

## Analyzing the challenges encountered by Pakistani students during the application process for PhD programs in Europe

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### Abstract

This study assesses the challenges faced by Pakistani students in accessing the Ph.D. programs of the European universities. Still those students who desires to shift to Europe from different countries like Pakistan then experience various problems through which a candidate cannot get admission in some of the more accredited universities in Europe. Some of the challenges as they are; structures for one, constrains financially second and last but not the least; stress and or limited- or no adequate counseling. Research quantitative results of descriptive and inferential analysis are used in the study in addition to quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the bilateral scholarship and financial aid donors from Pakistan and from Pakistani students who have applied for the scholarships. This study also reveal that major issues of Pakistan student population related to them which really hinder their performance are absence of better research programs and facilities inadequate academic support, problem with data and the scholarships as the biggest barriers. The study also seeks to establish some of these barriers in order to promote internationalization of higher education and in order to popularize the European culture, values of openness and equity. It concludes that in order to overcome these challenges European universities can improve more the recruitment and the enrolment of the international students and change positively the perception about Europe in general and universities in particular. They may also improve the equal opportunities of admission to higher learning to Pakistani candidates and promote educational relations between Pakistan and Europe.

**Keywords:** Pakistani Students, PhD Applications, European Universities, Internationalization, Barriers, Scholarships, Higher Education, Cultural Exchange, Structural Challenges.

## 1. Introduction

The challenges encountered by international students during the application process for admissions to European universities are found to be quite different from their European counterparts. Pakistani students, being non-EU nationals, encounter a number of structural, financial, and emotional barriers that limit them from seeking admissions in Tier 1 and Tier 2 European universities. The study uses both descriptive and inferential statistics, and the findings are supported by interviewing the bilateral donors who administer scholarships or financial aid, along with much-needed experiences from the Pakistani students. The study concludes that quality, research interests, lack of guidance, data issues, scholarships, and other factors in Europe are likely to promote positive narratives and are important when it comes to the internationalization of students seeking admissions. Higher education, being a service offered by Europe, is also a means to disseminate information and positive narratives about European culture, transparency, and belief in equality.

Entrance into European PhD programs has been a subject of interest for scholars, as evidenced by numerous studies focusing on different student groups from diverse countries. While it was emphasized that the use of a social capital approach could enrich various institutional research areas, this approach has not been widely utilized in the field of doctoral program entrance, especially in education. International students, including Pakistani students, have become an essential asset to improve the academic success of their universities, to fund the curriculum, and to make them international. The great importance of academic landscape shifts has led to an increase in the number of studies necessitated by the integration of these groups by European universities. The behavior of non-EU citizens should be analyzed as a factor supporting the very existence of provisions for both out-of-the-union providers and the EU-UAS. This paper focuses particularly on students and scholars who, while studying in the European academic system, benefit from the European Union's different steps, indicating the politics of the global education market and, at the same time, helping to improve academics, manage skeptics, and thus contribute to the narrative of those who believe in the convincing EU cause, which offers an important contribution.

### 1.1. Background and Rationale

The demand for educational opportunities in high-income countries has increased significantly in recent years. Every year, a large number of students from developing countries apply for scholarships to these countries in order to pursue their higher and doctoral studies. In the case of Pakistan, there exists an increasing trend in the number of students applying for scholarship opportunities. Various government scholarships are therefore offered every year by developed countries for Pakistani students to apply for higher studies. These scholarships are awarded at

undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. The need and demand for foreign degrees are the reasons motivating Pakistani students to apply for these scholarships. However, only a few Pakistani students can manage to get admission and then proceed for degree programs in high-income countries. Therefore, there is a need to assess the problems faced by Pakistani students when applying for scholarship opportunities provided by high-income countries.

The increasing trend of students applying for scholarships in developed countries has been a focus of various studies. However, in the case of Pakistani students applying for doctorate programs in European countries, little literature is available. This study is designed to explore the fact that Pakistani students face many issues and challenges. In many cases, students fail to pass the admission requirements of a specific scholarship. They often cite a few reasons for their failure, such as a poor statement of purpose, lack of preference, contact with the supervisor, not meeting the minimum English requirement, and lack of focus on research. The main purpose of the scholarship is to gain admission to pursue a degree in higher education. Furthermore, academic interests and technical skills, in particular, the requirements of the scholarship degree programs, should be mentioned in the statement of purpose. In perspective, students often mention the lack of preferences after seeing the patterns of last year's students. Furthermore, many students who met such requirements failed to compete. In this paper, we try to fill the research gap by examining some of the most important issues mentioned by a few successful Ph.D. students in European countries.

## 1.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to provide an in-depth view into the issues encountered by Pakistani students during the time that they are pursuing their terminal degree. The paper attempts to provide a roadmap for students on how they can overcome these challenges. This is very important as these students represent one of the best global talent pools available when it comes to pursuing an educational degree from a foreign country, particularly in Europe. In the course of providing solutions, it becomes very informative research for educational institutions that are offering opportunities for both teaching and pursuing a doctoral degree in a specific discipline. The study also addresses the many problems being confronted right now by Pakistani students who are already studying and seeking to capitalize on these difficulties, whether they are full-time students or part-time wage earners.

Other than research on providing a platform for potential Pakistani students, this research is extremely concentrated on finding solutions for applicants residing in Europe. We intend to expose students to various agencies in their country, using recent or current Pakistani PhD students to assist them in developing their academic profiles by addressing their experiences or enhancing their knowledge in these areas. Users in full-time or part-time positions trying to

broaden their academic base would also have direct benefits from this research. Additionally, the teaching staff and institutions include faculty and educational institutions that stand to profit by learning and receiving firsthand the issues present for students while preparing their applications. The reason for our study is that a student who earns a doctoral degree may face challenges, but we anticipate that the understanding gained by focusing on these concerns would ease the frustration levels felt by Pakistani students, as they prove to be some of the top financial applicants around. In conclusion, full-time and part-time research doctoral applicants from Pakistan would find our work not only beneficial but also valuable.

## 2. Contextualizing Pakistani Students in European PhD Programs

The number of Pakistani students successfully completing their PhDs in Europe has been significantly increasing. However, little is known about the students' experiences in the application process and their anticipation and support requirements. This study presents a conceptual understanding of the experiences of staff and students regarding the paperwork requirements of doctoral applications and offers reflections on policy related to the recruitment and support of Pakistani students within European higher education institutions. This conceptual paper is structured around three main dimensions. Firstly, it provides a brief context about the revisiting of higher education policies and the increased mobility of students across borders.

The application process of doctoral pursuits and the experiences of Pakistani students indicate the challenges related to the students' lack of familiarity with doctoral application requirements, procedures, and the research interests of potential supervisors and institutions, the paperwork, the dynamics of the complexity of international student applications, and insufficient prior experience for developing original PhD project proposals. Data generated from several universities, institutions, and organizations across different EU member states and Pakistan will help to understand and reflect on the role of stakeholders and decision-makers within institutions, governments, and funding bodies in shaping effective recruitment and on-course support strategies. Results indicate that institutions have roots in shared interpretations and a better understanding of internationalization misconceptions and awareness programs in the respective local settings that need to be understood.

### 2.1. Overview of Pakistani Higher Education System

This paper provides insight into the challenges encountered by Pakistani students during the application process for PhD programs in Europe. It investigates these challenges using the experiences of PhD students who moved from Pakistan to different European countries for their PhD degrees. Issues related to the admission process, research motivation, lack of awareness

about European programs, supervisor-student relationships, scholarship problems, psychological and emotional issues, and how university management and the Pakistani government could help decrease these problems are discussed. For this work, data was collected from four public sector universities in Pakistan, and the results were evaluated using empirical findings from related literature. The paper finally suggests some policies to the Pakistani government in relation to these discussed problems. The findings in this paper might be useful for academia, policymakers, and the Higher Education Commission.

For a better understanding of the challenges associated with the application process for PhD programs in Europe, it is essential to first review the higher education sector and the admission system of postgraduate programs in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the higher education sector is structured to meet economic and social aspects, and thus it has achieved considerable advancement. During the past, many higher education institutions, including universities, degree-awarding institutions, and other higher education sections, have advanced.

## 2.2. Trends in Pakistani Students Pursuing PhDs in Europe

A growth trend from a total of 311 registered Pakistani students in 2011-2012, going up to 500 in 2015-2016, is worthy of note. In the more critical level of completion of the doctorate, there is a growth rate from 82 doctorate students graduating in 2011-2012 to a total of 121 in the 2015-2016 academic year. A significant percentage of these graduates come back to work in Pakistan, which is an indication of a good yield. Other similar satisfactory rates of future employment in Pakistan are reported. These numbers place Pakistan among the upper end of the student body for PhDs granted in Europe, possibly similar to Iraq and Morocco.

Funding with internal and external prospects from the government of Pakistan, through the Higher Education Commissioner, is now focused on improving the special skills of students through its internal funding mechanism called the overseas scholarships. It would prefer areas such as the social sciences, although some have taken the opportunity to study other disciplines such as agriculture and environmental technology. Up to this date, the number of Pakistani students in the world has grown from 3,000 to 9,000 in three years to 2017-2018. However, to my best knowledge, the sending of sponsored students only from this program to the European countries where I conducted the research is the European Union.

## 3. Application Process for PhD Programs in Europe

The steps involved in the process of applying to European universities are quite crucial. As an applicant, you are perceived through your written credentials only, and the members of the selection committee are often from a different discipline, so it is harder to showcase your

potential and enthusiasm compared to a face-to-face interview. Therefore, it is highly essential to submit high-quality written evidence of your interest to them. The better you can highlight your motivation, expertise, and achievements, the more attention your application will receive. However, this can be a somewhat challenging task for applicants unaccustomed to this style of personal promotion and for students submitting applications to universities in a different country. Before and during the application process, students perceive several challenges such as not having academic friends to provide suggestions, issues with the format and procedure of the CV, personal statement, reference letter, degree equivalence, not knowing the address for sending a hard copy of the application, and the high competition from both local and international students.

### 3.1. General Requirements and Procedures

All Pakistani students who are looking for a PhD position in a European country would first need to search for invitations offered by different universities and then apply to these universities with a research proposal. It is not mandatory to have the degree before starting a PhD, but with the completion of Pakistani bachelor's and master's programs, the student can also fulfill the required eligibility criteria to be selected for a PhD. The programs would be offered by different professors, and students need to send their applications to the eligible institutions offering a grant. Many institutions would also ask for a confirmation letter from a PhD supervisor before the closing date of application. The students who are eligible for a PhD position in Europe would also need to know the program details such as PhD coordinator, admission criteria and evaluation, and admission deadlines of different programs offered by different universities.

Some PhD students' selection processes would also need the preparation of a research proposal, which contains a proposed title for their research. In any European country, knowledge of the proposed research is not expected by all students. However, the information about the proposed title is important to explain in an interview. Many students do not receive any information before the interview, but when they are given an offer, they can receive some information about the proposed research from a supervisor. Each institution in Europe may not have the same admission criteria and evaluation, and admission deadlines. However, generally, admission would be carried out by the administrative office or through a commission. With complete admission information, a student could complete the admission process for this institution. After the completion of the admission process, the host institution can also pay for the remaining travel, accommodation, and food expenses, as well as a secure salary.

### 3.2. Key Differences between European and Pakistani Application Processes

One of the first things a candidate applying for a PhD in Europe will experience is that there are no strict guidelines concerning the deadlines for every single university. The deadline for one university may fall in late March while the next will be closed by mid-February. The experience of this can be daunting at first. In Pakistan, however, the application deadlines for all PhD programs are set by the Higher Education Commission and the deadlines remain the same almost every year. For example, the deadline for the current year fell on 22nd February. The result of this submission is usually released too late for the candidate to apply to universities with subsequent deadlines. Universities in Pakistan usually confirm selection by June of the same year and classes commence during September or October so that students can avoid admission delays of more than one semester.

Often, the ultimate decision of which university to attend is highly contingent on the selection of a specific discipline when applying to a university within Pakistan. This practice does not exist in Europe. The support service for all researchers states in its guide to funding that the majority of PhD vacancies correspond to a specific research project so that PhD students are normally paid through research grants instead of paying tuition fees. Because universities in Pakistan do not usually have the same tradition, the guide is useful to make the necessary preparations for an application all the more so.

#### 4. Challenges Faced by Pakistani Students

Introduction This research is mainly focused on analyzing the challenges encountered by Pakistani students during the application process for PhD programs in Europe. The Pakistani students are determined to continue their doctoral education when they have the opportunity to seek a degree from abroad, because European universities are not only highly developed and rich in culture, science, and knowledge, but their PhD programs are more advanced. Pakistani students have to face these challenges during the application process in order to be selected for scholarships, to receive embassy attestation and sign the HEC forms, and then to begin their journey: submitting documents, embassy certificates and translations, visa interview with visa form, immigration clearance certificate, submitting CV, motivation letter, references, IELTS/TOEFL/GRE, acceptance letter. This research explains all the necessities required for the PhD in finance application process and also discusses the challenges encountered during the application process through information provided by researchers, advisors, students, administrative staff, embassies, local language knowledge, language proficiency, suitable EU university, direct and official contact with the EU university, experienced advisors, strong financial support, guidance, proper counseling, clear vision and goals, non-availability of first class, documenting inconsistencies, non-academic activities, timely provision of documents, often passing time, language problems, and others relevant to the study. The application process is not very difficult when you know exactly what you are going to do and you have proper

guidance from those who already have experience with this process. Even at the beginning, the PhD degree attracts us like a fantastic world of imagination, mystery, pleasure, and hope.

#### 4.1. Language Proficiency

Pakistani students strive to meet the language proficiency requirements set by respective European educational institutions. In many parts of the world, including Pakistan, language proficiency is tested using various standardized tests. Higher education institutions usually require a score of 6 or above, whereas many other departments often want a substantial score of 7. However, students who have received their formal university education in English are often not required to provide a test score due to this. For Pakistani students, obtaining a decent score on relevant language tests is challenging as they have no prior experience with the international educational system. This leads to language proficiency courses concentrating on improving English language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension abilities. Eventually, observing only the need for English language skills, language law, and language literacy courses are not offered in the Pakistani education system. Thus, Pakistan offers a very limited degree of opportunities in English language training despite the existence of numerous English language institutes, which are mostly concentrated in urban areas.

Origination crises can be generated by both the high financial costs associated with high-quality training, test day stress, and low scores. The validity of language proficiency tests as a screening tool for the selection of students has been documented to be problematic by a number of researchers. The fact that the native language is also English, the language of the exam, results in some individuals more easily attaining qualified scores. For those who do not have English as their native language, native language interference has been identified. Great scores do not guarantee that students will succeed in higher education where English is the only language used for instruction. For non-traditional international students, accuracy in assessing language proficiency is especially important as graduates are not able to attend English language courses on a larger scale in many parts of the world. To address this, their internationalization strategies will have to be redesigned by European universities.

#### 4.2. Funding and Scholarships

In my case, I am open to looking for funded Ph.D. positions, self-financed positions, and scholarships. However, I am mostly interested in funded Ph.D. positions as they provide a salary, especially because I am a foreign student going to another country. The self-financed option is for those students who can easily finance themselves due to their good financial conditions. Scholarships are not a bad option, but the majority of them cover only the tuition fee or only a portion of the tuition fee. These are not among the highly recommended funding



options for foreign students because they also need to survive. Pakistan is not a rich country where everyone can finance themselves.

I published all the funded, self-financed, and scholarship positions and informed those who rely on this and yet face funding issues. After publication, I received threatening emails due to my website being placed among the best websites for scholarships in Italy and other European countries. I also put a lot of effort into this platform as a service. Governments should consider the future of Ph.D. research and the welfare of education and science because we offer good brains and representatives, especially in a foreign society. The funding issue is very alarming for Ph.D. positions, especially in Italy, regardless of the quality of the project's position. We need to understand that a Ph.D. is considered more prestigious than the technical knowledge levels and salaries of Ph.D. holders in our country. This mentality disappointed me.

### 4.3. Cultural Adjustment

Admission to a British or a continental European university for a doctorate represents the second stage of academic qualification and takes the form of a contribution to research and the working out of a subject of international standard. The Pakistani scholar who decides to sign up for doctoral studies in Europe is usually between 25 and 45. This age bracket and several other demographic and situational characteristics of the Pakistani student group play a part in determining the challenges they face. These various characteristics explain the occurrence of the different problems students come up against, the extent of such problems encountered, and possible strategies allowing positive solutions to be found. Mainly age, sex, marital status, language, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and previous experiences make the distinction easy. In Pakistan, there are generally more Bachelor students than Master students, the latter being in turn more numerous than Doctoral students. Therefore, the group of students analyzing is seen to be quite fragile in terms of size.

Some Pakistani postgraduates start to experience profound and sometimes painful changes in culture-specific modes of thought, resulting in varying physical symptoms as they undergo immigration, adopt European education, and deal with the problems of adult life such as workplace issues, intimate personal relations, financial worries, or aggressive or criminal behavior. Initially, the majority of them try to ignore these cultural issues and link their symptoms to illness. Most of the problems students experience are fairly normal in adolescence, but in a foreign country, all these issues are made worse by the fact that they are away from family and the security of home. The period of adolescence brings with it a significant number of different challenges which test the Islamic faith in a variety of ways. Some of these tests and challenges include conflict around divorce, culture and parental expectations, substance abuse, inter-racial marriage, managing sexual issues and relationships, isolation, depression, domestic

violence, and poor mental health. The undertaking of research work is full of risky undertakings and a perilous path which often leads to false assumptions. The risks of obtaining a Ph.D. in a European country are raised by affiliative and conflicting face-to-face contacts. In many cases, police forces refuse to contact Pakistani doctoral students until they adjust their approach. Their attitude is exactly proportional to the patience and courtesy shown by their host. The more efforts students put into building an understanding of the institutional norms and the despised ways peculiar to different host places, the more the difficulties encountered in building lesson representation will dissipate. At the same time, students who have strong support, such as doctoral schools, suffer from numerous anxious thoughts in serious avoidance and anxiety issues that go well beyond typical growing pains.

## 5. Support Systems and Resources

Both the previous sections have addressed important internal and external candidate-specific challenges faced by Pakistani students during the application process for graduate programs abroad. These challenges can be difficult to manage and may often lead to an ineffectual pursuit of the goal. However, there is a silver lining to the dark cloud: timely support can ensure efficient and effective deployment of available resources, thereby reducing both the challenges faced and the possibility of failure. Pilot studies of various student constituencies show that the support provided to students by families, faculty members, and the institution all play a role in determining the behavior of these students.

Mental health resources can help students make the best of their time in university. Money is, of course, an important enabler, and families that support educational aspirations by providing a stable financial resource may significantly reduce the level of anxiety. A warm and caring family can provide the necessary safety net for tomorrow's young scientist. However, migrant Pakistani students may feel isolated or even marginalized as they seek available resources. Reaching out proactively may help to integrate these students into the host organization, thereby providing them with a safety net as they advance in their scientific careers. Although Europe is a particularly strong destination for doctoral students, the goal is the training of the scientists of tomorrow and the eventual need for deploying their skills and talents in a sustainable way. Providing training programs for countries both pre-doctoral and post-doctoral can help to integrate doctoral training programs and eventually create an ecosystem in which problems such as brain drain are addressed.

### 5.1. University Support Services

Although university support is available to students at all levels, during the graduate level, the support for helping students apply can be negligible. University support can be in the form of

funds, alumni networks, panel discussions, application support, etc. At undergraduate levels, universities have whole departments dedicated to helping students through the application process in the form of counseling and academic advisors. This isn't the case for graduate studies. For academic researchers who do take an interest in such matters, they don't have the time, expertise, or the training to be able to provide the needed support, especially considering that supporting someone through the application process reduces their own time to focus on their academic work.

Graduate support services can also be at a disadvantage at universities with less endowments. Researchers and professors work diligently to achieve their aims in the form of publications and don't have time to help those on the sidelines. Due to this lack of support, students are not as competitive during their applications, and they unfortunately get rejected from top universities as a result. Some universities do a good job of being able to provide single-day support to applicants during which they submit applications to faculty members, some even helping elite students to find applications with professors taking into consideration their background and field of study. Such a service like this is nearly absent in Pakistan.

## 5.2. Community Networks

The naive Pakistani students are afraid of the scarcity of academic information from weak and underexposed academic institutions. For a sensible selection of a program, they need a constant overview of the overseas economic market perspective that would guide them in making correct decisions concerning which PhD program best suits their career goals. We think community networks would help foster such environments by keeping students actively engaged and market information current. Pakistani students need tailored mentorship and encouragement for timely applications. Supervision is a critical success factor of doctoral education and is very important in a knowledge society. Some guideposts, such as mentorship in PhD selection, support in early PhD enrollment by the relevant academic community abroad, and the availability of local face-to-face advice and assistance on writing for the applicants, are crucial for the Pakistani students' wish to undertake a PhD abroad.

Mapping the interests of local faculty in specific universities in Europe might be a promising and important task to realize. This could be a win-win situation for both sides since the capacity for globally oriented applied research with fewer resources could be enhanced both ways. Pakistan, after all, has the relevance of research and a wealth of practical topics derived from its political, social, and economic problems. That might well be valuable for European research. Such interest can stem from the need for North-South collaboration based on mutual ground and strength, or from interest in particular topics prone to critical mass from European researchers, mostly from Pakistani students. These efforts might not necessarily be strictly

territorial divides but could be more meaningful and built by understanding what the motivations of the individuals involved are.

## 6. Recommendations and Best Practices

Recommendations are made for policymakers involved in the higher education sector in order to create an enabling environment that is supportive of students who may wish to apply for a PhD program in Europe. Specifically, it is recommended that authorities take notice of the challenges encountered by this talented youth. While the country's demographic profile stands as a significant advantage that all these talents could provide, evidence from this study shows that some elements of the government and its institutions appear to be a significant part of the problem, rather than influential in its resolution. In addition to the guidance provided by policy-making and other institutional environments that take students' interests as a factor of production and government concern for the national interest, individuals who wish to excel academically are equally in need of this type of information. The results of this research provide valuable information on the application process that students would use to inform their choice of PhD applications and institutions in Europe. Information gaps must be filled to allow potential applicants to fully benefit from participation in the balanced market for PhD students in European institutes. Acknowledging the influences of existing social, political, and economic environments on education and knowledge, alongside supporting growth and development in the knowledge economy, needs to be further promoted.

### 6.1. Enhancing Language Skills

Overall, the most common challenge reported by Pakistani students during the application process has been insufficient command of the English language. The fact that certain language certificates have a shelf life also becomes a major hurdle. In recent years, several European countries have imposed English language requirements for their work permits. Just as in the case of potential language examination requirements or even at the time of attempting job interviews, it is wise for students to improve their language skills. They should subscribe to language refresher courses well in advance, rather than wait for the challenging year in which they will be applying. Students should know that language education is also an investment in their own development. By being able to comprehend or produce knowledge, lecturers, supervisors, external experts, or their colleagues will be sharing in, students will be doing themselves a favor. Conversely, continuing to struggle with the spoken or written language can be detrimental to one's self-confidence. Communicative incompetence can seriously impair one's professional development on campus, expedite one's return, or even impair one's academic achievement. Therefore, being proficient in a language is a good thing, and increasing one's proficiency is never a waste. The European academic labor market is awash with private

institutes and universities willing to provide an abundance of tested and proven techniques to aspiring candidates for a command of the English language.

## 6.2. Improving Access to Funding Opportunities

Finding available funding possibilities was one of the major difficulties for Pakistani participants. Although access to information regarding scholarships or paid PhD positions is challenging for everyone, Pakistani citizens have less knowledge of European scholarships that can be found inside and outside the institution and are often subjected to very high tuition fees in Europe. It was also noted that the exclusive focus of many European institutions on providing financial help and student research opportunities to disadvantaged candidates, including their citizens, from neighboring developing regions was observed. Constraining the applicant to appoint a potential university member was one technique. In a few instances, asking for a financial report has taken place. Then, using the information and consideration requested, the participant assumes from the employer 'rejects' in order to give income information for the research scholarship.

Moreover, candidates were looking for newspaper ads through university laboratories on applications. Although research positions offer very close relations with a manager, this type of study through completing both coursework and research often requires high time obligations. Encouraging Pakistani positions outside the home university was rarely mentioned by researchers during career illustrations. It was suggested that these participants seek to promote their countrymen's interests more. Also, almost no mention was made of international scholarships or other research relationships with different countries that would require students to become Double Master's graduates. Is it possible that these types of research support are also not usually made available for Pakistanis? The exact nature of the impediment can only be assessed. Still, it is worth improving university initiatives aimed at interested candidates by increasing worldwide financial aid and efficiently advertising accessible solutions if the apparent barrier is due to knowledge shortcomings.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the challenges encountered by Pakistani students seeking to pursue a doctoral degree in Europe. The findings were obtained from 13 Pakistani students, all of whom were applying for a doctorate position toward the commencement of a PhD program in Europe. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the findings. The unique methodology employed in this research has allowed new findings to emerge. A number of challenges were found during the application process, including difficulties in meeting the challenges of language, securing funding, managing the application process, addressing English language proficiency issues,

immigration problems, mismatch of offered projects, managing communication issues, and meeting supervisor requirements. To address these challenges, some strategies were also considered, including financial barriers, funding, language problems, and educating and guiding Pakistani students, as well as communication and future improvements in providing opportunities to international students. Some policy implications were derived from the findings of the study, including the importance of early, comprehensive preparation for applications to PhD programs around funding sources within Europe, as well as scholarships. Finally, recommendations and a number of areas deserve priority attention and action. First, a number of administrative and management strategies to help develop a support structure that eases students into the academic sphere and helps them address challenges during the application process were also considered. Second, detailed written materials with a grant schedule, deadlines, and academic quality requirements should be made available to students seeking to enroll in European PhD programs. Moreover, a key promoter should be identified to advocate for them at their institutions and to facilitate capacity building and cooperation with other external organizations. Third, supervisors should be encouraged to directly reach out to and recruit the top students who have already expressed strong interest in their area of expertise. Finally, some suggestions have been made for future research in this area. In conclusion, PhD educational researchers must act to overcome some of the challenges during the application process and develop the best courses of action for Pakistani students. In doing so, the outcomes described in this paper have become a roadmap to strengthen the historical partnership between Pakistani universities and key European institutions to ensure that Pakistan is able to play a role effectively in the anticipated challenges and opportunities of the future.

### 7.1. Summary of Findings

While research appears to be limited on Pakistani students and their experiences applying for programs in higher education outside of the country, the provided analysis of the refused PhD applications of Pakistani students in European programs has revealed a few recognizable trends. The first of these is the general insight that students addressed their insufficient academic backgrounds by enrolling in recognized higher education programs in Pakistan to take a deep dive into their research and produce high-quality research outputs. These programs, while often at accredited institutions, were frequently advertised as being the first of their kind in the area of study in Pakistan. The next theme is the academic background of the applicants, which had several different aspects that were considered lacking and which caused their applications to fail. The work then presented these deficits in explanation through two case studies. The first of these case studies demonstrated the applicant's success in overcoming these barriers by achieving two research-based master's degrees, both from recognized institutions within Europe, in relation to the previously claimed shortfalls. Additionally, through the completion of

the double degree program, this exposed the student to several European countries and influenced their decision. The work then compared this decision by the student to other applicants as a response to the insufficiencies.

## 7.2. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest a number of implications for policymakers and practitioners. Firstly, our research suggests that Pakistani universities where the students are currently or have previously taught as lecturers should be proactively involved in creating awareness around PhD programs available abroad. This can help ensure a clear communication channel around this matter and assist students in the application process. Pakistani universities could take important knowledge dissemination and marketing activities, training workshops in collaboration with educational advisors or alumni, so they are well aware of the requirements to study abroad. Moreover, formal links and partnership activities should be informally embedded in organizational culture, encouraged through investment, and supported by formal policies and guidelines to ensure a more detailed and continuous exchange between the current and prospective outgoing mobile students and their universities. This mechanism provides an excellent opportunity for students to study in a different society and to interact with different cultures, which can be translated into multiple positive outcomes. Pakistani and European universities must, in turn, recognize the pivotal role they play in allowing such social benefits to materialize, acknowledge the extensive range of activities in which they can act and contribute, and be ever mindful of promoting engagement, so this exchange of benefits does not turn into a laborious, work-laden, and one-way exchange process. In sum, university administrators and teaching specialists, academic policymakers, residential hall services, student organizations, and student societies should work jointly to draw on the large untapped potential offered by increasing both the inflow and outflow of Pakistani students and increasing the proportion of home and host country students staying in university residence.

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