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### **Post 9/11 higher-education reforms and the instruction of International Relations in Pakistan**

Although Pakistan's higher-education sector has seen seismic reforms since 9/11, little is known about their impact on day-to-day instruction at Pakistani universities. Learning from the author's fieldwork at three institutions, the article examines a range of data gathered through survey questionnaires, faculty and student focus-groups and semi-structured interviews to assess the impact of these reforms on International Relations teaching in the country. The findings of the study contend that a) faculty who recently returned to Pakistan after receiving higher degrees abroad have been introducing a culture of innovation at Pakistani universities but the changes they are introducing are often too abrupt; b) students express clear preference for their instruction to be in English; c) they have limited appetite for their instruction to be in their mother tongues; d) the staff and students at one of the military institutions examined displayed a moderate, often liberal view; e) the universities were still lagging behind in catering to the learning needs of a diverse student body that shares multiple backgrounds, languages and cultures.

Keywords: inter-cultural learning; Western-centric curriculum; learning methods; language of instruction

#### **Introduction**

Pakistan's higher-education sector received much international attention at the onset of the war on terrorism in 2001. It was commonly asserted that any international military effort to rid the country of terrorism must be accompanied by a strategy to address its root causes, linked with poverty and poor educational standards. In 2002, the federal government of Pakistan started major reforms to liberalise the higher education sector, which were funded by the international community, especially the United States. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) worked closely with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan – a federal government body in charge of

Pakistan's higher-education sector – from 2002 onward to reform the sector (USAID 2008; USGAO 2011). A large number of new universities were established and a host of higher-education colleges, affiliated with the major universities, were upgraded to the status of degree-awarding universities. Pakistan had a total of 48 universities before 2002. The reforms led to the number of independent universities rising to 130 by the end of 2007 (Musharraf 2009). The number of students enrolled in the higher-education sector went up by 89 percent between 2001 and 2009 (Hayward 2009). The share of the higher-education budget was substantially increased each year: in 2006-07 alone, the budget for higher education jumped from 500 million to 14 billion Pakistani rupees (Musharraf 2009). The HEC's funds also increased significantly each year. For example, its budget 'increased 340 percent in real terms from 2001 to 2005/06' (Hayward 2009). Some of the other reforms included the introduction of a new tenure-track compensation scheme, better equipment in laboratories, 'alignment of academic degrees with international norms' and curriculum revision (The World Bank nd, 1).

As part of these reforms, a large number of Pakistani students and faculty were awarded scholarships to access higher education within and outside the country. Pakistani scholars quickly became the recipients of the largest US-government-funded Fulbright programme in the world. Between 2009 and 2015, the programme funded 800 masters degrees, 200 PhDs and nearly 100 senior scholars from Pakistan to study in the United States alone (White House 2015). The US particularly encouraged Pakistani higher-education institutions to adopt English as the language of instruction (USAID 2008, 118).

Though a very limited number of policy evaluations of these seismic reforms have been conducted (USAID 2008), no scholarly studies have been carried out so far to understand their impact on day-to-day teaching and learning at Pakistani universities. This research bridges that gap by examining the instruction of International Relations (IR) teaching at three Pakistani universities with the objective of learning about the impact of those reforms. It asks: what impact have the recent higher-

education reforms in Pakistan had on the instruction of IR at these three universities? The paper makes contributions in five key areas. First, it examines the impact of foreign-educated faculty on the higher-education landscape of Pakistan, particularly in the discipline of IR. Major investment and attention has gone into developing the faculty at universities across the country. However, as yet no academic research has studied the expected impact of that effort.

Second, this research assesses the impact and implications of the expanding use of English as a medium of instruction at Pakistani universities. Where there has been some focus on the language of instruction at seminary and school level (with the question being whether it should be Urdu, English or pupils' mother tongues), there exists no scholarly research on the impact and implications of adopting English as a medium of instruction at the higher-education level.

Third, it studies the dynamics of IR instruction at one of the elite, military-controlled universities in the country in the context of these reforms. Pakistan's higher-education sector consists of a variety of institutions, including religious seminaries (some of which grant educational qualifications equivalent to a master's degree at a regular university), private universities, public-sector universities and military institutions. Where some research has been conducted on understanding the education system at seminaries in the context of the war on terrorism (Khokhar 2007), there exists limited research on studying the instruction of particular programmes at public-sector universities with reference to the reforms. Research on the military-controlled institutions, which are quite a few in number, is non-existent.

Fourth, this study assesses the extent to which the contemporary instruction of IR, with the efforts that have gone in reforming the higher-education landscape in Pakistan, is getting better at catering to the needs of a diverse student body at Pakistani universities. These students hail from multiple backgrounds, social castes and tribes speaking dozens of different languages, and have uniquely different learning needs. An efficient instruction of IR would require a teacher to adopt a variety of

learning methods in accordance with this diversity. This article will study whether that has been happening since the reforms.

It has been fifteen years since the onset of the reforms and we believe that the time period is sufficiently long for us to examine their initial impact. The objective thus is to not only study the contemporary dynamics of IR instruction in Pakistan, it is also to learn lessons vis-à-vis similar countries in the future. Apart from shining light on Pakistan's higher education system in general, the research also makes a substantial contribution in the field of pedagogical analysis, in particular where it concerns learning and teaching of IR. It presents unique insights into the education sector of a very critical region of the world that does not enjoy much global attention.

Examining a variety of data, collected through faculty focus groups, student focus groups, faculty interviews and classroom surveys, the research puts forward five key findings. First, where foreign-educated faculty teaching IR is reshaping the research and pedagogical culture by encouraging critical enquiry, it nevertheless faces significant resistance in the classroom from students raised according to the norms of a conformist culture. Second, students appear quite keen for their IR instruction to be in English despite the serious difficulties some might face with the language. The study also found that the level of support for English varied depending on students' social backgrounds. Third, there remains little interest among students for the teaching of IR to be conducted in their mother tongues. Any discussion over changing the language of instruction is seen to be divisive. Fourth, although the state's powerful military has often been assumed to possess a conservative and nationalist outlook (Chalmers 2011), staff and students at the military institution surveyed here displayed a moderate and liberal worldview, at least as concerns the learning and teaching of IR. Fifth, and finally, though the teaching of IR has seen significant changes in the last fifteen years, the study found that the universities were still lagging behind in catering to the learning needs of a diverse student body that shares multiple backgrounds, languages and cultures.

This paper is structured in the following way: the section below sketches a brief literature review of the scholarly work on Pakistan's contemporary higher-education sector. It provides further details of the gaps in the literature this paper has bridged. The third section is dedicated to outlining the research design with a focus on the theoretical framework and an examination of various sources of data collection. That section also critically reflects on the modes of the data collection and case selection. The fourth section highlights and analyses the key findings of the research. The fifth section discusses the repercussions and implications of these findings in detail. The conclusion summarises the contribution of this article along with briefly highlighting policy implications of the study. One of the key contributions of this study is that it helps us understand the impact of international intervention on a developing country's educational system. That is particularly pertinent given the context of the ongoing campaign against terrorism. On the whole, this study has intended to make a contribution in a very under-studied area; it is hoped that its findings will spark a discussion on the topics examined here.

### **Research focus**

This section conducts a brief review of the literature on the contemporary dynamics of Pakistan's higher-education sector. As this research examines the impact of the post-9/11 higher-education reform on the instruction of International Relations in Pakistani universities, it would be pertinent to sketch a brief picture of the way higher education was delivered before these reforms were initiated.

Authors studying the Pakistan's higher education system in the 1990s and before were quite critical of the way the sector operated. It was noted that the country's higher education suffered because it had 'poor universities; incompetent faculty; sub-standard teaching and very little original research' with the consequences that the system seemed more targeted at 'a closing of the mind' than opening it to critical enquiry (Rahman 1998, 678). Rahman (1998) also raised concerns in the late 1990s concerning the lack of quality faculty teaching in Pakistani universities. He wrote at that time:

Pakistani universities are staffed by people who are not among the best and the brightest to begin with. A number of high achievers among students, especially middle class ones, are still attracted to the civil service because it gives one the power to manipulate the system for personal gains.... As for upper class students, or those who are lucky enough to get scholarships, they go to study abroad and generally settle down there because the affluent lifestyles they are used to cannot be supported by the salaries the universities offer (Rahman 1998, 675).

Ziring (1978, 324) also noted that Pakistani higher-education policy was more geared towards ensuring that successive governments retained significant control over the education sector instead of priming it for 'a renaissance'. In the absence of any freedoms, the universities in Pakistan could not deliver an education system that might enable the students to overcome regional, provincial and ethnic divides and think of themselves as part of 'a single coherent nation' (Ziring 1978, 324). This background is useful in helping us understand the status of the higher education sector before the reforms. The current study will provide a critical insight into how the contemporary higher education system differs from the way it operated prior to 2002.

A key area the paper contributes is the issue of faculty development in the country. Generally speaking, there exist few academic studies on that subject. Mansoor (2010) has shed some useful light on faculty development in the context of Pakistan's higher education system. Commenting in a leading Pakistani newspaper, she has written about the scholars who went to study abroad from Pakistan on scholarships administered through the HEC. The author asserts that the HEC's focus on supporting students to study abroad resulted in the organisation neglecting professional development initiatives targeting the other faculty who could not obtain the funding to study abroad. She has further highlighted that the HEC policies were considered to be less favourable towards the faculty enrolled for their PhDs within Pakistan (Mansoor 2010). Nasreen and Mirza (2012) have also looked at faculty training and development at public sector universities in the Punjab province. Their focus was on identifying the training and development needs with a view to providing policy suggestions for further improvement of the practice (Nasreen and Mirza 2012, 231).

Though these studies make a valuable contribution in the field of higher-education policy, they do not provide insights into the larger impact the faculty returning from overseas is making on daily instruction in Pakistani classrooms. This article bridges that gap.

Azhar et. al. (2015) study the job-satisfaction levels among faculty members at Pakistani universities. Rathore et al. (2015) look at the challenge of plagiarism to ask how prepared these instructors are to deal with the problem. Bhatti (2010) has looked at internet use among faculty members at a university in the Punjab province in the context of the changing higher-education environment. Though useful, none of these studies concerning Pakistani university faculty looks at the impact of the recently foreign-educated faculty on day-to-day teaching in the classroom – a gap addressed by this research.

The medium of instruction has attracted limited attention too, most of which has focused on primary and secondary levels. Pakistan's national language, and its lingua franca, is Urdu – which is widely understood, but only spoken by 8% of the country's population (CIA 2016). The rest of the population speaks a variety of regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi and Pashto. English is the language of instruction at every institution of higher education. There have been some studies looking at the relevance of English as a medium of instruction for primary and secondary education (see for example Manan et al. 2016; Tamim 2013; Rehman 2005). However, not much research exists in the field of higher education. The studies looking at the higher-education level have mostly focused on learning of English as a language and not on assessing the impact of its adoption as a medium of instruction in certain disciplines. For example, Javed et al. (2013) and Ali et al. (2015) have examined Pakistani university students' anxiety regarding the learning and use of the English language. Farooq et al. (2012) have assessed the efficacy of English-language teacher education in the context of distance education.

There has been some discussion of English in the context of designing curriculum of the English-language courses, such as Zafar (2011), but that also remains limited to English-language learning



and does not focus on studying the design and delivery of social sciences curriculum in English. Canagarajah and Ashraf (2013) have looked at the issue of delivering education in pupils' mother tongues at the school level. They argue that both India and Pakistan have attempted to deliver instruction to their school pupils in regional, national and English languages. That has caused a drain on resources and has generated tensions among the supporters of certain languages. They ask to equip pupils with languages for different competencies and social domains instead of ensuring that every pupil is taught in up to three languages at a time. In brief, the literature concerning the languages of instruction is mostly focused on the narrow field of language learning. It does not look at what the country's university students think of the use of English as a medium of instruction in social sciences – a gap that this paper addresses.

There is also very limited literature concerning instruction at the institutions controlled by the Pakistani military. The country's powerful military, which ran it for nearly half of its existence, is involved in several lucrative business and commercial ventures, ranging from property development to the manufacture of cement (Siddiqi 2007). It has either direct or indirect control of a number of schools, cadet colleges and universities in the country (Rehman 2001, 244-6). Some of the prestigious schools influenced by the armed forces include Army Public Schools in Sargodha and Lower Topa, Lawrence College Ghora Gali and Military College Jhelum (Rehman 2001, 244). Rehman (2001 and 2005) has studied how the schools and colleges under the control of the armed forces deliver a Westernised and sophisticated education that ensures that 'the world view of the officers corps of the future as well as other upper class functionaries would be under the influence of the state and, more specifically, of the military' (Rehman 2001, 244). Though significant, that research says very little about the learning and teaching at the military-controlled universities – another gap this study will fill.

Pakistan's student body is very diverse. The country's population consists of numerous discrete ethnic and linguistic groups (Baxter 2004). This diversity among the student body is more widely

acknowledged at the school level than at the higher-education level (the observations concerning the school-level education are critical because that level of instruction sets the stage for their higher education). For example, Rehman (2001) outlines how Pakistan's elitist English-medium schools have a different curriculum from that of non-elitist English-medium schools as well as vernacular-medium schools. The first category of schools has books that are 'originally written for Western school children... [and] these texts socialise a child into English-speaking Western culture' (Rehman 2001, 250-1). Pupils in these schools read about

such classics as *Lorna Doone*, *Little Women*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and famous figures like Florence Nightingale and so on. The world portrayed here is Western, middle class and successful... The overwhelming message of the texts is liberal and secular. Concepts like the segregation or veiling of women, ubiquitous religiosity, sectarianism and ethnicity get no support (Rehman 2001, 251).

In another insightful study, Ullah and Ali (2013) analyse how school text books in Pakistan's elitist and regular schools perpetuate class hierarchies and favour the status quo. On the other hand, the curriculum at state schools, where most Pakistanis would enrol, strives to create 'an apolitical mindset among the working class children' (Ullah and Ali 2013, 58). They assert that an elite, private-school curriculum portrays a favourable picture of the Western education system, encouraging elite pupils to seek out opportunities in the West (Ullah and Ali 2013, 58). Interestingly, little is known about the reverse story: what happens when some of these individuals return home and work at local universities? That story will be told here.

Studying issues from the perspective of gender, Ullah and Skelton (2013, 190), assert that Pakistani school textbooks for Urdu, English and Social Studies 'continue to be located in traditional discourses' with men and women represented in traditional gender roles. The authors argue that these textbooks represent men and women in traditional gender roles perpetuating dominant masculinity and presenting few challenges to traditional production of gender (Ullah and Skelton 2013, 190).

Very limited attention has been paid to studying the diverse learning needs of Pakistani university students. Rizwan et al. (2012) have examined the stress levels among female Pakistani engineering students, addressing the issue of gender disparities at the country's universities. They assert that the discouraging attitudes of families and teachers contribute to increased stress levels among such students. That is compounded by the fact that engineering degrees require students to conduct industrial visits and engage in out-of-class activities as opposed a typical social science degree that may be entirely assessed on the basis of in-class tests. In a country like Pakistan, it is harder for female engineering students to undertake these out-of-class activities – another reason for the increased stress levels among these students.

In another study, this time looking specifically at the urban-rural divide, Rizwan et al. (2013) examine the stress faced by engineering students from Pakistan's remote areas. They assert that a poor command of English, lack of knowledge of the higher-education system and lack of personal confidence are among the contributory factors to the stress faced by such students (Rizwan et al. 2013, 930). Javed (2011) has also asserted that access and gender disparity is worse among students from rural backgrounds but the levels of learning show a slightly better picture in some cases. Though significant, these studies do not look at the way university students from different backgrounds regard certain topics being taught in their courses. In particular, no studies exist on how IR students regard an increasingly Western-centric curriculum being taught at their universities. This paper addresses that gap.

## **Research design**

### *Research problem and questions*

This research has studied the contemporary dynamics of IR instruction at three Pakistani universities in multiple phases. The initial phase identified the research problems, which centred on the lack of awareness about how the recent reforms in Pakistan's higher-education sector have impacted the instruction of IR there. The first area of investigation identified for further exploration related to the

instructor and faculty members who studied in the US, Europe, Australia, China and elsewhere as a benefit of these reforms. The question it aimed to answer was: How have the foreign-educated faculty been influencing the higher-education landscape upon their return to Pakistan after completing their studies? The second area of investigation covered the medium of instruction. It asked this question: Do Pakistani university students consider instruction of IR in English as a hindrance in their learning? The question is pertinent given the difficulty faced by most of the students with basic levels of English. Another related question the study asked was: What do Pakistani university students think about the idea of their IR instruction taking place in their mother tongues? The third area of investigation centred upon understanding the dynamics of IR teaching at the country's military-run universities. The question the research aimed to answer in that regard asked: Do the faculty and students at the National Defence University exhibit the views that might be construed as nationalistic and conservative? In the instruction of IR, such views might be visible in debates concerning the medium of instruction and western-centricity of the curriculum, among others. The fourth and final area of study asked the question: To what extent does contemporary IR instruction satisfy the learning needs of a diverse student body in Pakistan? This body comes from different backgrounds and ethnic groups. The Pakistani populace speaks a variety of different languages and the country's cultural and social diversity is truly breathtaking. A resident of the eastern city of Lahore typically has more in common with their Punjabi brethren across the border in India than with their own compatriots in Baluchistan with whom they do not share language, food, dress and an array of socio-cultural norms.

### *Theory*

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory provided the guiding framework throughout the study, starting with the identification of the research problem to the analysis of its findings. We believe that the above-mentioned research questions can best be answered and analysed through the lens of this approach. The discipline of Education is dominated by conventional theories that can be

divided into Behavioural and Constructivist Camps (HEA 2014, 3). Most Behavioural approaches are seen to be less informative when evaluating social sciences because of their attempts to 'emulate' natural sciences (Atherton 2013a). Such approaches believe that the efficacy of the processes of learning and teaching can be measured by studying observable human behaviour and learning is manifested by a change in behaviour (Smith 1999). On the other hand, Constructivist approaches have been repeatedly consulted by researchers because of their focus on the role of a "learner" as someone who assimilates whatever the teacher presents him or her (Atherton 2013b). Where such approaches give more importance to the learner as someone who co-produces the meaning in any learning and teaching activity, they do not make many linkages with the learner's socio-cultural background and its current context and processes of history that might have played a role in helping an individual to develop into an independent learner. Furthermore, within the Behavioural and Constructivist approaches of learning, the process ends with the learner and neither approach provides much insight into how these individuals are shaped by their wider socio-political setup as well as how they end up shaping them.

Given the significant Pakistani involvement in recent international political dynamics (from Afghan Jihad to the war against terrorism) and the country's diverse cultural milieu, the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is a more meaningful instrument for analysis here. It provides insights into how 'teaching and learning are shaped by the social and cultural context of the learning environment and the complex and dynamic human activity systems within them at a particular point in time' (HEA 2014, 3). The theory is critical in its ability to build connections between the conditions of an individual's learning environment and his or her 'previous educational experience and their cultural and social background for facilitating or hindering learning' (HEA 2014, 3). Though founded by a combination of scholars, one of the key figures in the field is Lev Vygotsky who believed that the human mind does not react to its environment in a vacuum (Vygotsky 1978). Instead, this relationship between the human mind and its environment is influenced by social and cultural context (Oers 2008).

Vygotsky's main contribution in informing the field of learning and teaching lies in putting forward the concept of 'mediated action.' The concept helps investigate the 'semiotic process that enables human consciousness development through interaction with artifacts, tools and social others' in a given environment (Yamagata-Lynch 2010, 16). Human languages are an example of artifacts in this context while societal institutions come under the umbrella of tools. The relationships among the three (artifacts, tools and social others) changes over time. Furthermore,

the interactions in which individuals engage allow opportunities for mediated action that contribute to the social formation of their consciousness. In this interaction, individuals are not passive participants waiting for the environment to instigate meaning-making processes for them, but, through their interactions, individuals make meanings of the world while they modify and create activities that trigger transformation of artifacts, tools, and people in their environment (Yamagata-Lynch 2010, 16).

According to Foot (2014: 330), the objective of an analysis involving this theory would be 'to grasp the systemic whole of an activity, not just its separate components. This makes possible the analysis of a multitude of relations within an activity system, both at a particular point in time, and as it evolves over time.'

The discussion will return to the Cultural-Historical Activity theory in the next section in order to analyse the findings of the study.

#### *Universities studied and the rationale for selection:*

The fieldwork for this research was conducted at three Pakistani universities offering bachelors- or masters level-courses in IR or related fields (such as Strategic Studies or Defence and Diplomatic Studies). These institutions are the International Islamic University (IIU), the National Defence University (NDU) and Fatima Jinnah Women's University (FJWU). The first two are based in the federal capital, Islamabad, while the third university is based in the adjacent city of Rawalpindi. It is

important to add a caveat here that these universities represent a fairly useful set to undertake this study. However, they might not be fully representative of other Pakistani universities.

The IIU is considered to have a conservative culture (its first campus was in the city's biggest mosque, called Faisal Masjid) and attracts mostly rural students from relatively less well-off backgrounds. The University was established in 1980 and it currently occupies the 13<sup>th</sup> position out of 73 Pakistani institutions ranked by HEC (HEC 2016, 10). The IIU has separate campuses for women and men and the fieldwork for this study was conducted at the men's campus.

The NDU is one of a number of colleges, schools and universities controlled by the Pakistani military. Its enrolment includes both ordinary civilians and military personnel. The institution was established in 1970 and currently occupies the 33<sup>rd</sup> position in Pakistan according to the latest HEC ranking (HEC 2016, 10).

The FJWU is an all-women university, which enrolls students from urban and cosmopolitan backgrounds. It was established in 1998 and currently sits at number 38 in the HEC ranking (HEC 2016, 11).

It would be important to further highlight the criteria for the selection of the three universities to specify why they were selected. The federal territories and the adjacent city of Rawalpindi attract faculty and students from all over Pakistan in large numbers. The research at these universities maximised the chances of engaging with the students from across the country. The study ensured that the sample was as representative of the views held by the students from different regions as it could be. We are confident that these students represent the rest of the country fairly well. It would not have been possible to make that claim if the researcher had visited universities in Lahore, Multan or Peshawar that do not attract the variety of students that the above-mentioned universities do.

The World Bank indicators of 2014 note that 62% of the Pakistani population is from rural and/or tribal areas with the rest living in either urban or semi-urban locations (World Bank 2016). There are major socio-economic disparities within and among Pakistan's four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Khaibar Pakhtunkhwa. These variations exist along with the regular, and ubiquitous, differences based on gender and class. The three universities truly capture the diversity of the Pakistani population. Where FJWU students hail from urban and cosmopolitan backgrounds, IIU students usually tend to be from rural and tribal backgrounds. The former type of students are generally more open to challenging tradition and to embracing the challenge of globalisation, the latter usually tend to privilege tradition over novelty. These students prize their customs over a Western style of living. A study involving these three universities is far more insightful and representative than one that focuses on the students from only one background.

The universities studied here hold different positions compared to one another in the HEC's annual rankings. The objective behind selecting these three universities was to capture a variety of the views of the faculty and students based on their scholarly competence. The universities higher up in the ranking attract more competent students and faculty compared to those that are mid- or low-ranking institutions. This selection of the universities ensured that the research considered the views spread across the spectrum instead of visiting the top two or three universities. The students at the universities studied here could be described as ranging from average to very good. However, a top-ranking university would only have the students who could be described as excellent. Research conducted with only that type of students would skew any potential results making the findings unjustifiable.

#### *Data collection - Methods*

This study used a range of methods of data collection including surveys, semi-structured faculty interviews, student focus groups, faculty focus groups and participatory observation. Below is a brief



synopsis of each source of data collection along with critical reflections concerning the rationale for their adoption.

### *Surveys*

A quantitative questionnaire was circulated among students studying IR at all three universities. A total of 123 responses were received: 35 responses came from IIU, 29 from NDU and 88 responses came from FJU. The researcher was able to access individual classrooms in each university for the surveys to be filled in, ensuring that every student in the class participated. The purpose of the survey was to gain an understanding of the variety of learning needs of Pakistani university students. In order to get an indication of those learning needs, the survey sought the students' views on five questions. They were asked to state: (1) whether the IR curriculum at their universities helped them understand international politics; (2) whether the Western-centric nature of their curriculum was a hindrance towards their learning; (3) whether the use of English as medium of instruction was a hindrance in their learning; (4) whether they would like their instruction to be in their mother tongues; and finally, (5) whether they would like to be taught more topics that were directly relevant to them. The students were asked to give their views in an 'agree/disagree' format.

Surveys play a critical role in social-science research because they enable the collection of a structured set of data using reliable and valid instruments, thereby enabling researchers to conduct systematic and open-minded analysis upon it (De Vaus, 2014, xvii). As the next section will outline, the survey responses brought out very interesting results, providing unique insights into the thoughts and minds of young Pakistanis. The researcher was mindful of asking questions in uncomplicated way, as suggested by Fowler (2014, 75), to solicit clear and quality information.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty based across three universities. Semi-structured interviews are useful because, although they consist of several key questions, they allow

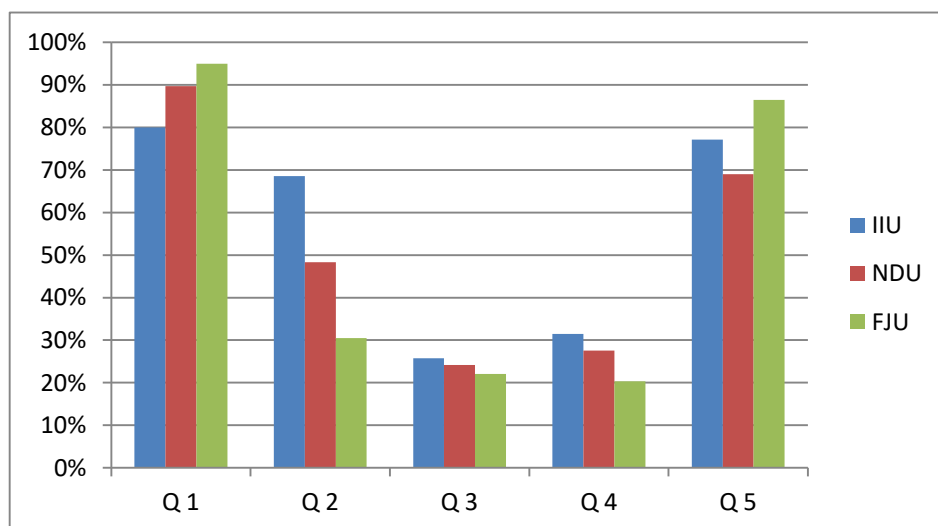
the interviewer or interviewee ‘to diverge in order to pursue an idea of response in more detail’ (Gill et al. 2008, 291). Those interviewees who did not want their names to be used were assured of confidentiality to facilitate a free flow of conversation.

### *Focus groups*

Two student-composed and two faculty-composed focus groups were also run as part of the research. The author acted as the facilitator, ensuring that each member of the group felt that they were able to voice their opinions freely (Guest et al. 2013, 188). The author devised strategies to minimise the impact of group mix – the overall impact of the group interaction on individual members – such as enabling everyone to have an equal say without one or two members dominating (Gill et al. 2008, 293).

### **Findings and analysis**

The fieldwork presented the picture of a vibrant education sector in Pakistan that is changing for the better. In particular, the findings of the survey, shown in the figure below, revealed that a majority of the students were engaged with their studies and felt that the IR instruction at their institutions helped them understand international politics. Interestingly, where nearly 70% of the students surveyed at IIU (which mostly enrolls students from rural and tribal backgrounds) felt that Western-centric curriculum was a hindrance in their learning, only 30% of the students surveyed at FJWU (whose students broadly hail from urban and cosmopolitan backgrounds) believed that such a hindrance existed. A vast majority at each university surveyed felt comfortable with their instruction being in English and did not find it to be a hindrance. There was also little appetite among students for their instruction to be conducted in their mother tongues. A large number of them also agreed that they would like to study topics more relevant to them. The discussion below will outline the individual findings of this study in detail.



**Figure 1:** The figure showing overall results of the survey

### *Finding 1*

Faculty interviews, and staff and student focus groups, revealed that Western-educated faculty were making a positive impact on the instruction of IR at these universities. Upon their return to Pakistan, these individuals brought back modern curriculum and innovative teaching methods from their experiences abroad. The universities studied had attracted many faculty members who went abroad on different scholarships made available after the above-mentioned reforms. Before that, it was rare to find faculty members educated abroad, especially to PhD level. A faculty member at the NDU noted that Western-educated academics were making a real effort to do something different. She asserted that these instructors

make an effort to collect the relevant literature and [to] prepare lectures. [Pakistani-educated instructors] don't take too much pain ... to collect timely literature and then prepare lectures and ... circulate the literature in classroom. That is not actually a common practice which we see here in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

These individuals have also been changing the research culture at local universities. Traditionally Pakistani universities have not enjoyed a robust culture of research and enquiry. That is changing, however, and those who studied abroad and then returned to Pakistan have been publishing in international peer-reviewed journals, linking Pakistani research to global academic networks. The impact made by these individuals, however, is not entirely positive. Some faculty members in focus groups asserted that Western-educated professors were responsible for not letting the Pakistani higher-education system develop its own culture and way of thinking, especially important at this critical point in time. One professor at the IIU noted that where there had been much discussion of economic and political separation from the West in the context of Pakistan's postcolonial history, there had not been similar debates in the field of higher education because those who should be leading such discussions were increasingly being educated in the West.<sup>2</sup> The holders of such opinions believed that Pakistani universities followed curriculum and pedagogy that was already quite Western-centric, even before the reforms. The teachers who had never been to the West taught key IR topics (like the Cold War) from a Western perspective and some of them liked to follow a Western-centric curriculum. According to these faculty members, post 9/11 higher-education reforms exacerbated that 'one-sided intellectual approach.'<sup>3</sup>

Other criticised that foreign-educated faculty were not fully able to understand what Pakistani students needed and hence could not introduce them to the topics more relevant to them. An interviewee noted that 'Non-Western theoretical approaches are needed for the [theories] to have more resonance with our students. If the students cannot relate to the message, there is little likelihood of them being convinced by that message (sic).'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Similarly, another professor noted that foreign-educated faculty mostly researched Western-centric theories and their education in the West detracted them from developing non-Western theories and perspectives from which to study Asian and Middle Eastern politics.<sup>5</sup> The politics of these areas have features that are inherently different from the way things are seen from the perspectives of American and European researchers, but their overseas education had shifted their perspective to a Western one.

One interviewee at IIU noted that the faculty at a different department, the Department of Political Science, focused more on developing non-Western perspectives because most of their staff were locally educated. (Foreign scholarships mostly go to those who would like to study IR and not Political Science.) This interviewee noted

In political science we have more local aspects of study but in IR we lack that perspective – we are doing a better job in Political Science but [that is] not the case with IR – In Political Science Department in IIU, students are better able to interpret ‘sit-in’ protests of Imran Khan and the ethnic politics of Muhajar Qaumi Movement [an ethno-nationalist party whose leadership is based in London]. [Students can also understand] what is happening in FATA and so on but IR students cannot do the same with issues of international importance (sic).<sup>6</sup>

Other faculty members noted that, although Pakistani universities now had many professors who can teach on Western-centric courses, there were not enough scholars ‘who could teach on non-Western courses because an increasing number of scholars were educated in the West and they lacked the aptitude to teach things from a different perspective.’<sup>7</sup> As a result, Pakistani universities had limited ‘focus on Central Asia and Southeast Asia’ because ‘experts [were] more focused on EU studies, American studies (and) India-Pakistan (nuclear rivalry).’ Certain topics that might be of great

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

relevance for Pakistani students were not considered 'trendy and fashionable.' This view was corroborated in the focus-group discussion with students at IIU who emphasised the cultural dimension of these dynamics. They asserted that Pakistani academics were increasingly interested in studying what was 'modern', leading them to study the West because studying Asian culture and politics from the perspectives of indigenously developed concepts would be considered 'backward.'<sup>8</sup> The absence of a focus on inter-cultural learning was noted by the students who would have liked to have seen every culture given equal value and attention.

It was also noted that foreign-educated faculty were making greater linkages with the Pakistani state's policy circles and were able to inform policy debates. The linkages between Pakistani academia and the state were not very strong before 9/11. After the reforms, the state brought various academics within its fold to make sense of the cataclysmic developments linked with the war on terrorism. According to one of the interviewees, the opportunity to be important was grabbed by these scholars because

International Relations scholarship is dependent on state support ... [state functionaries are] inviting people to talk shows, think tanks... The National Defence University (and) Inter-Services Intelligence [have been] asking them to work on research projects and to get in establishment circles. We feel more relevant if we align ourselves with state's approach. Otherwise nobody will consider us real International Relations scholars. We will fall out of the elite circle of scholars and will look like any other random IR professor that nobody much cares about. Our survival is in following the state's approach.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

One professor also noted that ‘our scholars feel that they are more relevant when they align themselves with the state’s approach – when the state is [interested in looking] at things differently, that will have an impact on the ground.’<sup>10</sup> Another interviewee noted

The security institutions in Pakistan’s security forces are realising now that they need the academic backup to cope with the necessities of contemporary (international) political landscape – that has necessitated them reaching out to academics – academics have very quickly grasped the hand that has been extended towards them.<sup>11</sup>

This nexus between the state and IR academics in Pakistan is not a one-way relationship in which the state controls everything. One interviewee noted that ‘if one wants to make themselves relevant at international level, state’s support is necessary’ (sic).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, these Western-educated faculty, who are being invited into the state circles, were also helping influence and change some of the more myopic Pakistan-state policies, albeit with quite slow progress. Another professor noted that these Western-educated intellectuals were now increasingly telling the military elites that their policies with reference to India, Afghanistan and Baluchistan were questionable and needed to change.<sup>13</sup> An interviewee noted that the security institutions were starting to think that

there is now more need to accommodate independent intellectual thought – more case is being made to bring them into the military colleges and think tanks. Now academics have more access and they are shaping the policy telling policymakers what they did that was wrong and what could be done differently – so it goes both ways.<sup>14</sup>

The foreign-educated professors also brought back with them the Western notions of critical thinking and negation of uncritical acceptance of ideas. Their lectures have been introducing their

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

classes to Western thinking on democracy, liberalism and freedom of speech. However, several staff members and students noted that both lecturers and students grapple with the dilemma of how much to challenge tradition (that expects and rewards unquestioned obedience) and follow change (that motivates to question everything). This issue will be further elaborated upon below.

### *Finding 2*

Observers of Pakistani politics have commented that recently politically and socially conservative, and nationalistic ideas are gaining greater support among sections of the Pakistani population (Burke 2012). Despite this, the vast majority of the students surveyed did not think that teaching IR in English was a hindrance towards their learning, as shown in the Table 1 below. In focus-group discussions, the students also showed limited interest in being taught in the national language (Urdu) despite being reminded that many countries including Japan and Germany imparted instruction in their national languages (Mansoor 2015). As mentioned above, the survey consisted of five questions asking students to give their views on (1) whether the IR curriculum at their universities helped them understand international politics; (2) whether the Western-centric nature of their curriculum was a hindrance towards their learning; (3) whether the use of English as medium of instruction was a hindrance in their learning; (4) whether they would like their instruction to be in their mother tongues; and finally, (5) whether they would like to be taught more topics that were directly relevant to them.

|                | Q1     | Q2     | Q3     | Q4     | Q5     |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Overall</b> | 89.43% | 45.53% | 23.58% | 25.20% | 79.67% |
| <b>IIU</b>     | 80.00% | 68.57% | 25.71% | 31.43% | 77.14% |
| <b>NDU</b>     | 89.66% | 48.28% | 24.14% | 27.59% | 68.97% |
| <b>FJU</b>     | 94.92% | 30.51% | 22.03% | 20.34% | 86.44% |

**Table 1:** The percentage of affirmative responses to the survey questions



Expanding on the reasons for this, a number of respondents referred to the need to link with contemporary global networks, and the status of English as a truly global language enabled them to do so. One student asserted that English enabled her ‘to read scholarly literature and search online. [That was] only possible through English.’<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, very few students mentioned the utility of English in helping them with employment – despite the fact their prospects for employment increased manifold if they are proficient in English (Shamim 2011, 5). A student said

When we talk about International Relations that is different from [other subjects like] Public Relations. If we were to study Public Relations, native languages would be fine.... In International Relations, we should communicate in English language. If we know terminologies in [only] our own language, how can we go ahead and communicate with other countries (sic).<sup>16</sup>

Some students from the remote tribal areas of Pakistan did mention that it was very difficult to learn in English. One of them said that he faced ‘many problems with English ... too much problem’ (sic). He said that he had a ‘double challenge.’<sup>17</sup> He grew up speaking Pashto but in Islamabad the *lingua franca* was Urdu and the language of instruction was English; he had difficulty with both.

An instructor in a focus group pointed to the country’s colonial history by saying

White people left but black-cum-white bureaucracy is still there. The elite have their own interest which are [sic] furthered by keeping English as the way it is. They are not interested [in change] because their hegemony is due to their superiority of English language. English empowers them more.<sup>18</sup>

A student at the FJWU asserted that it had

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<sup>15</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>16</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>17</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

become a norm in our society, that one who speaks English is 'civilised' and one who does not speak English is 'illiterate' ... It is by-product of British colonialism and it has been rooted in our minds that this is how structure of our education system is going to be. [Though] we don't think about it but from day one we are taught that we need to speak English (sic).<sup>19</sup>

This finding clearly showed that the students engaged here were keen to learn English, even if some of them had problems with the learning. Given this scenario, the Western effort to foster English as a medium of instruction has received sympathetic attention in Pakistan.

### *Finding 3*

The data collected through the survey and focus groups revealed that the students shared an aversion towards the idea that their instruction should be in their mother tongues. Only 25% favoured the option while 75% went against it, as shown in Table 1 above. The turn towards a conservative and nationalist outlook (as wanting instruction in one's native language would indicate) was not pronounced among the students as far as learning in their mother tongue was concerned.

However, this picture seemed to shift in line with the variation in students' socio-economic backgrounds. Students from semi-urban and rural (or tribal) backgrounds were more interested in learning in their mother tongues compared to those from urban backgrounds.

Explaining the reasons, a student at IIU mentioned the difficulties with reading and writing in their mother tongues by saying

in our mother tongue, we are not well versed. We can only speak but cannot do proper reading and writing. Very few might be able to do that. [These would be the ones who were] taking that subject

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<sup>19</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

and that course [at the university level]. English is ... a common language. If we have to look forward to our future and to proceed with this degree, then we should be well versed in English.<sup>20</sup>

Another student asserted that English was best suited for IR instruction because 'we do not have the terminology in our mother tongue.'<sup>21</sup> Another thought that Pakistan's regional languages were limited to very small pockets and gaining proficiency in them was not fruitful. Comparing Pakistani regional languages to the European regional languages, she said 'if you travel abroad, you might find people who speak these languages [regional languages of Europe] ... but that is not the case with [languages such as] Siraiki.'<sup>22</sup>

The Pakistani higher-education sector faced an interesting dilemma regarding the issue of language. Referring to the breakup of Pakistan in 1971 in which a dispute over Urdu played a major part, a faculty member noted that 'we [Pakistanis] have had such bitter experience of dealing with Urdu language that we do not want to make any changes to what is already in existence.'<sup>23</sup> Commenting on the issue, a faculty member noted that 'in classrooms, English does not work ... Urdu divides but English does not work – it does not do the job of helping people know about IR.'<sup>24</sup> He thought that the adoption of 'Urdu as a formal language ... w[ould] not work, that is the problem. It [would] lead to politicisation of the entire issue and discord.' That is why the students were happy with the status quo of using English as a medium of instruction even if they had difficulty with it. It was widely noted that the issue of languages was a serious obstacle in the students' learning because, according to one faculty member, Pakistanis 'do not have a common language. Urdu is imported language

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<sup>20</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>21</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>22</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

(originating in parts of the subcontinent that are now in India) [and] .... people do not own the language.'<sup>25</sup>

Commenting on the classroom dynamics, one faculty member noted that when he was a student, he felt ignored by the instructor because he did not have proficiency in English. He said that 'Urdu divides but English also divides' (sic).<sup>26</sup> The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory sheds useful light on the issue of language. It holds that an activity system has six components. The first three components include a subject (students in this case), objects (their learning) and the tools, including languages, used by the subject to pursue their desired outcome (Foot 2004, 331). The theory states that learners' preference for the languages of instructions would be shared by the 'needs, values and, norms of the culture(s) in which they are created and used' (Foot 2004, 331). In this instance, the students were able to increasingly see themselves as part of a collective, global culture and their preference for English, and not their mother tongues, demonstrates that understanding. The students demonstrated a highly-globalised outlook. They felt that they might be left behind at the global stage if the medium of their instruction was the mother tongue.

#### *Finding 4*

Pakistan's military has often been criticised for being too nationalistic and for its long history of support of terrorist groups – despite being an official ally of the United States in the war on terrorism (Chalmers 2011). This nationalistic outlook was at its peak during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq. For example, he ordered the military to use Urdu instead of English for internal communication (Nawaz 2009). The research studied whether that nationalistic outlook still prevails in one of the military's elite universities that has benefited from these reforms (such as obtaining faculty scholarships for studying abroad).

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

The fieldwork at NDU (the military-run institution) revealed that the students displayed moderate and, often, very liberal worldviews concerning the learning and teaching of IR. Figure 1 above shows that the moderate orientation of NDU students is visible from the finding that the percentage of NDU students who responded in the affirmative (i.e., who agreed) for *every* question fell between those of the FJWU and IIU. That finding is presented numerically in the Table 1 above.

The discussion with the staff at NDU revealed that the faculty was more content with the status-quo compared to other institutions. Neither students nor staff demonstrated unusually anti-Western and more nationalist or Islamist views. One faculty member at NDU did emphasise that Pakistani universities should help students interpret international politics through the lens of Islam.<sup>27</sup> That perspective, however, is not unusual because some staff at other institutions also expressed similar thoughts; they were not unique to this institution alone.

In faculty interviews, NDU instructors were keen to highlight that Pakistani university students were as equipped and capable as students at any Western university.<sup>28</sup> The desire to toe the middle line led them to downplay the need for any change in the way IR instruction is carried out at Pakistani universities. While students and faculty at other universities toyed with the possibility of teaching in local and national languages, the emphasis at NDU was on copying the West and teaching in English, because that is how IR is taught in the West.

Some emphasis, however, was placed on gaining more ‘indigenous’ PhD holders from Pakistan to counter the predominant ‘Western narrative.’ A faculty member asserted that Pakistani students were ‘overwhelmed by one Western narrative. There is no counter narrative because you don’t have

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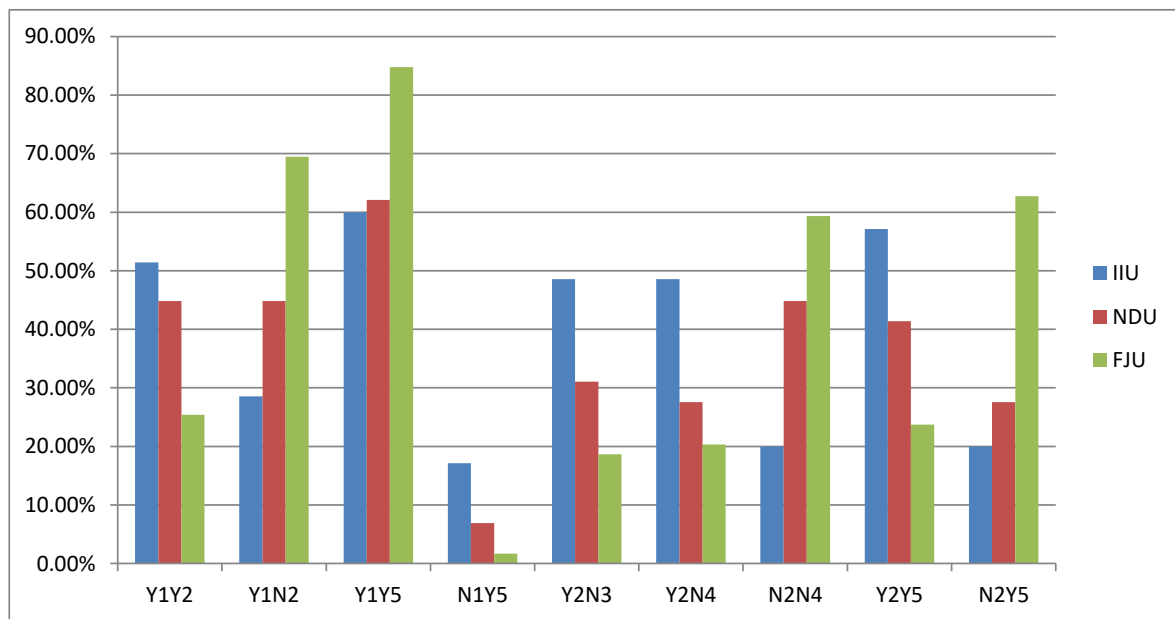
<sup>27</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

sufficient number of scholars of that calibre available in this country to counter that perspective so it is a one-way traffic. The other narrative is virtually non-existent (sic).<sup>29</sup>

*Finding 5*

The Pakistani student body is very diverse. Figure 2 below gives a glimpse into that diversity through the students’ responses (denoted by ‘Y’ for ‘Yes’ and ‘N’ for ‘No’). As mentioned above, the survey consisted of five questions asking students to give their views on (1) whether the IR curriculum at their universities helped them understand international politics; (2) whether the Western-centric nature of their curriculum was a hindrance towards their learning; (3) whether the use of English as medium of instruction was a hindrance in their learning; (4) whether they would like their instruction to be in their mother tongues; and finally, (5) whether they would like to be taught more topics that were directly relevant to them.



**Figure 2:** Showing diversity of student’s learning needs. N2N4, Y2 Y5 and N2Y5 are particularly interesting

<sup>29</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

The interactions with the students at different institutions increasingly brought out the idea that the IR teaching at these universities still did not cater to the very diverse learning needs of these students. One instructor noted that Pakistan was a 'traditional country' and the liberalisation of the education sector after 9/11 came as a shock and surprise to Pakistani students.<sup>30</sup> The curriculum had been Westernised and new ways of encouraging creative and critical thinking had been encouraged. Such fast changes would be more suitable if the majority of the students were from urban and cosmopolitan backgrounds who had more in common with students from Leeds in England or Buffalo in New York State in the US. However, that was not the case. A large number of students studying social sciences in Pakistan continue to come from less affluent, rural and/or tribal backgrounds and the schism between tradition and modernity in Pakistan's IR classrooms has been widened instead of bridged, as will be explained below.

One faculty member noted that the change was very sudden. It focused on 'fostering critical thinking and freedom of thought, and that does not gel with the culture which is more conformist and traditional ... challenging established wisdom is not inculcated from the beginning in classrooms in Pakistan' (the term 'critical thinking' was unheard of before the reforms).<sup>31</sup> The faculty member continued by saying that '[the students] are encouraged to disagree if they have convincing reasons for doing so – [they are told that] there is no one way of answering question.' This sudden change caused consternation and confusion among Pakistani students from more rural and tribal backgrounds. Where they might have been raised on the understanding that conformity is rewarded and expected, contemporary IR teaching was expecting them to question everything. Though positive in the longer run, the nearer-term consequences of the change were not fully understood by those leading it. They highlighted that a gradual process of change, with meaning for Pakistani

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<sup>30</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

students, would have suited the country better than the fast-paced change, along the lines of Western universities, that Pakistan was going through.

When asked about policy suggestions, interviewees stressed the need to remould the Western style of thinking along the lines of Pakistani cultural and social norms 'as there ha[d] to be constructive way of going about with the issue instead of following a single line.'<sup>32</sup> If a certain pedagogical method was presented as 'the ideal way' of teaching, it was bound to fail.

Commenting on the efficacy of this effort to encourage critical thinking and multiple viewpoints since 9/11, one instructor asserted that

Despite the sense that they are graduate [level students], they are sticking with [conformist] worldview – [there are] multiple causes [of that]: education is very limited exposure ... large part of their time they spend outside the university, with their families and huge influence comes from families. Universities are competing to get their attention among a variety of other outlets where they get their opinions from. [They seem to be more] convinced by friend and family to think in certain ways [sic].<sup>33</sup>

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory would also suggest that instead of looking at their university education on its own, it should be seen along with their learning in their respective communities. These communities are 'central to the process of making and interpreting meaning.' (Foot 2014, 330). Along similar lines, another instructor noted,

Majority of population of universities come from rural areas. Urban area people are newly urban – not urban in true sense of the word. The[es rural students] come with the expectation that lectures should be bilingual and they expect switches – if that does not happen, they lose the urge to take control of their learning process (sic).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.



Some pointed to their education before university saying that

Pedagogy at school also needs attention. [There is] not very diverse environment in [Pakistani] schools as far opinions are concerned. [These students are] a bit shy and reluctant to find solutions out of the box [while in schools] ... what is set in their minds continues in universities.<sup>35</sup>

The interaction with students at FJWU stressed the variety of learners' experience at school level given the significance of that experience for their higher education. In Pakistan, the divide between public- and private-sector schooling is massive with the private sector performing better in terms of educational standards. The linguistic backgrounds also held significance. The students noted that when they or their peers from different linguistic, social and educational backgrounds came to university, they had problems in coping with the new environment because universities still adopted a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and could not cater to the needs of the diverse student body adequately.<sup>36</sup>

A faculty member who taught at a more senior level (Masters, MPhil and PhD) pointed out that the task of fostering critical thinking had taken effect and the difference was more pronounced as they progressed through their education.<sup>37</sup> It was more visible by the time a student had been at university for a few years and was nearly finished with their degree.

Several staff and students noted the Western-centric nature of IR curriculum in Pakistan. Students from rural and tribal backgrounds felt that they could not relate to topics such as 'the Cold War, security dilemma, World War II... Barry Buzan and Kenneth Waltz.'<sup>38</sup> There was not enough instruction on the basic context in which they were living and why they needed to study certain topics. More focus on the topics that resonated with them would enable them to own their learning

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<sup>35</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>36</sup> Focus group, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

<sup>37</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014. Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

process. Along the lines of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, they asked for topics that might be related to tribal, ethnic and clan politics and their role in international security (issues they observed on a daily basis with reference to the insurgency in Afghanistan or instability on the Iran-Pakistan border).

These challenges mean that the nature of the job of a Pakistani instructor remains very different from an instructor in the West. In a focus group with instructors, one Western-educated faculty member noted that they have had to put in additional effort to 'address language barriers and to improve [students'] writing and [to help with] their research background [as well as] to improve their methodological backgrounds.'<sup>39</sup> 'We are actually struggling,' she asserted. Some of these skills might be taken for granted in the West but that is not necessarily the case in Pakistan.

The focus-group discussion with students at two very different institutions (FJWU and IIU) revealed that students from urban and cosmopolitan backgrounds were happier with the way the IR instruction was being carried out at Pakistani universities. However, those from rural and less-privileged backgrounds wanted the instruction to change to suit their learning needs. For example, when asked if students would like greater focus on the topics that were more relevant to them, those from tribal and rural backgrounds were more in favour of that idea compared to those from urban, cosmopolitan backgrounds.<sup>40</sup> Those demanding change thought that such a change would be more meaningful for them to make sense of the world around them. Urban students, on the other hand, also wanted more information on the topics more relevant to them but they also did not have as much of an issue with the Western-centric IR.<sup>41</sup> Seen through the prism of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, the students' responses were shaped by their versatile backgrounds and their socio-

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<sup>39</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>40</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>41</sup> Focus group, November 18, 2014, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

cultural circumstances. The engagement with the students revealed a multiplicity of views regarding their own learning. It also highlighted a vibrant learning scene.

## **Discussion**

Where Pakistani universities are fast liberalising IR instruction, the findings of this study provide a number of useful insights. Western-educated professors are changing the landscape of IR teaching and they have enhanced linkages between their alma maters and Pakistani universities where they find employment after their studies. However, more would be needed to protect their creativity and to foster the change they have introduced. Pakistan does not have a strong culture of intellectual exchange. Educational conferences in the field of IR (or most other fields of social sciences) are few and far between. As a result, the Western education of these individuals does not benefit their peers teaching at the universities in smaller cities or remote parts of Pakistan. A foreign-educated faculty member noted that 'European scholars can meet at free will. Conferences and seminars are often organised [in Europe] but there is no such culture here.'<sup>42</sup> Academic conferences would bring them close to each other with possibilities of sharing of innovative pedagogical technique and discussions concerning collaborative research opportunities.

Universities employing foreign-educated faculty could also do more by asking them to train their peers into innovative ways of conducting research and teaching. One faculty member noted that universities and the state were not fully utilising the potential of these foreign-educated faculty members. The public sector could also do more to learn from the expertise of such individuals as they are well placed to advise state and non-state think tanks and NGOs.<sup>43</sup>

The changes accompanying this liberalisation are making social sciences, particularly IR, an attractive subject for Pakistani students to study. Supporting this view, one instructor noted that the students

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<sup>42</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

'are changing their perceptions ... [they] think that [it is] a subject area which can help them in their careers. [Students] are taking [IR] as serious subject area. ... We will be experiencing change' in the near future.<sup>44</sup>

The issue of the language of instruction continues to pose one of the major obstacles in students' learning. As noted above, many students felt the switch to English at university level was quite abrupt when they were taught in either their regional languages (Sindhi or Pashto) or in Urdu at the school level. Interestingly, some students also underlined the linkages between the language of instruction and foreign interventions in the region. For example, an Afghan student enrolled at IIU detailed how his country has had to switch between Russian, Persian, Dari and English depending on which outside power was able to influence the country's education system at a certain time.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, a faculty member noted that Pakistan promoted Urdu under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, who was supported by the West during the Afghan Jihad of the 1980s. However, under the tenure of another military leader, General Pervez Musharraf, a switch was made after 9/11 in favour of English.<sup>46</sup> It is important to add here that given the focus of the current study is the discipline of International Relations, one has to understand the significance of languages and varying perspectives of learners. That is why the findings of the fieldwork are significant. If one were to conduct similar research involving other, dissimilar and less internationally-focused disciplines, the findings may not be that heavily focused on the issues of languages, worldviews and perspectives.

The Pakistani state has also been changing its own perceptions of the discipline of IR. One faculty member noted that the change in perceptions was quite visible 'at political and diplomatic levels.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>45</sup> Focus group, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, November 17, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>47</sup> Focus group, November 16, 2014, Islamabad, Pakistan.

She asserted that there was increasingly a feeling that ‘universities and think tanks [could] provide solutions to our local and societal problems ... eventually we are becoming active’ (sic).

The efforts made by the international community in helping shape the change in Pakistan’s higher-education sector were often lauded during the fieldwork. However, it was also noted that future scholarships for foreign study should be more targeted. They could be made conditional upon the idea that those returning from the West would be willing to serve in remote and tribal parts of Pakistan instead of joining cosmopolitan institutions in big cities.

### **Conclusion**

The learning and teaching of IR in Pakistan is changing fast, and different stakeholders (including the Pakistani state and the international community) would do well to both understand those changes and be fully prepared to deal with their repercussions. Though this article has focused primarily on the teaching of IR in Pakistan, the study has been quite instructive as concerns learning lessons about the higher-education sector in general. That sector has benefited greatly from recent reforms. The study has shown that there is a need to continue with this investment, the American desire to disengage with the region in the aftermath of the recent US withdrawal from Afghanistan notwithstanding.

### **Acknowledgements**

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