

ACADEMICIANS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FACULTY SELECTION CRITERIA AND LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS IN UNIVERSITIES OF LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore academics' perspectives on the faculty selection process and the appointment of leadership positions in higher education institutions in Lahore. It investigates faculty members' perceptions regarding the fairness, transparency, and merit-based nature of current procedures, particularly those overseen by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected senior faculty members and department heads from both public and private universities and were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach. The findings highlight several key challenges, including perceived gaps between official regulations and actual practices, biases, political influence, and inconsistent application of selection criteria. While some respondents acknowledged the existence of merit-based, paper-based standards, many expressed doubts about the transparency and accountability of faculty recruitment and leadership appointments in practice. Respondents also reported that non-meritocratic appointments negatively affect faculty morale, confidence in institutional leadership, and overall institutional performance. The study concludes that transparent, stable, and merit-based selection and leadership appointment systems are essential for enhancing faculty satisfaction, institutional credibility, and effective governance in higher education institutions. The results provide practical recommendations for policymakers and university administrators seeking to improve recruitment and leadership processes in Pakistani universities.

Keywords: Academics' beliefs; faculty selection standards; leadership appointments; transparency; and meritocracy.

1.INTRODUCTION

The choice of the faculty and the selection of the leaders have a profound effect on the academic environment, administration, and the general success of the higher education institutions. Clear and fair recruiting strategies foster academic integrity, institutional reputation, and faculty motivation whereas opaque and politically motivated ones may damage trust and academic performance at universities (Altbach, 2015; Shah, 2015). Fears of favouritism, nepotism and

transparency in faculty recruitment and appointment of leaders remain in the developmental countries such as Pakistan. This brings critical issues of justice and responsibility in the governance of higher education (Ahmad, 2020; Khan & Jabeen, 2011). Qualitative research can be applied to get the views of academics concerning the processes in the institutions. In contrast to the quantitative method, which aims to describe the results, which are measurable, qualitative research

provides a deeper explanation of how faculty members perceive selection criteria, determine the legitimacy of leadership, and learn about justice and meritocracy within specific contexts of organizations (Creswell, 2014). These subjective judgments are important to understand because the perception of the selection and appointment processes has a high influence on the faculty level of satisfaction and commitment, but not its consolidation in policy frameworks (Shin & Jung, 2014).

The appointment of university leaders, including the various positions of vice chancellor, deans, and heads of the different departments, has far reaching effects on the vision of the university, the policies to be put in place, and the morale of the academic world. Researchers argue that to be an effective academic leader requires not only intellectual credentials, but also moral character, administrative skill, and involvement in making decisions (Bolden et al., 2012; Bryman, 2007). Nevertheless, according to research work in Pakistani higher education, leadership roles are often viewed as based on political loyalty and close relations instead of competence and leadership skills, which leads to dissatisfaction and a lack of trust towards the organization in faculty members (Ahmad, Farid, & Rehman, 2019; Zaidi, 2015). Lahore is the biggest center of higher learning in Pakistan, and it houses a wide range of government and privately administered institutions having different administration structures.

Although the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan has developed statutory requirements of teaching staff recruitment and promotion, qualitative data indicate that the requirements are not always uniformly implemented in institutions (HEC, 2021; Kazim, 2016). The accounts of the faculty members indicate loopholes in what is publicly professed and actually implemented posing questions of transparency, stakeholder involvement, and responsibility in the process of faculty selection and appointment to leadership. Under these constraints, a qualitative study of the scholar viewpoints is necessary to know the hidden meaning, experience, and contextual factors that determine the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the faculty hiring and leadership positions. Qualitative research can provide understanding on the ground of how the institutions are perceived as practiced and offer evidence-based

recommendations on policy change and improved governance in higher education institutions in Lahore, by providing academics with a voice.

Background of the Study

Universities and colleges have a role to play in the national development by producing skilled human resources, promoting research, and promoting intellectual development. The level and effectiveness of universities highly rely on the effectiveness of the academic members of the university and the performance of the administration. Consequently, the faculty selection criteria and the leadership appointment process are considered a transparent and merit-based system that is essential to upholding the quality of academic and the legitimacy of the institution (Altbach, 2015). Universities with fair and consistent recruitment plans have higher chances of increasing their research output, quality of teaching, and performance of the organization.

Faculty selection is a significant business methodology of universities that make sure that qualified, competent and professional academics are recruited. On the global level, recruitment practices in faculties are focused on academic and research achievements, teaching and learning skills, and work experience, which are usually measured using open and competitive procedures (Ghazali et al., 2015).

Faculty members in institutions report more job satisfaction, motives, and commitment to the organization when hiring procedures are considered to be fair and consistent (Ghazali et al., 2015). Accusations of favouritism, nepotism, or political interference during recruitment processes on the other hand may weaken teacher spirit and negatively affect the academic performance.

Besides recruiting faculty, university leadership nominations including those of the vice chancellors, deans and department heads, have a significant effect on institutional vision, governance, as well as policy implementation. The academic leadership demands intellectual achievement, management ability, and upright judgment. In the studies, it was noted that merit-based and professionally competent leadership assignments are known to improve teachers confidence and also achieve a positive academic environment. But, in the event that the leadership is obtained on the basis of personal contacts and political membership instead of merit, the

performance and satisfaction in the faculty become worse (Khan, 2018).

In Pakistan, Higher Education Commission has developed uniform criteria to be used in faculty recruitment and advancements, with the primary focus set on academic qualifications, publications, and teaching experience. Notwithstanding these legislative limitations, various research studies have found that some institutions have implemented these laws differently, especially in their respective transparency and accountability in the process of selection and appointment of leaders (Khan & Jabeen, 2011; Shah 2015). There are instances of favouritism, political influence, and absentee stakeholders, and this has raised issues of fairness and meritocracy in institutions of higher learning (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Lahore is one of the largest educational hubs of Pakistan, which has a variety of both governmental and private institutions. Although there are companies that aim to hire and provide leadership based on merit, there are companies that have been reprimanded on their cloudy processes and conspicuous discrimination (Khan, 2018). Due to these differences, Lahore is a proper location in which the perceptions of academics on the faculty selection process and appointment of leaders can be studied. It is important to understand these perceptions because faculty satisfaction is intimately connected to the effectiveness in instruction, research productivity and reputation of an institution (Sadozai et al., 2012).

Although such seriousness of the matter, empirical studies on the levels of satisfaction of academics to faculty selection procedures and leadership appointment in Lahore universities have remained insignificant. Most of the existing studies concentrate on policy frameworks or leadership styles without giving sufficient attention to the perspectives of faculty and experiences. Consequently, this research paper will address the gap in the understanding of how scholars assess fairness, openness, and effectiveness of faculty selection criteria and leadership appointment procedures in the institutions of Lahore. The results are supposed to assist the policymakers, university administrators and regulatory bodies to reinforce merit-based systems, enhance faculty satisfaction, and enhance governance of higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Academic is greatly influenced by the criteria used to select the faculty as well as appointing the leaders. University performance in terms of quality, governance and institutional performance. Transparent, merit-based, and equal employment and selection of leaders is important towards academic achievement. faculty professional happiness, and faculty trust. Nevertheless, a great number of institutions of higher learning, some of them, especially those of the developing countries, still remain conscious of the transparency, consistency, and equity of faculty appointment policies and administrative assignments. Anecdotal evidence and the discussions with academicians at the public and private institutions of Lahore indicate that there are informal talks of academicians. perceived differences between the selection procedures announced in public and their actual application. Favouritism, openness, political/administrative and academic influence or lack thereof. participation in decision making processes are usually raised. These worries may have a unhealthy effect on the morale, job satisfaction, professional commitment, and institutional fairness perceptions. Although these issues are topical, little has been done. qualitative research that explores lives of academics and faculty selection views. selection and management in the university of Lahore. The majority of the past studies rely on. on quantitative methods, which can neglect the nuances, meanings and contextual. factors that impact the views of academics. Consequently, it has a pressing need to carry out. qualitative study of the faculty selection and leadership appointment process by academics. in Lahore universities. Knowing their experiences, perceptions and concerns can provide useful information. understandings of the effectiveness and reliability of current practices, not to mention highlight areas of potential improvement. change. This research is of great importance in the formulation of policy changes, enhancement of transparency, and. enhancing governance systems in institutions of higher learning.

Objective of the Study

1. To explore the perceptions of academicians about their satisfaction with the current faculty selection criteria of Higher Education Commission in universities of Lahore.

2. To analyze the satisfaction of university academicians with the appointment on leadership positions (e.g., vice-chancellors, pro-vice chancellors, deans, directors, chairpersons) in Lahore's higher education institutions.

3. To suggest new criteria for the selection of teachers in the universities and appointments against leadership positions in the light of stakeholders' views.

Research Questions

1. To what extent the academicians in universities of district Lahore are satisfied with the current faculty selection criteria of Higher Education Commission?

2. To what extent the academicians in universities of district Lahore are satisfied with the appointment of senior faculty against leadership and management positions (e.g., vice-chancellors, pro-vice chancellors, deans, directors, chairpersons) in universities of district Lahore?

3. How do university academicians perceive changes in the HEC's faculty selection criteria and their placement against leadership and management positions?

Significance of the Study

The research is of immense importance because it examines the lived experience, perception, and interpretation of academicians in relation to faculty selection, and appointment of leaders in the universities of Lahore. The qualitative approach used takes the study to the next level by presenting more profound information on the perception of fairness, transparency, merit, and credibility by the academic staff in the process of making decisions in the institution. This knowledge is necessary to understand the multifaceted social, cultural and organizational dynamics that govern the recruitment and leadership procedures in higher learning institutions. This research has important implications to policy makers and university administrators because it presents comprehensive contextual evidence that can be used to shape and improve the policy of transparent and merit-based and inclusive selection and appointment of leaders. This information may be used to reform institutional leaders to identify the discrepancies between the official policies and the real practices so as to facilitate reforms that will aid in increasing the trust, accountability and integrity within institutions. Academicians and members of the

faculty will also find this study useful as they have a voice, concern, and expectations platform when it comes to the development of their professions and growth as leaders. The study helps to have a better understanding of the impact of selection and leadership processes on job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment in universities in that it brings forward similarities in perceptions and experiences. Academically and research wise, the study adds to the scanty qualitative research on faculty selection and leadership appointments in the Pakistani higher education especially in Lahore. It adds to the growing body of literature by providing subtle interpretations and themes that can inform future qualitative and mixed-method studies in the field of higher education governance and leadership. Lastly, the research has a practical implication on quality assurance agencies and other higher education regulators like the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan since it presents evidence-based findings that could be used in the development of guidelines to enhance meritocracy, effectiveness of leadership, and performance within higher learning institutions.

Research Methodology

This research followed a qualitative approach where the interpretivist method was applied in exploring the views of academics on faculty selection criteria and appointing faculty leadership in the institutions in Lahore. The qualitative strand was meant to include the lived experiences, meanings and interpretations of transparency, meritocracy, and governance processes, which cannot be fully understood with the help of quantitative measurements only. The phenomenological method of qualitative research was employed to examine the way academicians view and think about faculty selection and appointment of leaders in their respective institutions. This design is appropriate to study the common point of meaning and subjective realities when people investigate the phenomena personally. Both the institutions in Lahore, senior academics and heads of departments (HoDs) participated in the qualitative phase. Purposive sampling was used to select those participants who were directly engaged in, or had considerable experience in faculty recruiting and leadership appointment processes. To enhance content and range of views, the selection was based on the type

of university (public/ private), name and field of learning.

Table 1: Population of Study

Sr. No.	Name of University	Departments	Total Faculty Members
1.	Public University 1	8	105
2.	Public University 2	8	155
3.	Private University 1	8	212
4.	Private University 2	8	105

The sample was chosen according to the Yamane Formula ($n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$). This equation was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The poll used a sample size of 236 people. 43 individuals from Public University were recruited using the proportionate stratified selection approach. Public University chose 163 participants. 287 people from Private University 1 and 43 participants from Private University 2 were chosen to participate in the survey.

Results and Interpretation

The study's qualitative findings are structured into six core topics and related sub-themes, which reflect academic's lived experiences and perspectives on faculty selection criteria and leadership appointment methods in Lahore's universities. The research captures participants' views through verbatim extracts and provides a thorough insight of how institutional regulation are understood and applied in real-world contexts.

Theme 1: Perceptions about HEC Faculty Selection Criteria

Sub-theme 1.1: Awareness and Understanding of HEC Criteria

Participants generally displayed a thorough understanding of the Higher Education Commission's official standards for the faculty recruitment, including credentials, experience, and research publications. Many respondents agreed that criteria were well-documented and available through official methods. A participant mentioned:

"HEC has clearly stated what is necessary for each position. Everyone is aware of the core roadmap—PhD, experience, and publications. (P3)

Despite this awareness, some scholars argued that recognizing the requirements did not imply equitable execution. One head of department commented:

"The criteria are transparent in documents, but universities interpret them according to their own convenience." (HoD2)

Participants underlined that institutional discretion frequently distorted seemingly consistent rules. This perspective implies that, while faculty members are policy literate, their faith in procedural fairness is limited. The narratives highlight the contrast between formal and practical openness, implying that knowing the rules does not engender confidence unless they are consistently implemented.

Sub-theme 1.2: Overemphasis on Research Publications

The present selection method prioritizes research productivity above teaching, mentorship, and professional ethics, which has been a recurring complaint. Many participants believed publication counts were the sole indicator of excellence. One responder explains:

"Today a good teacher is not the one who teaches well; it is the one who publishes more papers." (P7)

Early-career academics, in particular, considered this unfair:

"We spend most of our time in classrooms, but during selection no one asks about our teaching performance." (P12)

Such reports highlight a perceived disparity between a university's fundamental functions—teaching, research, and community involvement. Participants contended that the existing standards foster a 'publish or perish' mentality that disregards

instructional quality. These feeling parallels larger discussions in higher education concerning metric-driven evaluation systems and their influence on academic identity.

Theme 2: Transparency and Equity in the Selection Process

Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of Uniform Implementation

Although official processes exist, respondents commonly pointed out variations among institutions and even departments within the same university. Shortlisting criteria, interview rigor, and scoring techniques were found to differ significantly. A participant stated:

"In some universities, the interview panel poses genuine intellectual questions, while in others, it is merely a simple meeting." (P5)

Another added:

"Sometimes candidates know beforehand that they will be selected; the process only completes formalities." (HoD1)

These experiences indicate to procedural fragmentation. Participants regarded the rules to be flexible rather than binding, undermining the system's trust. The lack of common operational processes among institutions produced sentiments of uncertainty and insecurity among candidates.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Credibility of Selection Committees

Opinions regarding selection committees were mixed. Some academics appreciated the professionalism of panel members:

"I have seen committees that are very fair and evaluate candidates purely on merit." (P9)

Yet many others questioned their independence:

"Committee members are under internal pressures; they cannot always take neutral decisions." (P4)

These contrasting views suggest that committee credibility is not merely a structural issue but is deeply linked with institutional culture. Where governance traditions were strong, committees were trusted; where political interference prevailed, they were viewed skeptically.

Theme 3: Favouritism and Institutional Politics

Sub-theme 3.1: Personal Influence in Recruitment

A substantial number of participants referred to the influence of personal connections and political

affiliations in hiring decisions. One academic remarked:

"Merit works only when there is no strong reference; otherwise, reference wins." (P6)

Another observed:

"At senior level appointments, lobbying becomes more important than CV." (HoD4)

These statements reveal a perception that social capital often overrides human capital. Such beliefs, whether fully accurate or not, significantly shape organizational trust and faculty morale.

Sub-theme 3.2: Gap between Policy and Practice

Participants repeatedly contrasted official claims with ground realities:

"Policies speak the language of merit, but practice speaks the language of relations." (P2)

This perceived duality created cynicism toward institutional governance. Academics felt that written rules served symbolic purposes while real decisions followed informal pathways.

Theme 4: Leadership Appointment Practices

Sub-theme 4.1: Merit versus Seniority

Regarding leadership positions, many respondents believed that seniority rather than competence determined appointments.

"Mostly the oldest professor becomes the chair, not necessarily the most capable one." (P11)

Participants argued that administrative skills, strategic vision, and academic integrity should outweigh length of service. The dominance of seniority was viewed as a barrier to innovation.

Sub-theme 4.2: Academic and Administrative Credibility

Academics expressed greater acceptance of leaders who combined scholarly stature with managerial competence.

"A leader must understand both research and administration; otherwise, departments suffer." (HoD3)

Where leaders lacked one of these dimensions, respondents reported communication gaps, favouritism, and weak academic planning. This highlights the multidimensional expectations attached to academic leadership roles.

Theme 5: Impact on Academicians' Satisfaction and Motivation

Sub-theme 5.1: Trust in Institutional Governance

Perceptions of unfair selection directly affected trust levels.

"When processes are doubtful, teachers lose faith in the whole system." (P8)

Low trust was associated with withdrawal from institutional initiatives and reluctance to participate in committees.

Sub-theme 5.2: Professional Motivation and Performance

Several participants linked perceived injustice with declining motivation.

"Why invest in research or innovation when outcomes are already decided?" (P10)

Such narratives indicate that governance practices influence not only careers but also academic productivity and commitment to institutional development.

Theme 6: Suggestions for Improvement

Sub-theme 6.1: Demand for Transparency and Accountability

Participants strongly recommended public disclosure of procedures.

"Interview marks and selection reasons should be shared with candidates." (P1)

They emphasized external monitoring and standardized rubrics to reduce discretion.

Subtheme 6.2: Leadership Development and Training

Many advocated structured preparations for leadership roles.

"Before becoming dean or chair, there must be certified leadership training." (HoD5)

Respondents believed that professional development would improve decision-making and reduce politically motivated appointments.

The thematic findings illustrate a complex landscape where formally robust HEC criteria coexist with locally mediated practices. Academicians appreciate the existence of standardized policies yet remain sceptical about their equitable implementation. The dominance of publication metrics, perceived favouritism, and seniority-based leadership appointments collectively shape faculty satisfaction and organizational trust. Participants envision a more transparent, competency-driven, and accountable system that values teaching excellence alongside research productivity.

Major Findings

The main inference of the qualitative research is that scholars are generally conscious of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) requirements and rules regarding faculty selection. Respondents noted that there are established criteria applied in the credentials, research publications and experience. Nevertheless, the implementation of these criteria was considered to be disproportionate and discriminating, as there were differences across institutions and departments. They reported that research publications and academic qualifications are highly prioritized in faculty selection methods, but teaching effectiveness, professional ethics and interpersonal abilities are considered to a very small extent.

Faculty members at the early stages of their careers expressed concern that this gap does not allow making an equal estimate of the overall academic competence. Academicians observed that there is no consistency in the recruiting and selection methods. Variations in short listing, interviewing and ultimate verdicts were raised quite often, especially where influential candidates were concerned. This disparity gave rise to procedural injustice fears. Among the most notable results was the feeling of favouritism, nepotism, and political influence in the hiring of faculty members and appointment of leaders. According to the participants, personal relationship, and outside influence often overrode the merit in hiring particularly to senior leadership role. The methods of appointing leaders were not satisfied by many of the participants with the comment that most of the positions of Heads of Departments, Deans and Directors were always filled based on seniority or administrative convenience but not on leadership abilities, vision or having any formal training.

The participants always related poor choice and leadership procedures with reduced trust in institutional administration, reduced motivation, and less eagerness to take part in research, innovation, and leading roles. Conversely, greater morale and professional commitment were associated with transparency and processes that were based on merit. To enhance the validity and equity of the selection and leadership procedures, scholars aggressively called upon the open systems, standard procedures, external evaluation, leadership training courses, and involvement of the stakeholders.

Discussion

The qualitative results demonstrate a significant gap between the purpose of policies and institutional practice in choosing and leading the faculty. Despite the set standards offered by the HEC, scholars have opined that the standards are not always, and openly, applied. Previous research suggests that implementing formal policies does not necessarily promote justice without robust accountability measures. The focus on research publication is also in line with the global trends in higher education; however, the issues expressed by participants suggest that the use of a highly quantitative evaluation methodology can have a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and the overall academic growth.

The result supports other studies that suggest balanced systems of assessment which integrate teaching and research with service. Favouritism perception and political influence is one of the issues affecting institutional credibility. These perceptions are particularly detrimental in the academic environment where the ideal of meritocracy and moral governance are the main objectives. The results are in line with the past qualitative studies conducted in Pakistani tertiary education, indicating that prejudice decreases trust, reduces job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The modes of leadership appointment were mostly considered to be not strategic.

The focus on seniority rather than leadership competency is the factor that leads to the emergence of leaders with academic qualifications but management vision or leadership training. This paper supports the transformational theory of leadership because it underlines the importance of appointing leaders with the aim of vision, ability and moral influence and not just tenure. The survey also discovered that the views of fairness and openness are directly linked to teacher satisfaction. Academicians lose their drive, efficiency and engagement when they perceive that the process of selection and leadership is not fair.

On the other hand, transparent and merit-based systems foster trust, increase morale, and enhance professional development. Lastly, there is a need among the participants to go through reform, which highlights the need to change the system. Recommendations such as external audits, homogenous selection rubrics, leadership development initiatives, and stakeholder

involvement are some of the examples of recommendations based on a collective will to have transparent and credible governance systems in the Lahore institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The qualitative research study studied the views of the academics on faculty selection criteria, as well as leadership appointment methods in the Lahore institutions. The results indicate that the official policies and the HEC suggestions regarding faculty recruitment and leadership appointments are set in stone, however, the application is often perceived to be unequal and not transparent. Scholars questioned the issue of favouritism, politics and excessive focus on narrow measures of performance, especially in leadership decisions.

The researchers indicate that perceived unfairness in the process of selection and leadership styles affects the degree of trust of academics in the system of institutional governance, professional drive, and job satisfaction negatively. On the other hand, transparent, merit-based, and competency-oriented practices were considered as necessary in the development of academic morale and institutional legitimacy. In general, the paper highlights the importance of the improvement of the system of accountability, the fairness of policy implementation, and the use of leadership development strategies to increase the effectiveness and integrity of the institutions of higher education in Lahore.

Some recommendations based on the study findings are given.

1. Universities should strictly follow HEC-approved standards of faculty selection to decrease the extent of uncertainty and enhance trust in the practices of recruiting faculty.
2. Departments and institutions ought to have the same procedure of shortlisting, interviewing, and assessment to ensure fairness and uniformity.
3. The process of faculty selection and leadership appointment must be monitored by independent supervisory authorities or internal audit committees.
4. There should be clear laws that curb individual, political, and external interference in the recruitment and leadership choice.
5. The issue of filling leadership positions should be based on set leadership skills,

administrative skills, and scholarly goodwill and not on seniority.

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