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EFFECTIVENESS OF GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism at the University of Peshawar by exploring students' perceptions of awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, satisfaction, and overall functionality. Quantitative research was conducted using a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate and postgraduate students across five faculties. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that students had limited awareness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism and its procedures. Accessibility was a major concern, and perceptions of fairness and confidentiality were low. Timeliness and overall satisfaction with the mechanism were also inadequate. These results suggest that structural and procedural deficiencies hinder the effectiveness of the mechanism, leading students to rely on informal channels such as peer networks or social media to address grievances. The study concludes that the current Grievance Redressal Mechanism is largely ineffective and emphasizes the need for institutional reforms to improve procedural clarity, equitable access, confidentiality, and prompt resolution. Addressing these issues can enhance student engagement, strengthen trust in institutional processes, and increase the overall functionality of grievance management at the university.

KEYWORDS: *Grievance Redressal Mechanism, Higher Education, Student Perceptions, Institutional Trust*

INTRODUCTION

Grievances in universities are formal complaints by students or stakeholders that require investigation and resolution by authorized bodies (Opatha, 2019). These may involve academic evaluation, grading bias, harassment, administrative negligence, or resource inadequacies (Hossain et al., 2023). Unresolved grievances undermine student confidence, affect academic performance, and weaken institutional credibility (Tripathi et al., 2021). To address these challenges, universities implement Grievance Redressal Mechanisms, structured systems that allow students to report concerns, seek redress, and engage constructively with authorities (Agarwal et al., 2022). Grievance Redressal Mechanisms typically include digital platforms, committees, procedural guidelines, monitoring tools, and feedback mechanisms to ensure timely and transparent resolution while safeguarding stakeholder rights (Meshram et al., 2023). Their

effectiveness depends not only on formal procedures but also on student perceptions of awareness, fairness, confidentiality, and timeliness, which strongly influence whether students trust and utilize the system or bypass it, undermining institutional accountability (Bind et al., 2024).

The University of Peshawar, despite having a formal grievance redressal cell under Higher Education Commission guidelines, no empirical research has assessed student awareness, perceptions, or utilization of the mechanism. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the Grievance Redressal Mechanism accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness. Findings aim to guide institutional improvements, enhance student welfare, and strengthen trust between students and administration, while contributing to the limited literature on grievance redressal in Pakistani higher education (Pande, 2022).

Effectiveness of Grievance Redressal in Higher Education

Grievance redressal mechanisms are essential for maintaining institutional harmony, building trust between employees and management, and fostering an inclusive organizational culture. They provide formal channels for raising concerns, seeking solutions, and ensuring justice through open processes. Effective systems not only resolve conflicts but also promote fairness and tolerance in academic environments, which directly contribute to teacher motivation, student learning outcomes, institutional reputation, and organizational performance (Shaukat et al., 2024). Their significance lies in a dual role: as mechanisms for conflict resolution and as drivers of organizational effectiveness. When designed with fairness, inclusiveness, and transparency, grievance processes enhance satisfaction and institutional excellence, making their study in higher education both relevant and necessary.

The relationship between grievance handling styles and job satisfaction has been a central theme in educational research. Collective approaches such as compromising and integrating foster inclusivity, respect, and professional commitment, while dominating, avoiding, and obliging approaches often generate dissatisfaction (Narwat et al., 2024). Narwat et al. (2025) further identified common causes of grievances in academic institutions, including age bias, pay disparities, favoritism, and promotion conflicts. Left unresolved, these grievances reduce motivation, increase absenteeism, weaken teaching quality, and erode collegiality, thereby undermining institutional productivity. This situates grievance mechanisms not merely as administrative processes but as strategic instruments for workplace harmony, employee participation, and service delivery.

Stakeholder satisfaction with grievance mechanisms is influenced by procedural, structural, and relational factors. Singh and Singh (2024) identified accessibility, timeliness, follow-up, fairness of decisions, and impartiality as key determinants, explaining 67 percent of satisfaction outcomes. Faculty and staff reported higher levels of satisfaction compared to students and parents, reflecting the need for greater outreach and clarity for external stakeholders. Supporting this, Ramyasri et al. (2024) emphasized confidentiality and timeliness, with timely resolution emerging as the strongest predictor of satisfaction. Naagar and Saxena (2023) linked grievance reporting and identification to institutional credibility, while Ahmad (2021) highlighted how weak administrative cultures could create space for corruption. Collectively, these studies show that accessibility, timeliness, impartiality, and open communication are central to building trust and confidence in grievance mechanisms.

Although formal channels are designed to provide structured resolution, many employees continue to rely on informal communication. In healthcare, Aruchamy et al. (2017) found that 60 percent of employees preferred discussing grievances with peers rather than using official systems, and in the non-banking financial sector, 74 percent relied on informal methods due to delays and bureaucratic hurdles (Dhanabhakyam & Monish, 2021). While peer networks provide support, they rarely lead to resolution if concerns do not reach decision-makers. The widespread preference for informal approaches reflects broader mistrust in institutional processes, underscoring the need to make formal systems more credible, responsive, and user-friendly.

The manner in which grievances are handled also shapes perceptions of fairness and effectiveness, with cultural context exerting a strong influence. Tirno et al. (2020) found that all handling styles improved outcomes but accommodating was most effective, followed by compromising, avoiding, and collaborating. Contrary to Western perspectives that emphasize collaboration, studies in Bangladesh showed collaboration ranked lowest, reflecting workplace hierarchies and cultural norms. In collectivist and high power-distance societies, employees often favor harmony and indirect solutions over open confrontation, making accommodating and compromise-based approaches more effective. These findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive grievance systems that reflect socio-cultural values while maintaining principles of fairness and inclusivity.

Information and communication technologies have transformed grievance redressal by addressing the limitations of paper-based systems, which were often slow, inaccessible, and insecure (Meshram et al., 2023). Digital platforms now allow faster and more transparent processes. Automated routing, secure authentication, and categorization have improved precision and speed (Bind et al., 2024). Workflow automation and real-time updates have enhanced security and timeliness (Mansi et al., 2022), while features such as multimedia submissions, spam detection, and hierarchical escalation have expanded functionality (Tijare et al., 2023). Evidence from practice supports these advantages: the iGRAM system achieved 67.4 percent satisfaction with reduced response times (Tripathi et al., 2021), and trust in institutional systems was found to be a significant predictor of long-term adoption (Rana et al., 2015). Digital innovations thus go beyond administrative modernization by strengthening institutional credibility through speed, transparency, and accessibility.

The adoption of information technologies in Pakistan illustrates both the potential and the challenges of digital transformation. Resolution rates at the federal level rose from 8 percent in 2013 to 93 percent in 2016 (Phatak & Nisar, 2017), while the Strengthening of Citizen Redressal project achieved more than 99 percent resolution within 25 days through integrated systems and inter-agency cooperation (Phatak et al., 2022). The Pakistan Citizen Portal provided accessibility, multilingual support, and tracking, but issues such as premature closures, inconsistent departmental responses, and a significant gender gap in usage limited its effectiveness (Raza & Ali, 2021). In higher education, interactional justice, respectful treatment, empathy, and open communication, was found to be a stronger predictor of satisfaction than procedural or distributive justice, highlighting the importance of human interaction alongside structural efficiency (Waqas et al., 2014). Despite progress, persistent weaknesses remain, including lack of public awareness, weak coordination, outdated tracking systems, and conflicts of interest, which compromise fairness (Farooq & Kunwal, 2022). Sustainable improvement requires institutional reforms, capacity building, and broader inclusion alongside technological adoption.

Across the literature, four components emerge as central to effective grievance mechanisms: timeliness, accessibility, impartiality, and transparency (Raza & Ali, 2021). Digital systems have improved efficiency but remain vulnerable to premature closures and accountability gaps (Farooq & Kunwal, 2022). Cultural norms further shape grievance handling, with accommodating or compromising approaches proving more effective in hierarchical or collectivist settings (Tirno et al., 2020). Informal grievance channels remain widely used due to mistrust in formal mechanisms, and in higher education, empathetic communication continues to outweigh procedural efficiency in influencing satisfaction (Waqas et al., 2014). Despite global and national research, there is limited focus on institutional realities within specific universities, particularly the University of Peshawar. Existing studies emphasize higher education in general or policy-level frameworks but overlook cultural and administrative dynamics such as timeliness, accessibility, trust, and context-specific practices. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining grievance redressal at the University of Peshawar through a lens that combines global best practices with local institutional realities.

This study holds significance as it addresses a critical

gap in higher education governance in Pakistan by examining the grievance redressal mechanism in public universities, with specific reference to University of Peshawar. Through an analysis of students' perceptions, it assesses whether the grievance redressal mechanism ensures fairness, accessibility, confidentiality, timeliness, and accountability, while also highlighting barriers such as lack of awareness, procedural complexities, and low trust. The findings not only provide insights into the challenges students encounter in seeking justice and support but also offer practical guidance for administrators and policymakers to strengthen the system, thereby enhancing student welfare, institutional credibility, and transparency. At the academic level, the research contributes to the limited body of literature on grievance redressal in Pakistani higher education and presents evidence-based recommendations that can be adapted to similar institutional contexts. By linking student trust and satisfaction with broader issues of institutional accountability, the study also adds to ongoing debates on governance, education, and peacebuilding, where fairness and inclusivity remain essential for sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the effectiveness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism.
2. To understand the perceptions of students about the Grievance Redressal Mechanism.

Methodology of Research

The research study was conducted at the University of Peshawar, focusing on currently enrolled undergraduate and postgraduate students across all faculties: Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Commerce and Management, and Islamic and Oriental Studies. A quantitative research design was adopted, and a cross-sectional survey method was used to capture students' perceptions of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation from all faculties, allowing the study to capture diverse student perspectives and make the findings more representative of the overall population. In total, 100 students from five major faculties completed the survey.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of ten Likert-scale items and one open-ended question, which assessed awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness of the mechanism. Prior to data collection, the tool was pilot tested with a small group of students to ensure clarity and reliability.

The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, with the results presented in tables and charts for interpretation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Table

Awareness, Accessibility, Fairness, Timeliness, and Overall Effectiveness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Section	S#	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Awareness of the GRM	1	I am aware that the University of Peshawar has a grievance redressal mechanism (GRM).	55 (55.0%)	30 (30.0%)	10 (10.0%)	4 (4.0%)	1 (1.0%)
Awareness of the GRM	2	I know how to file a grievance through the GRM.	60 (60.0%)	30 (30.0%)	7 (7.0%)	3 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Accessibility of the GRM	1	The process of filing a grievance is easy to understand and follow.	58 (58.0%)	30 (30.0%)	8 (8.0%)	4 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Accessibility of the GRM	2	The GRM is accessible to all students, regardless of gender or background.	50 (50.0%)	35 (35.0%)	10 (10.0%)	5 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Fairness & Confidentiality of GRM	1	The grievance process treats all students fairly.	52 (52.0%)	34 (34.0%)	12 (12.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Fairness & Confidentiality of GRM	2	Students' identities are kept confidential when filing a grievance.	48 (48.0%)	40 (40.0%)	10 (10.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Timeliness & Satisfaction of GRM	1	Grievances are resolved within a reasonable time frame.	55 (55.0%)	32 (32.0%)	10 (10.0%)	3 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Timeliness & Satisfaction of GRM	2	I am satisfied with the way grievances are handled at the university.	50 (50.0%)	35 (35.0%)	10 (10.0%)	5 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Overall Effectiveness of GRM	1	The GRM has improved trust between students and the university administration.	45 (45.0%)	40 (40.0%)	12 (12.0%)	3 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Overall Effectiveness of GRM	2	I believe the GRM at UoP is an effective system for resolving student complaints.	50 (50.0%)	35 (35.0%)	10 (10.0%)	5 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Discussion

The research study evaluated the effectiveness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism at University of Peshawar by examining the perceptions of students across multiple dimensions, including awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, satisfaction, and overall effectiveness, revealing consistently negative assessments that underscore structural and operational deficiencies in the system as it currently functions within the institutional framework. The findings indicate that only 5% of students reported awareness of the mechanism, and a mere 3% demonstrated knowledge of the formal procedures required to file a grievance, suggesting that the mechanism remains largely invisible to the student body and that its functional utility is therefore severely constrained, as students lack both the information and confidence necessary to engage effectively with formal processes. The absence of structured orientation programs, comprehensive handbooks, or clear digital communication channels further exacerbates this issue.

Accessibility emerged as one of the most significant challenges faced by students when attempting to utilize the Grievance Redressal Mechanism, with 88% reporting difficulties in navigating the grievance procedures and 85% perceiving that the mechanism does not provide equitable access across diverse student groups, a finding that reflects both procedural complexity and perceptions of exclusivity that collectively discourage participation and constrain inclusivity within the institutional framework.

Perceptions of fairness and confidentiality were particularly low among students, with 86% indicating

that the grievance process lacked impartiality and 88% expressing concerns regarding confidentiality, a combination that reflects a substantive credibility gap in the handling of complaints and underscores the importance of trust as a fundamental component of institutional legitimacy. Students reported that grievances, especially those involving sensitive issues such as harassment or discrimination, were often processed without transparency and that the risk of exposure or retaliation was perceived as a significant concern, reinforcing the notion that the mechanism does not operate in a manner that ensures protection or fairness for complainants.

Timeliness and satisfaction were additional dimensions in which the mechanism performed poorly, with only 3% of students agreeing that grievances were addressed promptly and 5% expressing satisfaction with the resolution process, suggesting that delays and procedural inefficiencies are significant barriers to trust and engagement. Delays in grievance resolution convey a perception of institutional disengagement or lack of responsiveness, undermining the students' confidence in the system and reinforcing frustration and disengagement. Low satisfaction appears linked to procedural inefficiencies, limited communication, and the absence of clear accountability structures.

Overall effectiveness of the mechanism was perceived as low, with only 3% to 5% of students indicating that the system enhanced trust in the administration or effectively resolved complaints, demonstrating that the combination of low awareness, limited accessibility, procedural complexity, perceived unfairness, and concerns regarding confidentiality undermines the functionality of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Students frequently reported relying on informal mechanisms or personal networks to address grievances, reflecting a diminished trust in the institutional process and highlighting a systemic disconnect between the intended design of the mechanism and the practical experiences of the student body.

Descriptive statistics reinforce these observations, as low mean scores were recorded across all dimensions, including awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, and satisfaction, indicating pervasive weaknesses that limit students' capacity to engage meaningfully with the mechanism. The students' experiences illustrate persistent frustration, confusion, and a lack of confidence in formal institutional structures, with procedural complexity, inequitable access, and perceived bias consistently constraining participation. Delays in response, insufficient communication, and the absence of clear accountability mechanisms further undermined the perceived reliability and credibility of the system. These findings collectively demonstrate that the Grievance Redressal Mechanism, in its current form, fails to provide a functional, trustworthy, or transparent avenue for the resolution of student complaints, with deficiencies in each dimension reinforcing one another and highlighting broader structural challenges within the university's governance framework.

The patterns observed in this study suggest that the effectiveness of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism is compromised by interrelated factors that encompass both procedural design and operational implementation, with low awareness limiting initial engagement, complex and inaccessible procedures discouraging continued participation, and perceived unfairness and confidentiality breaches undermining trust. Similarly, delays in grievance handling and lack of satisfaction with the resolution process signal that the mechanism is not responsive to student needs, which not only reduces confidence but also increases reliance on informal channels that lack oversight or standardization. The combined effect of these deficiencies indicates a systemic misalignment between the design of the mechanism and its practical functioning, with each aspect, awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, and satisfaction, interacting to produce an overall perception of ineffectiveness that is consistent across the student population. The study thus provides a detailed account of the multidimensional challenges faced by students, illustrating how structural and procedural limitations contribute to the low utilization and negative perception of the grievance system.

Beyond the numerical findings, student perspectives also indicate that the grievance process is often perceived as symbolic rather than functional. Several

respondents described the mechanism as a formality that exists only on paper, with little visible effort made to ensure that it functions in practice. This perception suggests that institutional priorities may be more focused on demonstrating compliance with higher education regulatory requirements than on building a genuinely effective support system for students. In this context, the absence of visibility, clarity, and genuine responsiveness not only weakens the mechanism itself but also affects the broader institutional culture, where students may feel their voices and concerns are undervalued or ignored.

The data further highlight a tension between students' expectations and the university's delivery of grievance services. Students enter the system expecting a transparent, impartial, and confidential process, but their lived experiences suggest the opposite. Such a gap between expectation and practice undermines institutional legitimacy, as students increasingly perceive the mechanism as incapable of fulfilling its intended role. The low levels of trust expressed by students are particularly significant, given that trust is central to any grievance redressal system. Without trust, students will neither engage with nor respect the outcomes of the process, regardless of whether individual grievances are resolved.

It is also notable that the reliance on informal networks to resolve complaints reflects a broader lack of institutional accountability. When students feel that formal procedures are unhelpful or unsafe, they turn instead to peers, mentors, or personal contacts. While such strategies may provide short-term relief, they lack the safeguards, consistency, and oversight of formal processes. This reliance on informal avenues risks normalizing non-institutional modes of dispute resolution, thereby further marginalizing the grievance mechanism and weakening its role within the university governance structure.

Another important dimension revealed by the study is the lack of systematic communication between the administration and the student body regarding grievances. Students consistently reported a lack of updates, explanations, or clear feedback once a grievance had been filed. This absence of communication not only delays resolution but also increases feelings of exclusion and neglect, reinforcing the perception that the institution is unwilling or unable to address student concerns. Effective communication is integral to grievance systems, as it ensures transparency, builds trust, and signals to students that their issues are being taken seriously. Its absence here reflects a structural weakness that must be addressed if the mechanism is to gain legitimacy.

Finally, the findings suggest that the weaknesses in the Grievance Redressal Mechanism cannot be understood in isolation from the broader governance practices of the university. The system's shortcomings in awareness, accessibility, fairness, confidentiality, timeliness, and satisfaction collectively point to larger institutional challenges, including insufficient policy design, lack of training for administrators, and weak accountability structures. The grievance mechanism thus becomes a microcosm of wider governance deficits within the university, highlighting the need for comprehensive reform rather than piecemeal adjustments.

In conclusion, the data demonstrates that the Grievance Redressal Mechanism at University of Peshawar is characterized by low awareness, limited accessibility, perceived unfairness, confidentiality concerns, procedural inefficiencies, and low satisfaction, which together result in a system widely regarded by students as ineffective. These findings not only underscore the immediate need for reform of the grievance process but also highlight the broader institutional imperative of building transparent, accountable, and student-centered governance structures. Without such reforms, the mechanism will continue to exist as a largely symbolic structure, disconnected from the lived realities of students and incapable of fulfilling its intended purpose.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be argued that the Grievance Redressal Mechanism at University of Peshawar, in its current operational form, fails to meet the expectations of students across all key dimensions. The study found that awareness of the mechanism is extremely low, with only 5% of students knowing about its existence and merely 3% understanding the procedures for filing a grievance. Accessibility was identified as a major challenge, as 88% of students

reported difficulties in navigating the procedures, and 85% perceived that access was not equitable across different student groups. Concerns regarding fairness and confidentiality were also prominent, with 86% of students reporting that the process lacked impartiality and 88% expressing apprehension about potential exposure or retaliation when reporting sensitive matters. Timeliness and satisfaction were equally deficient, with only 3% of students agreeing that grievances were addressed promptly and 5% indicating satisfaction with the resolution process. The data indicate that these deficiencies collectively reduce trust in the formal grievance system, leading students to rely on informal channels such as peer networks or social media to address concerns. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Grievance Redressal Mechanism is largely ineffective, with structural and procedural limitations constraining its functionality and credibility. The primary data thus reveal a systemic disconnect between the intended purpose of the mechanism and its practical performance, highlighting the need for institutional attention to enhance student engagement, procedural clarity, and confidence in the system.

Policy Implications

- The University shall mandate the integration of Grievance Redressal Mechanism orientation into all student induction programs and academic advising sessions as a compulsory institutional requirement.
- Official communication policy shall require systematic dissemination of Grievance Redressal Mechanism related information through the university website, student emails, and notice boards to ensure equitable access to information.
- Procedural guidelines for grievance submission and redressal shall be standardized into clear, stepwise regulations, accompanied by official visual flowcharts to eliminate ambiguity in process navigation.
- Impartial review committees shall be formally constituted through regulatory provisions, with codified transparency requirements in decision-making to strengthen perceptions of fairness.
- Confidentiality protections shall be institutionalized through secure digital case management systems, with explicit regulatory provisions for anonymous submissions and controlled data access.
- A time-bound grievance resolution policy shall be enforced, with mandatory case tracking mechanisms and public reporting requirements to ensure accountability and timeliness.
- A formalized feedback system shall be incorporated into the Grievance Redressal Mechanism framework, requiring post-resolution student evaluations to inform continuous procedural and policy improvements.

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