

**2023**

Seeing Beyond Control: Assessing the Impact of the 18th Amendment on Pakistan's Higher Education

Discussion on the post-18th amendment devolution process in Pakistan must change from power, control, and autonomy to the scientific evidence of devolution impact in terms of access, equity, efficiency, quality, and relevance of higher education if the relevant stakeholders want to reap the real benefits of federalism.

Education remained a joint constitutional responsibility of federal and provincial governments in Pakistan from 1973 to 2010. However, in practice, the federal government coordinated, regulated, and funded higher education through the Federal Ministry of Education, the University Grants Commission (1974 – 2002), and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan (2002-to date). In April 2010, the federal government passed the 18th constitutional amendment, which devolved 47 areas, including education, to the provinces (Ahmad, 2019; Government of Pakistan, 2010). However, "a tug of war" started between federal and provincial governments and between provincial governments and universities (Khan, 2015, p. 83). Sindh and Punjab provinces established their own higher education commissions in 2013 (SHEC) and 2015 (PHEC), respectively (Academia Magazine, 2018). The establishment of SHEC was challenged in the Sindh High Court, and the federal government was barred from devolving HEC by the Supreme Court of Pakistan (Tribune, 2011). Nevertheless, the two provinces (Baluchistan and KPK) and Gilgit Baltistan territory have not followed suit.

At the provincial level, the Sindh government passed a new "Sindh Universities Laws Amendment Act 2013," replacing the earlier Universities Act of 1972. The new act modified universities' organizational structure and curtailed their autonomy (Khan, 2015). A few studies on post-18th amendment reforms (Ali & Rid, 2021; Khan, 2015; Parvez et al., 2021; Siddiqui et al., 2021) have described the post-18th amendment developments and challenges. Nevertheless, these studies have various shortcomings. First, a comparative perspective is missing in these studies. Second, none of these studies utilized any theory to examine the relationship between various organizations (governments, regulatory bodies, and universities). Third, extant research has various methodological issues (e.g., homogenous samples). Thus, their trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998) is not guaranteed. Consequently, fresh empirical evidence is needed. In addition, establishing SHEC and PHEC provides a natural experiment (Murnane & Willett, 2011, p. 136) opportunity, especially when ten years have passed since the inception of SHEC. Therefore, a study is proposed here that will answer the question: How does higher education governance in Punjab and Sindh relate to the higher education governance in KPK, Baluchistan, and GB in terms of students' access to higher education, equity in access, equity of funding to HEIs, efficiency, quality, relevance, research and innovation, institutional autonomy, curriculum, and development of standards?

Answers to this question will provide the necessary knowledge for evidence-based policymaking in Pakistan. Higher education stakeholders and proponents of federalism in Pakistan will learn what approaches are effective in achieving system-level higher education goals. Ijaz Ahmad Louise McBee  
Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia Page 2 of 3

This study will build upon my previous comparative studies on European and North American (the US and Canada) higher education reforms. My graduate studies and work experience in Europe (Austria, Finland, and Belgium), the United States, China, and Pakistan will be an asset in conducting this research.

Although this research will employ only qualitative research methods, it will inform my long-term exploratory sequential mixed-methods research (Creswell & Clark, 2017) on the impact of devolution on Pakistan's higher education. The AIPS grant will help me achieve multiple goals: (a) to travel to Pakistan between June and August 2023 to collect qualitative data and develop a more comprehensive research proposal to be submitted to other funding bodies, (b) to develop an instrument to conduct a quantitative survey, (c) to identify the sources or collect institutional and system level quantitative data to conduct causal statistical analysis and assess the impact of devolution. I will draw on various sources in this qualitative phase, including law and policy documents, published reports, media reports, and semi-structured interviews. After getting IRB approval, these interviews will be conducted in Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, and Quetta. The participants will be higher education stakeholders, including university leaders, officials of federal and provincial HECs, the Federal Ministry for Education and Professional Training, Higher Education Departments (HEDs), and industry leaders. So far, I have reviewed enough literature and developed a semi-structured interview protocol.

This research will be guided by political science and economics theories, such as historical institutionalism in political science (Fioretos et al., 2016) because historical institutionalism explains the relationship between power, institutions, interest, and ideas better than some other theories. Neo-institutionalism in organization studies (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) will also be used to examine the behavior of various organizations, including governments, higher education institutions, and regulatory bodies. Finally, principal-agent theory (Yallem et al., 2018) from neo-institutionalism in economics will also inform this study on understanding the relationship between various level governments or regulatory bodies (principals) and universities (agents). Thus, the study will broaden neo-institutional theory and provide empirical evidence on the issues of access, equity, efficiency, relevance, and quality of higher education in Pakistan to change the devolution narrative in Pakistan positively.