had never failed in any of the previously learned courses, spoke English to satisfactory extent, achieved at least 45% aggregate marks and were aware of the HEC ranking procedure for the public and private sector universities in the province of Sindh. Table 1 describes the participants from various universities and DAIs in Sindh.

**Table 1**  
**Sample Composition**

S.No	Institution	Participants
1	Karachi University	34
2	A.I Open University	10
3	PIMSAT	11
4	Sindh University	25
5	Shah Latif University	10
6	P.A.F KIET	06
7	Preston University	08
8	Dada Bhai Institute	06
9	Bahria University	09
10	COMSAT	06
11	Al-Khair University	10
12	Hamdard University	09
13	Iqra University	16
14	Newport University	07
15	M.A. Jinah University	11
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>

- **Pilot Study**

The pilot study was conducted at Iqra University Karachi with 18 graduate students from science and commerce background and 12 students from the University of Sindh. The overall reliability measurement, Cronbach Alpha of the instrument was 0.71. The pilot study was later discussed with two foreign Ph. Ds from USA and one from Pakistan with expertise in educational research. The full scale study was conducted after the corrective measures to improve the items in the instrument.

• ***Instrument Reliability and Validity***

A five-option Likert scale marked *strongly agree, agree, I am not sure, disagree and strongly disagree* was used. Each option had been coded with a numeric value for the purpose of estimating reliability coefficient. The instrument comprised N= 36 items with 9 variables probed 4 times to measure Cronbach Alpha as the internal consistency measure. Table 1 shows the value of Cronbach Alpha for all independent variables in the study.

As the instrument of the study was descriptive in nature, its validity was established with the pedagogically defined procedures. For the construct, criterion and content validity, PhD (Education) experts from Institute for Educational Development, AKU, University of Karachi and University of Connecticut, U.S.A were consulted. Their expert opinions were considered for the improvement of the independent variables and arrangement of items in the instrument. In the light of the advice from the experts, item 8 and 9 were included. The revised instrument comprised two additional. Post-pilot considerations comprised the revision of the instrument in the light of expertise of the professionals.

***Table 2***

***Item wise Cronbach Alpha***

S.No	Independent Variables	Cronbach Alpha
1	HEC Recognition	0.763
2	Educational Cost	0.742
3	Public Opinion and Rating	0.698
4	Academic Programmes Offered	0.541
5	Faculty Qualification	0.801
6	Institutional Location & Distance	0.461
7	Activities & Facilities	0.533
8	Effect of Media Campaign	0.710
9	Peer Pressure	0.775

• **Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

The data collection procedure involved invitation letters, identification of independent variables, construction of Likert scale, composition of male and female graduate participants followed by a structured collection of data. Most of the completed instruments were collected in person by two teams of research assistants; one in Karachi and the other in the University of Sindh. Some of the instruments were collected online as the respondents were out of station. Initially 187 respondents were sent the instrument, but only correctly filled instruments  $n = 178$  were used for the data analysis. For the statistical analyses of the data, independent samples t-test was used in the SPSS v. 13 as the research inferential tool to compute and compare the means of the scores of male and female graduate students.

**TEST RESULTS**

**Table 3**  
**Inferential Statistics**

Independent Variables	Hypotheses	Mean Pair Differences	S.D	Std. E.M	T-test Value	df	Sig (2 tailed)	Result
1	HEC Recognition	0.0674	0.942	0.0706	0.954	177	0.341	Accepted
2	Educational Cost	0.0909	1.126	0.1283	-0.708	177	0.481	Accepted
3	Public Rating	0.1236	1.24	0.934	-1.322	177	0.188	Accepted
4	Programs Offered	0.219	1.281	0.0960	-2.282	177	0.024	Not Accepted
5	Faculty Qualification	0.0393	1.366	0.1024	-0.384	177	0.702	Accepted
6	Location/ Distance	0.466	1.566	0.117	-3.97	177	0.00	Not Accepted
7	Facilities/ Activities	0.3708	1.54	0.1156	-3.206	177	0.002	Not Accepted
8	Media Campaign	0.1124	1.229	0.0921	1.219	177	0.225	Accepted
9	Peer Pressure	0.2079	1.44	0.1085	-1.91	177	0.057	Accepted

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Male and female graduates agree on six independent variables namely HEC Ranking, Educational Cost, Public Rating, Faculty Qualification, Media Campaign and Peer Pressure significantly and differ in three independent variables namely the Programmes Offered, Location and Distance and Facilities and Activities.

Perception of male and female graduate students toward the quality of education at the university was evidently supportive and significant. The mean pair differences in the male and female graduate students' perceptions in the accepted  $H_0$  were low (between 0.03 to 0.20) as Table 3 elaborates. The test was significant only in the three rejected  $H_0$  in which the level of rejection was below 0.05. This significant difference occurred as the study participants considered the independent variable different in their situations.

The study also found that male and female graduate students seeking admission to Masters' programme remain inquisitive whether or not their academic and professional skills and knowledge will be required by the job market. When interviewed, 78% male were concerned about how they would be employed after they finished their education and 63 % female graduates felt strongly that they would be employed adequately as a result of achieving Masters degree from HEC chartered university. They are competently aware of the degree programme at Masters' level to be equitable for the areas of interest. Graduate students know the worth of their degree and relate it with the real economic benefits to pursue specific career goals.

In general, male and female graduate students are not significantly different in their perceptions about the type and format of the Masters' degree programme both at public and private universities. The interviews also revealed that graduate students' awareness of the skills required in the real world was lower due to institutional programmes that did not support their economically demand-led and career-oriented decision making process productively. Male and female graduates have fair knowledge of the institutions' legal status after the introduction of

HEC ranking system. The study also emphasized that toward the end of their professional studies, graduate students consider the independent variable in the study as critical factors for career building.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that all the graduates seeking admissions to the Masters' programme of studies do the following:

- Consider the pedagogic and economic utility of the Masters' programme while applying for the admission. This would lead them to evaluate the specialization offered at the Masters' degree level.
- Analyze a number of different options within one faculty to adequately adjust in the learning process.
- Get information about the HEC ranking and the provincial charter of the higher education institution
- Estimate the total cost of the programme to complete the required courses in time.
- Adjust the present activities accordingly prior to enrolling in morning or evening programmes.
- Seek information regarding how the department is perceived by common people and what jobs have the Masters' students been given in the market.
- Know the teaching faculty's professional qualification and research experience with regards to the current corporate sector demands and requirements.

### **CONCLUSION**

Graduate male and female students in the province of Sind consider the independent variables in the study essential for admission to Masters' programme in various disciplines. The universities and DAIs offering such programmes need to be more adaptive in their selection criteria to meet the demand-led induction of graduate students. HEC ranking and faculty qualification have tremendous impact on the opinions of graduate

students. The location, cost, and the types of programmes offered are the most commonly cited considerations by most potential Masters' students. To find an economically adequate place in the current job market, graduate students emphasize the role of the higher education institution at an early stage. Their major concern is to find themselves well adjusted in the competitive job environment in the real life. This realistic aspect must be linked with the pedagogic and scholastic activities at a university. A university offering Masters' programme of study must make provisions to make its education a worthy experience to allow the male and female graduates a competitive opportunity based on their true potential and competencies. This can be made conveniently possible through making graduate students' access possible to current market demand. Graduate students' admission preferences are market-oriented with an assumption that they would have access to the corporate world through internship programme, job-oriented fairs and their professors' assistance. Associating the future academic and economic needs of graduate students for the next decades will serve to be an indispensable university management component.

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