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POWER AND POLITICS IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: AS PERCEIVED BY THE STAFF OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SARGODHA, PAKISTAN.

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Abstract
The distribution of power, who is included in decision-making, and the nature of the interplay between political and informal influences and formal structures are all important aspects of university governance. The present study delineates the perspectives of academics and administrators of one university in Pakistan on these issues. A 30-item, seven-domain questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was administered to 41 staff members, drawn from a purposive sample at the University of Sargodha, through face-to-face administration of the quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional survey. The responses are given on a five-point agreement scale and reported as counts and percentages by agreement, neutrality, and disagreement. A large proportion (35 out of 41) agree that decision-making is at a high level of administration. Three different questions about government policy, internal politics, and political relationships received 31 responses in each case, and there was less agreement for questions regarding the administrator requiring consultation and merit-based appointments. Some positive comments on governance were made; there was a split over faculty voice, staff engagement in policy-making, budget favoritism, and unethical practices, and there was a mix of responses for other questions. The results are from a single institution and do not represent the general perception of the population of that institution. They do not demonstrate any real political interference and do not extend to a generalization. The study provides a descriptive baseline of multi-institutional and mixed-methods studies in university governance in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Universities engage in teaching, research, and public service and are held accountable to the powers and communities that support and supervise them. The distribution of authority in them is therefore more than administrative efficiency. It influences the determination of priorities, who assumes leadership, the allocation of resources, and whether policies produce the desired results.

Power is the ability of any individual or group to exert influence in determining decisions and outcomes, either formally through their role or through the control of resources or information or informally through relationships. Politics is the activity that people and groups engage in to achieve their interests, to prioritize their issues, and to fight for power and resources. Consultation and negotiation are part of the normal flow of processes in organizations and are not necessarily inappropriate in themselves. They are a governance issue if they are observed to be a replacement of transparent processes, fair treatment, or accountability.

Scholarship has likewise dealt with universities. In a case study of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ordorika (2003) looks at governance and institutional change as political processes. McLendon et al. (2009) link political issues to state higher-education funding in the United States; whereas, Pimentel Botas and Huisman (2012) discuss power relations in governing bodies.

Pakistani scholarship also sheds light on social and political dynamics of higher education (Rehman & Farooq, 2020), role of Higher Education Commission (Khan et al., 2021), and the governance of universities, such as role of the state and university governing bodies (Akhtar & Kalsoom, 2012). The effect of political patronage on appointments has also been examined in general in Pakistan public sector (Ashraf, 2017). They are of varying scope and design and they offer a background for general information, not a description of the governance of any specific university.

1.1. Research Problem and Rationale.

Staff perceptions provide one approach for exploring governance issues at the institutional level. Academic and administrative personnel are involved in the implementation of policy, in decision-making positions, and are impacted by appointments and resource allocation decisions. Their perceptions of governance quality are not objective measures, and they can't prove that anything was wrong in a decision. They do suggest how governance structures look to people inside them, and that relates to institutional legitimacy and willingness to engage in reform.

The research problem will thus be descriptive: What are the perceptions of academic and administrative staff regarding the centralization of decision-making power, the impact of government policy, internal politics and political connections in the governance and appointments, and the conditions of participation, bureaucracy, resource allocation, and policy implementation at one Pakistani university? The literature review gap and the contribution of this research are presented in Section 2.5.

1.2. Objectives and Research Questions

The study aimed to accomplish three goals:

1. To outline the perception of the concentration of decision-making in university governance that is held by staff.
2. To explain how government policy, internal politics, and political connections affect governance and administrative appointments in the eyes of staff.
3. To explain the perceptions of staff with regard to stakeholders' involvement, bureaucracy issues, resource allocation, and policy implementation.

These are three research questions:

RQ1: How do academic and administrative faculty members view the amount of decision-making authority held by senior university administrators?

RQ2: What is staff's view of the impact of government policies, internal politics, and political connections on governance and administrative appointments in universities?

RQ3: What is the perception of staff regarding the participation of stakeholders, bureaucratic issues, resource allocation, and policy implementation in the university?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The review is selective and in accordance with a single-site descriptive survey. It separates facts, hypotheses, and background information.

2.1. Power, decision-making, and autonomy.

In case study and conceptual work, the governance of universities is not just a technical arrangement. There are other studies that relate political processes to organizational change processes; in the first example, Ordorika (2003) has analyzed one large university, and in the second, Kodelja (2013) has provided a theoretical discussion about authority and university autonomy in the context of the neoliberal political context. Pimentel Botas and Huisman (2012) focus on representation and roles within governing bodies from Foucauldian perspectives and the use of government powers to influence the governance structure. Akhtar and Kalsoom (2012) explore the issue of university governance in Pakistan using document analysis, which identifies the role of the state as an important actor, and then goes on to discuss the role of university governance.

These works will give conceptual and contextual support. They are not indicative of a perceived high level of decision-making power at the

university studied here, at the center of RQ1. Concentrations of power do not imply poor governance as such, because the impact of concentration of power is in part related to transparency and accountability.

2.2. Political influence and appointments.

There are indications that political influence is present in contexts other than the current one. This article by McLendon et al. (2009) discusses state-level higher-education funding in the United States and its relationship to political factors. Salter and Tapper (2000) examine the quality assurance issue in the United Kingdom's higher education as a matter of governance politics. A study of perceptions of political influence on public-sector appointments in Pakistan by Ashraf (2017) does not focus on universities, and the author's findings are described as equivocal. None of these studies investigates the role of politics in university appointments in Pakistan; thus, it encourages the RQ2 without addressing it.

2.3. Participation, transparency, resources, and implementation.

Participation and transparency are not identical but are related aspects of governance. Staff may have access to information without involvement in decisions with little influence, and consultation may be held without the reasons for the outcomes being disclosed. It is an interpretive proposition and not a finding of this survey. Pimentel Botas and Huisman (2012) analyze representation in governing bodies, Akhtar and Kalsoom (2012) discuss the roles of governing bodies in Pakistan, and Khan et al. (2021) explore the role of the Higher Education Commission. This does not provide much direct evidence of the involvement of teachers, bureaucratic processes, allocation of resources, or policy implementation in individual Pakistani universities. The topics are treated as descriptive questions and not as questions solved by the literature.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The study is descriptive and not a test of theory. According to Lukes (2005), there are three dimensions to power: observable decision-making, agenda setting, and the shaping of preferences. This view helps to understand the interpretation of RQ1, which is related to perceptions of decision-making power. The questions on the questionnaire focus on visible decision-making. They are not observations of decisions, and there is no operationalization of agenda-setting or preference-shaping in the survey.

Stakeholder theory and resource dependence theory were thought of but not taken up. The questionnaire does not include any comparison of stakeholder groups or an indicator of resource dependence, nor was there a sufficiently documented theory that was available for the use here. Participation and resource allocation are, therefore, considered empirical issues and presented as perceived by the respondents.

2.5. Research Gap and Contribution

The sources available reflect on university governance either at a conceptual level, in other countries' systems, in the public sector at large, or as it relates to national institutions and policy. No source was found that captures the multi-faceted perception of power concentration, political influence, participation, and distribution of resources among academic and administrative staff at a single university in Pakistan. This is not a statement about the absence of research but a statement about the sources reviewed, as no systematic search was undertaken. The contribution is a structured quantitative description of staff perceptions at one institutional context that can be used to reflect locally and as a point of reference for comparative work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Settings

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional survey design, and data was collected during the single event of data collection at the University of Sargodha, Pakistan. The design decided to be used was to portray staff perceptions in one institution. The study did not include a comparison of universities, provinces, or

public and private institutions and did not attempt to test causal relationships.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The target population included academic staff and administrative staff, as well as academics with experience of, or a role in, university governance and decision-making. Participants were chosen using purposive, non-probability sampling, based on their assumed knowledge of and experience in governance, power, and political processes. There are no records of a sampling frame or eligibility criteria or of the recruitment procedure, nor are there any records of the number of staff invited or the response rate. A total of 41 respondents were included in the final sample (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 41)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	29	70.7
	Female	12	29.3
Professional position	Visiting teacher	9	22.0
	Lecturer	7	17.1
	Assistant professor	4	9.8
	Associate professor	2	4.9
	Professor	1	2.4
	Administration	8	19.5
	Other	10	24.4
Experience in higher education	Less than 5 years	17	41.5
	5–10 years	13	31.7
	More than 10 years	11	26.8

3.3. Instrument

The data were gathered using a 30-statement, researcher-designed questionnaire with the seven domains. Each statement was rated on a five-point scale: Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5). Statements have been worded in positive and negative terms and are not reverse-worded to score; thus, it does not necessarily imply a positive or negative direction. The mapping of the domains onto the research questions is the interpretation of the content of the instrument by the author (see Table 2). No reliability or validity evidence was found, and it is not described as validated (see Section 7).

Table 2. Domains of a questionnaire and their relevance to the research questions

Domain	Items	Research question
Power dynamics in university governance	4	RQ1
Political influences in university governance	4	RQ2
Administrative appointments/selection	4	RQ2
Role of stakeholders in university governance	5	RQ3
Challenges in university governance	5	RQ3
Resource allocation	4	RQ3
Policy implementation	4	RQ3

3.4. Data Collection

The instrument was administered through a face-to-face method in which respondents could ask questions on items. The opening paragraphs of its introduction had indicated that the information provided would be kept confidential and utilised for research. The thesis records do not record dates and locations for administration.

3.5. Data Analysis

The five points of the response scale were collapsed into three for reporting: Agreement (strongly agree and agree), Neutral, and Disagreement (disagree and strongly disagree). Data is presented in percentages and numbers of the overall sample (N = 41). The counts are from the thesis tables, and percentages are calculated from these and may deviate from the whole number percentages in the thesis by up to one percentage point. This type of analysis is descriptive with no inferential statistics reported.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study was carried out as a BS Education degree. The thesis indicates that participation was free, informed consent was gained, anonymity and confidentiality were respected and that the data were used for academic research only. There is no evidence of formal institutional ethics committee approval, and no claim is made for this.

4. Results

The data are presented in tables, which contain the numbers (n) and percentages of the total sample (N = 41). The items in the questionnaire are followed by the wording of items, and distributions are provided as presented in the thesis distributions.

4.1. Concentration in decision-making power?

Table 3. The 41 participants consisted of the 20 local teams and 21 national teams. The 20 local teams and 21 national teams comprised a total of 41 participants

4.1. RQ1: Concentration of Decision-Making Power

Table 3. Domain 1: Power dynamics in university governance (N = 41)

Item	Statement	Agreement n (%)	Neutral n (%)
The power of decision making is largely within the hands of the top-level administrators.	35 (85.4)	3 (7.3)	3 (7.3)
Faculty senates/unions make a real impact in the university's policymaking process.	30 (73.2)	5 (12.2)	6 (14.6)
The university makes important decisions (e.g. budget, hiring) transparent.	18 (43.9)	11 (26.8)	12 (29.3)
Academic departments have more power than others when it comes to governance.	30 (73.2)	6 (14.6)	5 (12.2)

Agreement across the four items ranged from 43.9% (item 1.3) to 85.4% (item 1.1), and disagreement ranged from 7.3% to 29.3% (Table 3).

4.2. RQ2: Political Influence and Administrative Appointments

Table 4. Domain 2: Political influences in university governance (N = 41)

Statement	Agreement n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagreement n (%)
Governmental policies have a significant influence on the governance of universities.	31 (75.6)	7 (17.1)	3 (7.3)
Internal politics (e.g. favoritism, cliques) have an impact on faculty	31 (75.6)	4 (9.8)	6 (14.6)

promotions and faculty hiring.			
There is a form of political connection in the appointment of leadership at the University.	31 (75.6)	6 (14.6)	4 (9.8)
Power struggles cause conflicts between faculty and administration.	23 (56.1)	10 (24.4)	8 (19.5)

Table 5. Domain 5: Administrative appointments/selection (N=41)

University administrators are selected through political influence.	23 (56.1)	8 (19.5)	10 (24.4)
Most administrative appointments are based on personal relationships rather than merit.	21 (51.2)	8 (19.5)	12 (29.3)
The roles and functions of academic leaders in university careers are shaped by power dynamics.	20 (48.8)	12 (29.3)	9 (22.0)
Political networks play an important role in the nomination process for leadership positions.	20 (48.8)	12 (29.3)	9 (22.0)

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In Table 4, agreement was 75.6% for items 2.1 to 2.3 and 56.1% for item 2.4. In Table 5, agreement ranged from 48.8% (items 5.3 and 5.4) to 56.1% (item 5.1), disagreement from 22.0% to 29.3%, and neutral responses from 19.5% to 29.3%.

4.3. Participation, challenges, resources and implementation

Table 6. Domain 3: Role of stakeholders in university governance (N = 41)

Statement	Agreement n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagreement n (%)
Faculty's voice is strong in influencing academic policies.	20 (48.8)	7 (17.1)	14 (34.1)
There are meaningful opportunities for pupils to be involved in governance.	26 (63.4)	5 (12.2)	10 (24.4)

The external stakeholders (government, corporations) have too much influence on the policies of the university.	28 (68.3)	8 (19.5)	5 (12.2)
Shared governance (collaboration between administrators, faculty and students) is working well in the university.	22 (53.7)	13 (31.7)	6 (14.6)
There is a fair participation of 3.5 Non-academic staff in institutional decisions.	23 (56.1)	9 (22.0)	9 (22.0)

Table 7. Domain 4. The challenges in university governance (N = 41)

Statement	Agreement (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Disagreement
Too much bureaucracy delays decision making.	24 (58.5)	9 (22.0)	8 (19.5)
Traditional power structures can be counter-productive to governance change.	20 (48.8)	9 (22.0)	12 (29.3)
Lack of faculty and student involvement leads to ineffective policies.	24 (58.5)	6 (14.6)	11 (26.8)
The university's governance is hindered by lack of financial resources.	21 (51.2)	9 (22.0)	11 (26.8)
Unethical practices (such as corruption, nepotism) are hindering fair governance.	13 (31.7)	13 (31.7)	15 (36.6)

Table 8. Domain 6: Resource allocation (N = 41)

Statement	Agreement n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagreement n (%)
Budget allocation is influenced by political favoritism	20 (48.8)	7 (17.1)	14 (34.1)
Powerful people get more support.	23 (56.1)	11 (26.8)	7 (17.1)

There is equitable and transparent access to resources.	25 (61.0)	9 (22.0)	7 (17.1)
All departments get fair money and resources.	22 (53.7)	8 (19.5)	11 (26.8)

Table 9. Domain 7: Policy implementation (N = 41)

Statement	Agreement n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagreement n (%)
Political factors slow down the implementation of policies.	21 (51.2)	9 (22.0)	11 (26.8)
Powerful people often influence University policies.	20 (48.8)	8 (19.5)	13 (31.7)
There are power issues that impact the implementation of policies in the university.	21 (51.2)	10 (24.4)	10 (24.4)
All staff are involved in the policy-making process.	13 (31.7)	12 (29.3)	16 (39.0)

Agreement ranged from 48.8% to 68.3% in Domain 3 (Table 6), from 31.7% to 58.5% in Domain 4 (Table 7), from 48.8% to 61.0% in Domain 6 (Table 8), and from 31.7% to 51.2% in Domain 7 (Table 9). Corresponding disagreement ranged from 12.2% to 34.1%, 19.5% to 36.6%, 17.1% to 34.1%, and 24.4% to 39.0%.

On 21 of these 30 items, there was > 50% agreement. There were more disagreements than agreements on two issues: 4.5 (unethical practices) and 7.4 (all staff involved in policymaking).

5. Discussion

These questions are responded to, and the results are explained in the context of a descriptive survey. It is not providing evidence of governance practice, but rather a perception of it.

5.1. Concentrated Power in Decision-Making (RQ1)

The high level of agreement on 1.1 (authority lies with top-level administrators) should be interpreted as a perception of who decides. It is a matter of visible decision-making, as Lukes (2005) would put it, and it is not possible for the survey to comment on agenda-setting or preference-shaping. This does not conflict with agreement about the real influence faculty senates or unions have (item 1.2). Formal bodies can coexist with concentrated authority, and the items do not indicate what respondents meant by "real influence.

Concentration does not constitute a lack of good governance on its own, as it is ultimately important that decisions are transparent and accountable (Section 2.1). There was less consensus on this point; less than half supported the transparency item (1.3), while almost three in ten opposed it. Thus, there is a duality of perceived concentration of authority and uncertainty of openness in major decisions.

5.2. The political implications and appointments (RQ2)

Responses to questions having to do with government policy, internal politics, and political connections were all equally positive, with 31 of the respondents in each case responding positively. More specific questions about the selection of administrators and personal relationships rather than merit received less agreement from 31 of the respondents agreeing to each. The content is close on items 2.3 and 5.4, but there are 11 respondents who answered differently on the two items (31 - 20). The additional word 'often' is included in Item 5.4, which could have reduced agreement. This reading does not appear to have been tested.

There is also a similar worry regarding political interference in appointments in the Pakistani public sector (Ashraf, 2017). The present results do not duplicate that study, which did not focus on universities, nor does that study provide unequivocal results. This agreement is only a record of what these respondents believe, and it does not demonstrate poor service on the part of a specific appointment or promotion.

5.3. Participation, Constraints, Resources, and Implementation (RQ3)

The participation items are applicable to different groups and different facets of governance so should not be combined into one indicator. Majorities agreed with statements regarding students, non-academic staff, and shared governance, while half agreed with faculty voice and half agreed with the involvement of all staff in policymaking. The pattern identifies a variation in the perception of participation but does not comment on how inclusive the institution is. The current data lack a comparison across stakeholder groups, but Pimentel Botas and Huisman (2012) regard representation in governing bodies as an issue that needs to be analyzed.

Majorities also agreed that bureaucracy makes decisions slow and external actors have excessive influence on policy. These are designed to pinpoint concerns of the participants and were not compared with administrative records. Responses were centered around the middle of the agreement range, reflecting mixed experiences across responses as to resource allocation and policy implementation.

5.4. A Mixed Overall Pattern

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Majorities also agreed that bureaucracy makes decisions slow and external actors have excessive influence on policy. These are designed to pinpoint concerns of the participants and were not compared with administrative records. Responses were centered around the middle of the agreement range, reflecting mixed experiences across respondents. Respondents made positive comments (e.g., open sharing of resources, student involvement in the decision-making) and critical comments (e.g., more support for powerful individuals). Somewhat surprisingly, even the two transparency-related items differed: under half affirmed transparency in the major decisions, while most affirmed openness in the distribution of resources. There are various ways in which people interpret the statements, may have different experiences in their roles, and may tend to say yes to the questions, and these are all confounded in the data.

All statements are not reverse worded, and so the number of items where there is majority agreement does not provide an index of favorability. The most defensible reading is that respondents' comments were both positive and negative on the seven domains.

7. Implications for the University Governance.

These implications are based on the reported perceptions. These are ideas to consider, and the effectiveness of the study was not tested.

1. **Appointments and promotions**. If there is a perception of political or personal influence in the selection process, then published reasons for selection and reasons for decision may help staff to understand if the established procedures are followed or not.

2. **Participation**. The variety of ways faculty and non-academic staff are involved in policy may help to explain the conflicting perceptions of involvement.

3. **Transparency and delay**. Representing the decision-making process, explaining the rationale for high-level decisions and auditing administrative processes may help to reduce any concerns raised regarding transparency and delays.

4. **Resource allocation**. If allocation criteria or the reasons for key decisions on major resources are published, it may be easier to review the allocation, as opinions on fairness and support were mixed.

Further studies are required to demonstrate if the claims of enhanced performance are substantiated by existing behaviors and if such interventions would lead to improvements as to resource allocation and policy implementation.

7. Limitations and future research

Some qualifications need to be considered regarding the extent to which the results can be extended. The sample size is small (41), the sample is purposive, and is from a single university, and therefore findings cannot be generalised to other staff or universities. The cross-sectional design can only be used to capture the perception at a point in time and cannot demonstrate change or cause-and-effect. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher (no reliability or validity evidence available), and the items are not evenly distributed across the favourable and unfavourable wording of the items (the items are not a composite score).

No inferences were made from the data, and numbers are as they were entered in the thesis. There are very few members in some professional subgroups (one professor, two associate professors), and the category of 'Other' is not defined, so there were no subgroup comparisons. The wording reading of the difference of items 2.3 and 5.4 is not tested. Online administration might have prompted socially desirable responding on sensitive items. The literature review is not systematic; it is only selective. Lastly, the survey captures perceptions and does not tell us if political interference, favoritism or other issues have actually occurred.

Larger samples from multiple universities, instruments with a documented validity and reliability, and instruments with balanced wording, as well as a documented sampling procedure, could be utilised in future research.

Analysis of the appointment records and interviews might differentiate between influence and reality, and longitudinal designs could focus on change after governance changes.

8. Conclusion

The present study portrays the perception of academic and administrative members of a Pakistani university regarding power and politics of governing. Respondents indicated that decision-making powers were largely in the hands of senior administrators and that government policy, internal politics, and political connections were important to governance and appointments, although levels of importance were not as high for the government policy or internal politics when asked about specific aspects of appointments. There was a mixed response where people gave positive and negative comments in relation to participation, the bureaucracy, resources, and policy implementation.

The study is a bounded descriptive account of one institution. It does not show signs of political bias or corruption and does not lead to causal statements or generalizations. It would be useful to provide a transparent baseline on which later studies, conducted by other institutions or using mixed methods, can develop or test.

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