

Evaluating the Paradox of Academic Research in Pakistan: Limited Knowledge Contribution vs. Its Predominance in Faculty Recruitment Criteria

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Abstract

Background: Despite the proliferation of academic research in Pakistan, its tangible contribution to global and national knowledge repositories remains limited. Ironically, the same academic output plays a critical role in determining faculty recruitment, promotion, and tenure in higher education institutions.

Objectives: This qualitative study explores this paradox by investigating the underlying motivations, systemic challenges, and institutional practices that prioritize quantity over quality in research outputs.

Methods: This qualitative study explored the paradox through in- depth interviews with Pakistani academics and administrators, analyzing their experiences for emergent themes.

Results: The study found Pakistani faculty often publishes research primarily for career promotion, not knowledge. This creates a paradox where publications are vital for hiring but offer minimal societal impact.

Implications: To resolve this paradox, faculty evaluation must shift from counting publications to assessing their real-world impact and quality, fostering research that genuinely contributes to knowledge.

Keywords: *Academic research; Pakistan, faculty recruitment; research quality; higher education; knowledge contribution; qualitative study*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic research has long been recognized as a cornerstone of knowledge advancement, policy development, and socio-economic transformation. In developed countries, academic institutions serve as knowledge hubs where rigorous inquiry fuels innovation, informs governance, and shapes societal evolution (Altbach, 2015). However, in developing countries like Pakistan, the role and value of academic research remain contentious. Despite a marked increase in research publications, largely driven by policy reforms initiated by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) since 2002, the actual contribution of this output to national or global knowledge systems is perceived as limited (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2021).

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan introduced stringent requirements for faculty hiring, promotions, and tenures, emphasizing research publications, particularly in recognized journals. These efforts aimed to bolster academic productivity and enhance Pakistan's academic reputation globally. As a result, universities and faculty members have aggressively pursued publication goals. However, this numerical increase has not necessarily translated into quality knowledge creation, practical policy inputs, or innovation (Shah, 2020).

A paradox has thus emerged: academic research has become central to faculty evaluation and institutional prestige in Pakistan, yet its epistemic value, defined by citation, relevance, originality, and impact, remains marginal. This situation has sparked debates within the academic and policy-making community about whether the current metrics used to evaluate faculty are reflective of genuine scholarly excellence.

While academic publications are a crucial metric in Pakistan's faculty recruitment and promotion systems, the actual quality and impact of this research are often questionable. Publications are frequently driven by performative needs rather than intellectual curiosity or societal relevance. Moreover, the widespread acceptance of low-quality or even predatory journals undermines the integrity of academic scholarship (Khan & Jamil, 2019). There exists a disconnect between the intended purpose of academic research, to contribute to knowledge, and its current instrumental role as a means to secure employment or promotions. This research seeks to explore this disconnect and critically examine why academic research in Pakistan is simultaneously insignificant in knowledge contribution and significant in hiring decisions.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the paradoxical nature of academic research in Pakistan. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Investigate the motivations driving faculty to produce research publications.
- Analyze institutional policies and practices regarding research-based faculty recruitment.
- Explore the extent to which academic research in Pakistan contributes to knowledge generation.
- Understand systemic barriers that hinder impactful academic research.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- What motivates faculty in Pakistan to engage in academic research?
- How do institutional recruitment and promotion policies influence research behaviors?
- To what extent does academic research in Pakistan contribute to national and global knowledge?
- What are the structural and institutional factors limiting the quality and impact of research?

This study holds significance for policymakers, academic institutions, and researchers alike. By unpacking the paradox of publication-driven hiring versus knowledge-driven research, it seeks to offer valuable insights for revising recruitment policies and academic incentives. It also contributes to the broader discourse on higher education reform in developing countries and adds to the global understanding of research ethics, integrity, and performance metrics.

For academic institutions, the findings may serve as a foundation to redesign faculty evaluation criteria, incorporating measures of quality, relevance, and impact rather than mere quantity. For researchers, this study may illuminate the importance of aligning personal scholarly goals with broader knowledge-based outcomes.

This study focuses on higher education institutions across Pakistan, encompassing both public and private sector universities. While the emphasis is on faculty recruitment practices and research output, the study also considers broader institutional dynamics such as funding, training, and policy frameworks. The research employs a qualitative approach, which, while not statistically generalizable, offers rich, contextual insights into the lived realities of academic professionals.

This chapter critically reviews the relevant academic literature to establish a theoretical and contextual foundation for exploring the paradox of academic research in Pakistan. The review is organized into several themes: the global role of academic research, the evolution of research practices in Pakistan, research quality versus quantity debate, faculty recruitment criteria, predatory publishing trends, and institutional challenges. The literature also highlights the growing concern that academic research in Pakistan, despite increasing in volume, contributes minimally to global knowledge production.

Academic research is universally recognized as the engine of innovation, intellectual progress, and social transformation (Brew, 2006). In well-developed academic ecosystems, research output informs public policy, improves technologies, fosters economic growth, and advances disciplines (Altbach & Salmi, 2016). According to Marginson (2020), knowledge-intensive economies prioritize high-impact research by linking academic outputs to real-world problem-solving.

Research excellence globally is not merely measured by the number of publications, but also by their citation impact, interdisciplinary relevance, and influence on societal progress (Wilsdon et al., 2015). Citation indices such as the h-index, Scopus citations, and altmetrics are used to gauge the visibility and utility of research beyond academic boundaries.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has played a pivotal role in expanding academic research through structured reforms since 2002. HEC introduced performance-based incentives such as grants, promotions, and recognitions linked to publication counts (Qureshi et al., 2017). These reforms resulted in an exponential increase in the number of research articles authored by Pakistani academics, rising from fewer than 1,000 in 2002 to over 22,000 in 2023 (HEC, 2023).

Despite this growth, critiques have emerged regarding the superficiality of research outputs. Studies suggest that most research produced in Pakistan lacks innovation, theoretical novelty, or relevance to local issues (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2021). Furthermore, it is seldom cited in influential international journals, reflecting its limited global resonance (World Bank, 2022).

One of the central tensions in the academic landscape of Pakistan is the overemphasis on quantity of research rather than its quality. Shah (2020) observed that faculty members often publish for career survival rather than genuine scholarly pursuit. Research metrics are measured by the number of publications rather than their academic rigor or societal impact.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to Pakistan but is especially pronounced due to the rigid HEC criteria. According to Abbasi et al. (2019), the lack of quality control mechanisms and peer-review accountability has led to the proliferation of superficial studies that contribute little to intellectual discourse. The “publish or perish” culture has consequently diluted the integrity of scholarly publishing in many institutions.

Academic hiring and promotion processes in Pakistan heavily rely on quantifiable research outputs. As per HEC guidelines, faculty appointments require a minimum number of publications in HEC- recognized journals for various designations such as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor (HEC, 2023). However, these guidelines often disregard impact metrics such as citation count, journal prestige (e.g., JCR impact factor), or practical application of research findings.

Research by Bashir and Naseer (2022) argues that this quantitative focus encourages token compliance rather than excellence, where faculty meet bare minimum publication thresholds without ensuring relevance or originality. This has led to a mechanical publishing culture, driven more by procedural checklists than knowledge creation.

The rise of predatory publishing in Pakistan is one of the most troubling consequences of performance-based research incentives. These journals exploit the demand for quick publication by offering paid, non-peer-reviewed articles with no academic credibility (Khan et al., 2020). Many such journals are even indexed temporarily in HEC’s recognized list, enabling unethical publishing practices to flourish.

Butt and Ahmad (2021) note that some academics, under pressure to meet institutional publication requirements, knowingly opt for these outlets. This undermines the legitimacy of research and contributes to the global skepticism toward research originating from certain developing nations, including Pakistan.

Several systemic challenges hinder the production of high-quality academic research in Pakistan:

- **Limited Funding:** Research and development (R&D) allocation in Pakistan remains below 0.3% of GDP, far below the global average (UNESCO, 2022).
- **Weak Research Culture:** Many institutions lack formal research offices, grant facilitation units, or mentorship programs (Habib & Hamid, 2020).
- **Access to Databases:** Subscriptions to premium academic databases like JSTOR, Scopus, or Web of Science are restricted due to cost, limiting literature access and visibility.
- **Poor Methodological Training:** A significant portion of university faculty lacks rigorous training in research methodologies, especially qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches (Javed et al., 2022).

These factors cumulatively contribute to a research environment that prioritizes output over outcome, thereby amplifying the paradox under study. A majority of research conducted in Pakistani universities tends to replicate Western models without adapting them to local contexts. According to Raza et al. (2021), this intellectual dependency often results in redundant studies that neither challenge existing knowledge nor propose context-specific solutions. Consequently, policy-making in Pakistan remains largely disconnected from academic insights.

Despite abundant literature on higher education reforms and publication incentives in Pakistan, few studies critically examine the paradox where research holds strategic value for hiring but minimal epistemic significance. This study attempts to fill this gap by capturing lived experiences and insider perspectives through qualitative inquiry.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to explore the paradox of academic research in Pakistan, its limited knowledge contribution versus its dominant role in faculty recruitment criteria. The study adopts a qualitative research design, particularly a phenomenological approach, to delve into the lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional realities of academic professionals in Pakistan. This chapter details the research design, philosophical underpinnings, population and sampling, data collection methods, tools of analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness strategies.

The study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding human experiences, social contexts, and institutional behaviors from the perspective of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretivism is appropriate for this inquiry, as it facilitates deep exploration of how academic faculty and administrators perceive and navigate institutional pressures related to research and hiring.

A phenomenological research design is used to explore the subjective experiences of university faculty, policy-makers, and academic administrators regarding the value and role of research. Phenomenology is suitable for this study because it seeks to understand not just what participants think but how they experience the paradoxical academic landscape in Pakistan (Moustakas, 1994).

The target population includes academic professionals from both public and private sector universities across Pakistan, particularly those in leadership or tenure-track roles, as well as policy experts and researchers associated with the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of information-rich participants who could provide in-depth insights into institutional practices and research behaviors. The selection criteria included:

- Faculty members with at least 5 years of experience
 - Department heads and deans
 - Officials and policy advisors from the HEC or Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs)
- A total of 20 participants were interviewed:
- 10 university faculty members (from diverse disciplines)
 - 5 academic administrators (e.g., department heads, deans)
 - 5 education policy experts (member accreditation bodies, and academic consultants)

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The sample size was deemed sufficient for thematic saturation, where no new information emerged from additional interviews (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013).

The primary data collection method was semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing flexibility to probe emergent themes while maintaining a guiding framework of questions. The interview protocol included questions about:

- Motivations for publishing
- Experiences with hiring and promotion procedures
- Perceptions of research quality and impact
- Institutional support and challenges
- Interviews lasted 45–120 minutes.

Conducted via Zoom, Google Meet, or in-person (depending on availability and COVID-19 protocols). All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved six steps:

1. Familiarization with transcripts through repeated reading
2. Generating initial codes related to institutional pressure, research motivation, and policy perceptions
3. Searching for themes by grouping similar codes
4. Reviewing themes for coherence and distinctiveness
5. Defining and naming themes to capture their essence
6. Producing the report with direct quotes from participants to illustrate key findings

NVivo software (version 12) was used to organize and code data, enabling systematic theme extraction and visualization of patterns.

To ensure rigor and credibility, the following strategies were applied:

Credibility: Triangulation of data sources (faculty, administrators, and policy experts); member checking was performed with select participants to validate interpretations.

Transferability: Thick descriptions of participant experiences and institutional contexts allow for potential application in similar developing country settings.

Dependability: An audit trail of all research decisions, coding processes, and analytic memos was maintained.

Confirmability: Researcher bias was minimized through reflexivity and peer debriefing.

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Ethical approval was obtained from the host university's research ethics board. Key ethical measures included:

- Informed consent obtained before interviews
- Voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any point
- Anonymity and confidentiality ensured by using pseudonyms and encrypted data storage
- Respect and transparency maintained throughout the study
- The qualitative nature limits generalizability to all universities across Pakistan.
- Potential for social desirability bias during interviews, especially with faculty members worried about institutional repercussions.
- Language barriers in a few cases were mitigated by offering the option to respond in Urdu or English.

3. RESULTS

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, including university faculty members, academic administrators, and education policy experts. The analysis uncovers five major themes that reflect the paradox of academic research in Pakistan: (1) research as a means of career progression, (2) institutional emphasis on quantity over quality, (3) prevalence of predatory publishing, (4) systemic constraints on meaningful research, and (5) the disconnect between research and societal needs. Each theme is supported by direct participant quotations and linked to the overarching research questions.

The participants included:

- 10 university faculty members (from public and private sector institutions)
- 5 academic administrators (department heads, deans)
- 5 policy experts (including HEC officials and consultants)
- The participants were anonymized using pseudonyms (e.g., Faculty-1, Admin-2, Policy-3).

Theme 1: Research as a Means of Career Progression

A majority of participants admitted that the primary motivation for publishing research was not to contribute to knowledge, but to meet institutional requirements for promotions and job security.

"I publish to survive. It's a checklist. If I don't have the required publications, I can't apply for promotion. Whether the research is useful or cited doesn't matter." (Faculty-3)

Several faculty acknowledged that research was treated as an obligation rather than a passion. This utilitarian view reduced academic inquiry to a bureaucratic task, undermining its purpose.

Theme 2: Institutional Emphasis on Quantity over Quality

All administrators and faculty agreed that universities and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) prioritize the number of publications in hiring and promotion criteria. Impact factor, citation count, or social relevance are rarely assessed.

“We don’t assess the impact of research in hiring panels. If a candidate has 10 HEC-approved publications, they qualify, even if none of the papers were ever cited.” (Admin-1)

This emphasis on volume has incentivized repetitive and low-risk research topics. Some participants expressed frustration over the absence of mechanisms to differentiate quality contributions from superficial output.

Theme 3: Prevalence of Predatory Publishing

Nearly all participants acknowledged the widespread use of predatory or low-quality journals to meet institutional benchmarks. Faculty shared experiences of pressure to publish quickly, which often led them to pay-for-publication journals with no peer review.

“It’s a common secret, many colleagues use predatory journals because they’re fast and affordable. And sadly, the HEC sometimes recognizes them temporarily, so people exploit the loophole.” (Faculty-7)

Policy experts revealed that efforts to weed out such journals are often delayed due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and political resistance.

“Some institutions lobby to keep certain journals on the HEC list because their faculty have published there. It’s an ethical failure.” (Policy-2)

Theme 4: Systemic Constraints on Meaningful Research

Participants highlighted the lack of structural support for quality research. Key constraints included limited funding, inadequate access to international journals, weak mentorship, and poor research training.

“We don’t have access to databases like JSTOR or Science Direct. How can we produce high-quality work without seeing what the world is doing?” (Faculty-5)

“There’s no research culture here. You’re thrown into teaching four courses and told to publish at the same time. It’s a broken system.” (Faculty-9)

Administrators admitted that even faculty appraisal systems do not account for research rigor or innovation.

Theme 5: Disconnect Between Research and Societal Needs

Multiple respondents lamented the irrelevance of much academic research to Pakistan’s pressing socio-economic issues. Participants noted that faculty often replicate Western models without contextual adaptation, making their findings academically and practically insignificant.

“We are copying Western theories and models, often without questioning if they apply here. That’s not real research, it’s academic mimicry.” (Admin-3)

“If you ask how much of our research influences policy, the answer is almost none.” (Policy-5)

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This disconnect between research output and real-world impact further widens the gap between academia and society.

	Theme	Core Insight
Table 1 Summary Insights	Research as Career Progression	Faculty publish to fulfill promotion criteria, not to advance knowledge
	Quantity Over Quality	Institutional policies reward volume rather than relevance or impact
	Predatory Publishing Culture	Faculty rely on non-peer-reviewed journals due to ease and institutional neglect
	Systemic Barriers to Quality Research	Limited access, mentorship, and training obstruct high-quality output
	Disconnect from Societal Relevance	Research often lacks contextual value and fails to inform national development

Faculty vs. Administrators: While faculty expressed personal frustration, administrators admitted to systemic flaws but emphasized compliance with HEC mandates.

Public vs. Private Sector: Private institutions showed more flexibility in recognizing international journals, while public universities adhered rigidly to HEC's local journal list.

Policy Experts: Expressed concern over the politicization of journal listings and lack of research impact audits at the national level.

Research Question	Key Findings
What motivates faculty in Pakistan to engage in academic research?	Career survival, promotions, job eligibility
How do institutional recruitment and promotion policies influence research behaviors?	Favor volume; neglect depth, citations, and societal relevance
To what extent does academic research in Pakistan contribute to knowledge creation?	Minimal, due to replication, low citation, and lack of innovation
What are the structural and institutional barriers to impactful research?	Poor funding, limited access, lack of training, overburdened teaching schedules

Table 2
Alignment with
Research Questions

The findings from this study confirm the existence of a troubling paradox in Pakistan's academic research

environment. Research is institutionally valued as a metric for hiring and promotion but undervalued in terms of its epistemological and societal significance. Faculty are incentivized to meet publication quotas with little regard for impact or innovation. This leads to a cycle of superficial outputs, reputational challenges, and intellectual stagnation. Addressing this paradox requires systemic reforms in policy, funding, evaluation, and academic culture.

4. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 within the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It reflects on the paradox where academic research is heavily emphasized in faculty recruitment and promotion decisions in Pakistan, yet contributes marginally to the advancement of knowledge or societal development. It also presents practical and policy-oriented recommendations for academia, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), and government stakeholders to address this disconnect.

The data confirm that most academic staff in Pakistan view research as a professional obligation rather than an intellectual pursuit. The motivations are largely extrinsic, promotion, job retention, and institutional appraisal, rather than intrinsic, such as curiosity or problem-solving. This aligns with Ahmed and Ahmed's (2021) findings that Pakistani academics often engage in research for survival, not contribution.

This shift from inquiry-driven research to performance-driven publishing reflects a bureaucratization of scholarship (Shah, 2020), where publication is reduced to a quantifiable unit rather than a vehicle for innovation.

The overemphasis on publication counts, measured by HEC-approved journals, encourages faculty to pursue the easiest and fastest publication routes, regardless of research depth or relevance. Similar concerns were raised by Abbasi et al. (2019), who noted that research policies in Pakistan promote a mechanical culture of publishing, detached from originality or global standards.

This creates a perverse incentive structure, where faculty are rewarded not for the substance of their work, but merely for fulfilling numeric thresholds.

The normalization of publishing in predatory or non-peer-reviewed journals emerged as a serious concern. Faculty often resort to these journals due to the urgency of meeting institutional benchmarks. As Khan et al. (2020) argue, this phenomenon undermines academic integrity and contributes to the international marginalization of research from Pakistan.

The HEC's inconsistent enforcement and delayed response to predatory publishing have allowed these practices to persist, compromising the credibility of Pakistan's academic output.

The study highlights a lack of essential resources, such as database access, funding, and methodological training, as key barriers to producing high-impact research. Without the infrastructure to engage with global scholarship or conduct rigorous studies, faculty often resort to replicating existing models.

This is consistent with global literature on the challenges of academic underdevelopment in the Global South, where institutional fragility and policy inconsistency inhibit research excellence (Altbach & Salmi, 2016).

Participants expressed concern that much of the academic research in Pakistan is out of sync with national priorities or local societal challenges. This confirms Raza et al.'s (2021) argument that

Pakistani research often fails to engage with indigenous knowledge systems or provide solutions to localized problems, limiting its societal relevance.

This study contributes to academic institutional theory by revealing how institutionalized policies, though intended to promote academic excellence, may inadvertently stifle creativity and reduce research to a compliance activity. The findings also support performance paradox theory, wherein organizations overemphasize metrics (i.e., number of publications), but underachieve on core goals (i.e., knowledge advancement).

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Shift from publication count to multi-dimensional performance metrics, including: Citation indices

Journal impact factor

Research relevance to national goals Policy and industry engagement

Introduce research contribution statements during hiring to assess intellectual merit. Establish a transparent, real-time review mechanism for HEC journal recognition.

Blacklist and publicly disclose predatory journals with supporting evidence.

Promote international databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science) as acceptable publication venues. Increase research funding, especially for projects addressing national issues.

Provide institutional subscriptions to leading academic databases.

Establish grant-writing offices, methodology workshops, and research mentorship programs at universities.

Recognize faculty with impactful research through awards and reduced teaching loads.

Establish competitive research funds tied to innovation, social impact, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Promote university-industry linkages to ensure real-world relevance of research. Make research ethics and academic integrity training mandatory.

Encourage faculty and doctoral students to publish in indexed journals with rigorous peer review. Launch campaigns to raise awareness about predatory publishing and its consequences.

Table 3 Strategic Insights

	Stakeholder	Implications
Table 3 Strategic Insights	HEC	Needs to revise journal policies, introduce qualitative assessment standards
	Universities	Must build research cultures, invest in faculty training and infrastructure
	Faculty	Should align research with both institutional goals and societal impact
	Government	Should fund R&D and incentivize policy-relevant academic research

The paradox of academic research in Pakistan, being central to faculty recruitment yet peripheral to knowledge production, is deeply embedded in institutional practices, policy frameworks, and cultural norms. This chapter has discussed how structural incentives, performative expectations, and systemic gaps have contributed to the decline of meaningful academic inquiry. While reforms are underway, a paradigm shift is needed, one that values intellectual merit, research integrity, and national relevance over mere numerical compliance.

5. Conclusion

This final chapter presents a summary of the study's findings, revisits the research objectives, and outlines key conclusions drawn from the investigation. It reflects on the paradox embedded in Pakistan's academic ecosystem, where research is institutionally mandated for academic progression but contributes minimally to national or global knowledge creation. The chapter concludes with directions for future research and the limitations of the present study.

The primary aim of this study was to explore why academic research in Pakistan holds high significance in faculty recruitment and promotion while simultaneously remaining relatively insignificant in terms of knowledge generation and societal impact.

The research employed a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews with faculty members, academic administrators, and policy influencers from various Pakistani universities. The thematic analysis yielded five major insights:

Instrumentalization of Research – Faculty members perceive research as a tool for career advancement rather than intellectual contribution.

Publication-Oriented Evaluation – Academic evaluations focus more on the number of publications than on their quality, relevance, or impact.

Proliferation of Predatory Publishing – The pressure to publish fuels unethical publishing practices.

Systemic and Structural Limitations – Lack of funding, mentorship, databases, and institutional support hinders meaningful research.

Disconnect from Local Realities – Much of the research fails to address pressing national problems or reflect the Pakistani context.

The findings of this study underscore a profound paradox: while research is a mandatory component of academic employment and institutional rankings in Pakistan, it lacks the transformative potential it is intended to serve. This is primarily due to systemic deficiencies, flawed evaluation metrics, and a bureaucratized understanding of scholarly work.

The study concludes that the current academic research culture in Pakistan is compliance-driven rather than curiosity-driven, metric-focused rather than mission-focused, and institutionally encouraged but structurally unsupported.

To resolve this paradox, a holistic transformation is required, one that redefines the purpose of research within academia, recalibrates faculty evaluation systems, and nurtures a research culture centered on relevance, innovation, and societal contribution.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on academic development in emerging economies by:

Shedding light on how institutionalized incentives shape research behavior in Pakistani universities.

Providing a qualitative lens to understand the motivations, challenges, and perceptions of faculty towards research.

Offering policy-level insights for improving academic standards, evaluation methods, and research quality in developing contexts.

While the study provides valuable insights, it also has a few limitations:

Sample Scope: The study primarily involved participants from public sector universities, limiting generalizability to private institutions.

Regional Representation: Most participants were drawn from urban centers; rural academic perspectives may differ.

Scope of Analysis: The study focused on faculty and academic leaders but excluded detailed input from policymakers and funding agencies.

Several areas emerge as worthy of future exploration:

Quantitative Validation: Future studies could develop and apply survey instruments across a larger sample to validate the themes identified here.

Comparative Studies: Comparing academic research cultures in Pakistan with those in other developing or neighboring countries (e.g., India, Bangladesh) may offer broader regional insights.

Sector-Based Analysis: Research could analyze the paradox across disciplines (e.g., natural sciences vs. social sciences) to determine domain-specific challenges.

Policy Impact Evaluation: Studies evaluating the effectiveness of HEC policies and reforms over time could inform better implementation strategies.

Student Perspective: Investigating how postgraduate students perceive academic research can help identify generational shifts and expectations.

The academic research paradox in Pakistan is not merely a policy flaw, it reflects deeper issues of academic culture,

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institutional inertia, and misaligned incentives. To become a globally recognized contributor to knowledge, Pakistan must move beyond tokenism in academic publishing. By reforming research evaluation frameworks, investing in academic infrastructure, and aligning research goals with national priorities, Pakistan's higher education sector can transform its research environment into one that is both productive and purposeful.

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Concept Design, Data Collection and Drafting: Dr. Meer Bilawal

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Furthermore, this research did not involve the use of animals, plants, or any biological specimens requiring ethical approval. Therefore, ethical clearance from an institutional review board, prior informed consent (PIC) from respondents, or animal/plant welfare approvals are not applicable to this study.

The author(s) affirm full compliance with international ethical standards for research and publication.

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