

## Gendered Perspectives on Higher Education: Analyzing Student Attitudes in Contemporary Academic Contexts

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study investigates undergraduate students' attitudes toward higher education in universities of Sindh, Pakistan, with a focus on gender differences. Positive attitudes toward higher education are known to enhance academic engagement, retention, and career readiness, yet limited research has examined this construct in the local context.

**Methodology:** A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving a sample of 175 undergraduate students (88 males, 87 females). Data were collected using a standardized attitude scale and analyzed through descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test.

**Findings:** Results indicated that male students ( $M = 72.2$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) exhibited significantly more positive attitudes toward higher education compared to female students ( $M = 65.8$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ),  $t(4.23)$ ,  $p < .001$ . Overall, students demonstrated favorable perceptions regarding the value and relevance of higher education.

**Conclusion:** The findings highlight a significant gender-based disparity in attitudes toward higher education, with male students demonstrating more positive perceptions than females. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions to address female students' concerns and promote equitable engagement in higher education.

**Keywords:** attitudes toward higher education, gender differences, undergraduate students

## Introduction

Education plays an important role in the development and progress of any country, and higher education completely changes the socio-economic condition of the public. Condition of education, specifically of higher education in Pakistan is miserable. As per Economic survey of Pakistan 2023-2024 the percentage of higher education of Pakistan is merely 9 which is very low as compared to our regional countries.

Though, Pakistan has almost 250 universities but there is a dearth of quality education in these institutions. To ascertain the reason behind this pathetic condition of higher education. There is a need to observe students' attitude towards higher education. In Pakistan more than 30 percent students could be enrolled in the institutions of higher education. But the actual enrolment ratio is country to this fact. As portion of students is of opinion that our institutions are just giving a piece of paper in the name of degree. Students don't develop skill sets and professional expertise required in the job market.

In recent decades, students' attitudes toward higher education have been recognized as a pivotal driver of academic success and institutional effectiveness. Positive perceptions of university as a site of personal development, career preparation, and social connection correlate strongly with increased engagement, retention, and long-term achievement (Tahir & Fatima, 2023). Yet, despite its importance, the evolving landscape of higher education including digital transformation, economic shifts, and social dynamics necessitates renewed scholarly attention to how students today perceive, value, and emotionally connect with institutions of higher learning.

Several studies suggest that male students, in certain academic contexts, exhibit more favorable attitudes toward higher education than female students. Research in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries has indicated that male students often perceive higher education as more directly linked to career advancement and social mobility, which can strengthen their academic motivation and institutional engagement (Khalid & Ahmed, 2022; Ali et al., 2021). In patriarchal societies, males may also experience fewer social or cultural constraints regarding field selection, geographical mobility, or academic autonomy factors that can contribute to a more optimistic outlook toward university education (Mahmood et al., 2023).

Additionally, male students frequently report higher levels of self-efficacy, a more robust academic identity, and more positive opinions regarding the curriculum's relevance in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering, the physical sciences, and particular business domains (Okeke, 2021; Raza & Khan, 2022). Overall academic involvement and happiness may be improved by the relationship between personal identity and the school's culture. According to studies done in Pakistan and the Gulf, male students tend to associate higher education with social standing, leadership positions, and financial independence, which leads to a more positive attitude toward obtaining advanced degrees (Yousaf & Anwar, 2023; Al-Qahtani, 2022).

## Literature Review

Students' opinions about higher education are now a significant determinant of academic success, retention rates, and the general efficacy of institutions. In a variety of educational situations, motivation, engagement, and perseverance are strongly

associated with positive perceptions of the academic environment, job preparedness, and personal growth (Akpan, 2022; Wilson, 2022; Jones & Johnson, 2023). These viewpoints influence post-graduation outcomes including community involvement and job preparation in addition to academic achievement (Liu et al., 2023). Higher education research has repeatedly demonstrated that students who have a stronger sense of belonging and confidence in the caliber of their school are more likely to remain enrolled and perform better than those who have neutral or unfavorable opinions (Rahman., 2023; Smith & Taylor, 2022).

It has been shown that delivery strategies and teaching techniques have a big impact on these attitudes. Perceptions have subtly changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic-induced transition to hybrid and totally online schooling. Research shows that students' academic self-concept and level of satisfaction can be significantly enhanced by interactive and well-structured online platforms (Khan & Ahmad, 2023). Conversely, inefficient remote learning has been associated with lower levels of engagement and a decline in confidence in the value of higher education (Brown & Lee, 2022; Novak, 2023). According to experts, whether technology mediated learning improves or worsens student attitudes depends on several critical elements, including the efficiency of instructional design, faculty response, and peer collaboration available (Morris et al., 2022).

Gender variations in attitudes toward higher education are well documented, particularly in competitive academic areas and STEM-related fields. According to research, compared to female students, male students typically exhibit higher levels of confidence in their academic abilities, see greater value in their degree programs, and indicate a stronger connection between their studies and future career goals (Millington & Huber, 2022; Bakar & Hassan, 2023). The observed discrepancies can be explained by a combination of sociocultural norms, gender-influenced self-efficacy beliefs, and variations in the institutional support available to different groups (Rahim & Perveen, 2022; Malik & Zahra, 2023). Even though female students frequently demonstrate remarkable academic performance, research suggests that contextual elements such as work-life balance, social expectations, and a lack of representation in leadership roles within academic institutions can affect how they view higher education (Khalid & Fatima, 2024).

Complex sociocultural and economic factors that represent gendered viewpoints impact attitudes toward higher education in Pakistan. Systemic obstacles such mobility restrictions, safety worries, and strict family expectations are common for female students and can negatively impact their perceptions of higher education (Shaukat & Pell, 2023; Anwar et al., 2024). Male students, on the other hand, typically report higher levels of happiness and involvement due to greater networking opportunities, less mobility restrictions, and greater familial support (Ali, Saleem, & Ahmad, 2024; Hussain & Jabeen, 2023). Male students in Pakistani universities have more positive attitudes toward higher education, according to several studies, especially when it comes to perceived institutional prestige, confidence in their preparedness for the job market, and willingness to devote more years to advanced study (Rashid & Imran, 2023; Aslam, 2024).

The understanding of these patterns has been greatly improved by recent methodological developments. It has been shown that combining validated

quantitative instruments, such as Likert-scale attitude inventories, with in-depth qualitative interviews can effectively uncover the complex ways that academic discipline, gender, and socioeconomic background interact to shape students' perceptions (Memon & Shah, 2023). Research employing these approaches shows that targeted programs such as career counseling, mentorship for underrepresented groups, and faculty-led engagement initiatives can significantly improve students' perceptions, particularly for those who initially exhibit lower levels of academic self-efficacy or institutional confidence (Yusof et al., 2022; Farooq & Siddiqui, 2023).

### Statement of the problem

Students' attitudes toward higher education have a significant impact on their academic achievement, degree of participation in class, and desired career routes. There are still gender-based disparities in attitudes in many situations, with male students often having more favorable opinions about improved job prospects, less sociocultural limitations, and a better fit between academic programs and individual objectives. However, female students may face barriers to participation, including mobility restrictions, social pressures, and a perceived disconnect between higher education and employment opportunities. In Pakistan's fast changing higher education landscape, which is impacted by digital transformation, more access, and changing job market needs, it is important to recognize these disparities in attitudes in order to promote fairness and improve the performance of institutions. Yet, there is limited empirical research that systematically compares male and female students' perspectives in this context. This study addresses this gap by examining gender-based attitudes toward higher education in Universities of Sindh Province, providing evidence to guide policy and practice in fostering inclusive academic environments.

### Research Objectives

To assess the overall attitudes of university students toward higher education.

To compare the attitudes of male and female students towards higher education.

### Research Hypotheses

University students generally hold positive attitudes toward higher education

There is a significant difference between male and female students' attitudes toward higher education

### Research Design

This study will use a **quantitative, cross-sectional survey design** to assess and compare attitudes of male and female university students toward higher education at a single point in time. The design is appropriate because it allows measurement of attitudinal constructs across a large sample and enables hypothesis testing (gender differences and predictive effects of gender on attitude).

### Population of the study

The target population consisted of approximately 270 undergraduate students from different universities of Sindh Province. This data was obtained from the university's Admission Office.

## Sample Size

Sample size for the current study is  $n = 175$ . It is statistically appropriate sample for  $N = 270$  at 95% CI and  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error.

**Table 1**

Sample Distribution by Gender

| Gender       | Population (N) | Sample (n) | Percentage of Sample (%) |
|--------------|----------------|------------|--------------------------|
| Male         | 135            | 88         | 50.29                    |
| Female       | 135            | 87         | 49.71                    |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>270</b>     | <b>175</b> | <b>100.00</b>            |

## Sampling Technique

To ensure representativeness and to allow direct comparison between genders, this study used proportionate stratified random sampling

## Rationale:

Stratified sampling ensures adequate female and male representation (avoids gender imbalance) and increases precision of estimates for subgroup comparisons.

## Data Collection Tools

Attitude scale of Gelisli & Kazykhankyzy (2021) based on Five-point Likert scale was used as a tool to measure attitude of undergraduate students. Joshi, Kale, Chandel, and Pal (2015) suggest that the five-point Likert scale is straightforward and easy to understand, helping to minimize respondent confusion and promote more consistent answers. This scale achieves a good balance by providing sufficient options for subtlety without overwhelming respondents, as larger scales may reduce response accuracy due to decision fatigue. It is often a good balance between obtaining enough points of discrimination without having to maintain too many coping options.

## Results

| S #                               | Items                                                                      | SD<br>1 | D<br>2 | N<br>3 | A<br>4 | SA<br>5 | Mean |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------|
| <b>University and Development</b> |                                                                            |         |        |        |        |         |      |
| 1.                                | Attending different activities with my teachers makes me happy.            | 8.2%    | 2.70%  | 6.4%   | 53.6%  | 29.1%   | 4.1  |
| 2.                                | I am happy to attend cultural activities at university.                    | 14.5%   | 4.5%   | 11.8%  | 50%    | 19.1%   | 5    |
| 3.                                | What is taught at the university is essential for my personal development. | 7.5%    | 3.7%   | 15%    | 58.9%  | 14%     | 4.1  |

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|                                            |                                                                                   |       |       |       |       |       |      |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 4.                                         | I have good relations with my teachers at the university                          | 9.2%  | 1.8%  | 7.3%  | 49.5% | 32.1% | 1    |
| 5.                                         | I think the role of the university is important for realizing my goals.           | 8.3%  | 2.8%  | 8.3%  | 51.9% | 28.7% | 4.1  |
| 6.                                         | University Education is very important for my future.                             | 10.1% | 3.7%  | 7.3%  | 30.3% | 48.6% | 1    |
| 7.                                         | I think that the university will not contribute to the realization of my goals.   | 11.2% | 38.3% | 15.9% | 30.8% | 3.7%  | 3.1  |
| 8.                                         | I believe that university is necessary for my professional development            | 6.5%  | 0.9%  | 13%   | 53.7% | 25.9% | 4.1  |
| <b>Emotions associated with university</b> |                                                                                   |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 9.                                         | I am happy to go to university.                                                   | 10.2% | 0.9%  | 15.7% | 39.8% | 33.3% | 3.9  |
| 10.                                        | University is an annoying place for me.                                           | 12.4% | 23.8% | 21%   | 31.4% | 11.4% | 3.25 |
| 11.                                        | I would not want to go to university if it was not required me to attend lessons. | 11.2% | 27.1% | 16.8% | 35.5% | 9.3%  | 3.34 |
| 12.                                        | Lessons are very boring to me.                                                    | 15%   | 43%   | 22.4% | 16.8% | 2.8%  | 2.6  |
| 13.                                        | I don't want to get up early in the morning and go to university.                 | 22.6% | 40.6% | 11.3% | 20.8% | 4.7%  | 2.6  |
| 14.                                        | Being at the university annoys me                                                 | 13.2% | 22.6% | 27.4% | 34.9% | 1.9%  | 3    |
| 15.                                        | I find it unnecessary to go to university.                                        | 16.2% | 28.6% | 19%   | 31.4% | 4.8%  | 3.08 |
| <b>Love of university</b>                  |                                                                                   |       |       |       |       |       |      |
| 16.                                        | I feel myself valuable at the university                                          | 5.6%  | 6.5%  | 14%   | 53.3% | 20.6% | 4.09 |
| 17.                                        | I think that my university teachers make sacrifices for us.                       | 3.8%  | 8.5%  | 17%   | 50%   | 20.8% | 4.02 |
| 18.                                        | My teachers are like my family at university                                      | 5.7%  | 5.7%  | 13.2% | 50%   | 25.5% | 4.02 |
| 19.                                        | I see university as a place of protection                                         | 6.6%  | 6.6%  | 17.9% | 40.6% | 28.3% | 3.8  |

**Table 2**

*Gender-based differences in students' Attitudes towards Higher Education*

| Gender | Male | Female |
|--------|------|--------|
| Mean   | 72.2 | 65.8   |

**Table 3**

*Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Attitudes Toward Higher Education*

| Gender | n  | M    | SD   | t    | df     | P     |
|--------|----|------|------|------|--------|-------|
| Male   | 88 | 72.2 | 0.38 | 4.28 | 153.95 | <.001 |
| Female | 87 | 65.8 | 0.29 |      |        |       |

An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in attitudes toward higher education between male students ( $M = 72.2$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) and female students ( $M = 65.8$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ),  $t (4.28)$ ,  $p < .001$ , with male students reporting more positive attitudes.

## Discussion

The findings provide a comprehensive view of students' perceptions toward their university experience, highlighting strong appreciation for the institution's role in personal and professional growth, while also pointing to emotional and pedagogical areas needing improvement.

## University and Personal Development

The data reveal a clear consensus on the positive developmental impact of university education. For instance, 53.6% strongly agreed and 29.1% agreed that "*Attending different activities with my teachers makes me happy*" ( $M = 4.1$ ), emphasizing the value of co-curricular engagement in strengthening student–teacher rapport. Similarly, in "*What is taught at the university is essential for my personal development*", 58.9% strongly agreed and 14% agreed, underscoring alignment between academic content and personal growth (Akpan et al., 2022; Hanapi et al., 2023).

The belief that higher education is central to future success is reflected in "*University education is very important for my future*", where 48.6% strongly agreed and 30.3% agreed ( $M = 5.0$ ). Furthermore, positive faculty relations are evident from "*I have good relations with my teachers*", with 49.5% strongly agreeing and 32.1% agreeing. These findings support literature showing that strong student–faculty relationships contribute to motivation and persistence (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Wilson et al., 2022). However, a minority expressed skepticism, as shown in "*The university will not contribute to the realization of my goals*", where 38.3% disagreed and 11.2% strongly disagreed, yet 15.9% agreed and 3.7% strongly agreed ( $M = 3.1$ ). This suggests a small group may perceive a misalignment between university offerings and their career ambitions, highlighting the need for personalized career counseling (Nghia, 2021).

Emotional Associations with University

Emotional attitudes toward university life showed mixed results. While *“I am happy to go to university”* received 33.3% strong agreement and 39.8% agreement ( $M = 3.9$ ), a substantial share of students also expressed disengagement in learning activities. In *“Lessons are very boring to me”*, 43% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed, yet 22.4% were neutral, and 16.8% agreed, indicating that although most students reject the notion of boring lessons, a notable portion still finds classes unengaging. This supports prior findings that lecture-heavy teaching formats can reduce enthusiasm (Koris et al., 2021; Kuh et al., 2020).

Negative emotions toward campus life also emerged: *“University is an annoying place for me”* saw 23.8% disagreement and 12.4% strong disagreement, but 31.4% agreed and 11.4% strongly agreed ( $M = 3.25$ ), suggesting that roughly two in five students experience annoyance. Similarly, *“I don’t want to get up early in the morning and go to university”* had 40.6% disagreement but also 20.8% agreement and 4.7% strong agreement ( $M = 2.6$ ), indicating scheduling as a potential source of dissatisfaction. Such sentiments are consistent with research showing that workload pressures and rigid timetables can undermine engagement (El-Sayad et al., 2021; Perera & DiGiacomo, 2023).

### Love of University and Sense of Belonging

Responses in this category were overwhelmingly positive, reflecting strong institutional attachment. For example, in *“I feel myself valuable at the university”*, 53.3% agreed and 20.6% strongly agreed ( $M = 4.09$ ), while *“My teachers are like my family”* recorded 50% agreement and 25.5% strong agreement ( $M = 4.02$ ). This is consistent with the study of Osterman (2021) who found students wellbeing and persistence to be a crucial component. Similarly, 40.6% of respondents agreed with the statement, “I see the university as a place of protection,” and 28.3% strongly agreed ( $M = 3.8$ ), indicating that students consider their school as more than simply a place to learn; they also see it as a safe and supportive place. Improved mental health outcomes are linked to these protective views (Baik, 2021; Wilson, 2022). Students recognize and value the commitment of faculty, which strengthens the sense of loyalty and respect between students and teachers, as evidenced by the noteworthy consensus on the statement, “I think that my university teachers make sacrifices for us” (50% agreement and 20.8% strong agreement,  $M = 4.02$ ).

A t-test was also used to look at the connection between male and female students. The results from the independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant disparity in views toward higher education between male and female students,  $t(4.28)$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, male students ( $M = 72.2$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ) demonstrated more positive attitudes about higher education compared to female students ( $M = 65.8$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ). This conclusion supports  $H_2$ , which posited that gender would significantly influence students' assessments of the value and usefulness of higher education.

The results are aligned with other research that emphasized variations in educational views and motivations according to gender (Akpan, 2022; Wilson, 2022; Rahman & Ahmed, 2023). Many studies show that male students may see higher education as an easier way to move up in their careers, while female students may encounter structural and cultural barriers that affect how they see things in different ways (Hussain, 2021; Khan & Raza, 2023). The average difference seen in this survey (6.4 points) indicates

a substantial divergence in opinions, which may impact on institutional policy and support structures. Universities must implement gender-responsive methods that address the unique obstacles faced by female students. This includes the creation of academic mentorship initiatives, the facilitation of networking opportunities, and the provision of specialized career counsel.

## Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives of undergraduate students regarding higher education in the universities of Sindh province, emphasizing gender disparities. The results indicated that students have a positive view of higher education; however, gender disparity is present, with male students have more favorable attitudes compared to female students. This reinforces the idea that gender plays a role in shaping how individuals perceive the importance and significance of higher education.

## Recommendations

Higher education institutions of Sindh province should create mentorship programs that enable accomplished female alumni to share their experiences, thereby inspiring and motivating current female students. Faculty ought to implement inclusive teaching strategies that promote active engagement and foster a supportive educational environment for all genders. Organize seminars and workshops to emphasize the importance, significance, and professional advantages of higher education, aimed at both students and their families.

## Limitations

The current research focused exclusively on undergraduate students from universities in Sindh, Pakistan, hence limiting the generalizability of the results to other regions or countries. The study focused on gender disparities, neglecting other demographic or contextual variables such as socioeconomic status, academic discipline, or parental education.

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