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Institutional facilitation for learning improvement with consideration of students' voices

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Abstract

This study investigates the students' perceptions regarding their voices towards improvement in learning at public and private sector universities in Pakistan. These voices are collected by the Quality Enhancement Cells of the varsities through either technological tools or other ways. To understand how this data is utilized, a self-constructed and validated tool was utilized to get information about four categories; understanding of the term student voices, inquiry of learning process; university facilitation for best learning and implementation of student voices. Using purposive sampling technique, a survey of 112 under graduate students from four fields of studies (social sciences, natural sciences, business administrations and languages) from a Public and Private Sector University each from District Lahore was conducted. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 22, and t-test and chi-square was performed to measure the difference in institutional facilitation of public and private sector universities. One-way ANOVA was applied to check the effects of student's status in the class on the inquiry of learning process. The study indicated statistically significant effect of public and private sector on students' perceptions regarding institutional facilitations for learning improvement. The study also reported the significant effects of student's status on the inquiry of learning process. It is suggested that further studies need to explore how and where the students' voices are being used for planning, assessment and course development.

Keywords: Institutional facilitation, students' voice, Higher Education, Pakistan

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Introduction

Educational research focuses on students' perspectives in various areas, among which student' voices, focusing on students' interest and their perspective, have gained much attention in the last few decades. In the 21st century, with the shifting of paradigm from instructional paradigm to learning' it is needed to ensure the students support to increase their self -responsibility towards their learning. The challenging world of this century requires their personal, corporeal and social comfort, their good relationships with others and their strong position and positive role in national local and global society (Calkins & Micari, 2010). Many researchers put emphasis on student voices as it plays a fundamental role in learning improvement' as the students perception gives insights regarding learning complexities and their probable solutions (Cook-Sather, 2006; Levin, 2000; Yonezawa & Makeba, 2007). The term student voice is broadly supposed to increase students' involvement and learning (Biddulph, 2011; Mitra, 2003). One of the most vital challenge faced by the researchers in today's classroom is to promote a productive and supportive learning environment by involving the teacher and student voice (Richardson, 2001). Student voice not only involves student's participation and their critical involvement in discussion but it is much more beyond it, which also involves the individual perceptions (Dahl, 1995). The focus of such studies has shifted towards how much opportunities and freedom is being given to students to put their talents and intelligence in a much better way. Learning technology supports educational products, resources, and digital tools. Learning technology solves quick solutions which we are facing biggest challenges globally. There are many barriers in learning technology-based innovations' in schools, universities and colleges. Teachers use much time in their class with students to give information through lectures in traditional way and follow-up-discussion. In the modern era, advanced technology approaches many resources to disseminate information in the classroom more efficiently and more than human beings. Technology will continue to employ academic programs, curriculum, professional members to design tools and software.

The focus of research is on how to improve students' learning by using their potential and competencies, to make their education more beneficial (Mitra, 2004). Bergmark and Kostenius (2018) conducted a study on student's meaningful experiences in educational institutions, with the emphasis on issues related to the educational process. It reported students' voices thematically in the light of their experiences: raising students' voice for attainment, multiple learning exposures and conducive learning environment, taking learning as fun and giving out for consideration. Nowadays students are being involved not only in educational activities but also in research (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006). The student voice may be defined as the provision of essential opportunities where the students can make decisions to shape their learning process (Fielding, 2004). Past researches suggested that unless the higher educational institutions realize the importance of students' voices and opinions, they cannot take initiatives to improve the future of the students and facilitate their progress. Fielding (2011) drew attention to the need for educational institutions to provide such opportunities to students as give them freedom to express their opinions and using their abilities and skills for the sake of better learning environment.

A “Listening Institute” is a Gateway to a Better Future

Many researches showed that students are a valuable asset of the educational institutions (Gärdebo and Wiggberg, 2012). Their involvement for the welfare of any educational institution is essential in these days (Ahlfeldt et. al., 2005). Students' quest for speech, performance, emotional and mental attachment is very important for learning improvement (Kuh et al., 2010). Past studies emphasized that educational institutions have to provide students with equal opportunities to perform in different ways, including curricular and non- curricular activities, and research projects. Even students' opinions should be given priority when making decisions (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp 6-7). Much work is now being done on this type of investigation (Bovill et al., 2011). Most of the universities do not involve their students in making decisions about the learning process. They consider decisions made for learning as an administrative task only; such organizations lacked to hearing student voice (Mann, 2008). A lot of attention is now being paid to increasing students' academic performance, interest in learning and to give opportunities for enhancing their learning Dunne and Zandstra (2011).

A study was conducted in England to investigate the significance of listening to students; the survey was conducted on 15,000 students in which asked them which kind of institution they like more. From their responses one of the most admired was “a listening institute” (Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003). The term listening can be customized in the ways as student’s involvement and right to speak. Healey et al. (2014) in the University of Glasgow reported that a smaller scale change case chanced where university students were doing their master's degree in learning and teaching, where they were given a task to plan intended learning outcomes of their study. While post graduate level pre-existing outcomes were available, however when students were given the opportunity to create their own learning outcomes of their project or study, they got self-awareness and self-guidance which gave them the answer how they can achieve their goals (Bovillet al., 2015).

Learning Improvement Based on Students Involvement

This should also be kept in mind while talking about the students' voices; students for whom these learning outcomes are being developed are not the part of this process. Students were found more concerned for their learning process if they are not made part of curriculum or course objectives, they would always take it as burden (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Even teachers can't figure out what kind of difficulties students have to face to follow the instructional methodologies. It would not be possible to achieve the learning outcomes unless until the students are not given the opportunity to be a part of learning process, (Konings, et al., 2010). McPhail, Kirk, and Eley (2003) argued for the consideration of students’ voice so that their motivation and discouragement to involve in curricular and co-curricular activities can be observed. When students were practically involved in planning tasks, they got the opportunity to use their education and skills in organizational progress. Many other students reported that, their participation in learning process helped to raise their spirits. They like to work harder so that they will be valued and it can be deducted that their involvement and importance may be the key of motivation and success (Cushman, 2010).

The methods used to involve the students in the learning process can help to increase their conceptual understanding are much better than the researches, which are limited and passive. Initiatives should be taken and researches conducted in which the voice of students should be given priority, such type of researches are essential for the well-being of students (Minner et al., 2010). This article is a slight effort to analyze the institutional facilities for students' voices to improve learning. It will discuss how public and private sector universities facilitate their students regarding their learning perspective.

Many researchers advocate that student voice is considered as a more significant element of getting better understanding for teaching learning process, (McCallum et al., 2000).

A number of teachers had created democratic and interactive learning environment for many years and we may just copy their best efforts. The structural changes in workplace environment also become the cause of change in thoughts and ideas regarding empowerment. The fundamental change evolved where technology gives equal opportunities for students and teachers and students play the instructor's role. In the regard of promoting student voice some researchers think it as the edge of confusion while other consider as effective for democratic learning environment. The participatory voice of students helps to develop the effective learning styles which are essential to learning empowerment. Some other researchers took it as another step of learning improvement. If another thing is required to legitimize in this term' it is being offered by recent learning improvement reform (Soo Hoo, 1993).

Student's involvement in focused action and influential learning is the best example for measuring the importance of student voice. Some institutes routinely plasticized student voice to make their educational policies according to the learner's needs and interest. Such type of practices helps to enhance the student's abilities regarding their learning improvement (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013). Rudduck and Flutter (2000) explained that student like decentralization in learning process and enjoy their participation in classroom decisions. The student's involvement in learning decision increase motivation level and discouraged their negative behavior. Biddulph (2011) described that students' thoughts, and involvement in learning helps to organize and improve the teaching learning process.

Voice of students can never be ignored because this can impede the effective learning and teaching process. It will not be wrong to say that a more collaborative or cooperative approach can help a teacher in terms of developing more confidence among the students so that they can raise their voice for better learning outcomes. Teachers are expected to raise the confidence level of the students by providing them with the required notions necessarily so that they can be a part of classroom discussions. In terms of expressing their ideas more confidently this will definitely leave a better impact on their learning process. If a student seems to be quiet all the time then it is imperative for the teacher to effectively coach or mentor him so that he can confidently become the part of class room in decision making process (Parry, 2014). According to Jagersma and Parsons (2011) teachers must be aware of a fact that student's voice can never be brushed aside as it is quite fine to give up some of the control from the decisions of the class. This would end up in coming up of the unique ideas that cannot be elicited otherwise due to extreme control over the students and class. In the view point of McIntyre et al. (2005) if the teacher understands a fact that by transforming the center of control this would be a greater

help to get better understanding of the students' needs and requirements. The teachers should also realize that to change the teaching learning strategies in this way becomes the cause of improvement in teaching learning process.

In short student voice is important in teaching and learning process as it enables the students to actively participate in decision making. It also ensures better learning environment for them and their fellows (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions regarding their voices towards improvement of learning at public and private sector?
2. What are the differences in the perceptions of students with reference to the (field of studies, year of study and status in the class)?

Significance of the study

This study may helpful to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning process will be improved, where the students will be active and vigilant for their rights. This study may also be helpful to improve the institutional facilities for students where their voices will be used to improve learning.

Research Methodology

It is a descriptive study of public and private universities that intended to compare the students' perceptions regarding institutional role in hearing students' voices to enhance their learning. Quantitative research design was used for this study.

Population of the study

Under graduate students of all public and private sector universities of District Lahore were taken as population for this study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A public and a private university were randomly taken as sample from Lahore district Pakistan. Four fields of studies, natural sciences, social sciences, business administration and languages were taken by both (public and private) universities by using purposive sampling technique. 113 undergraduate students were taken, 50 from a public and 62 from a private university each. Participants were from four different semesters, with a different status in the class (as class representative, high scorer, random student) chosen by using purposive sampling technique.

Instrument

A self-structured questionnaire was used for collecting data from the participants. The questionnaire consisted of two sections; basic background information (gender, sector, field of the study, semester or year of study, student status in the class i.e. whether the student is class representative, high scorer or random student in the class). The second section of the questionnaire regarding students' voices was further classified in four categories. The first category consisted of statements about understanding of the term student voices, the second category inquiry of learning process, third facilitation for best learning and the fourth category

consisted of the implementation of student voices which includes the statements regarding the implementation of their voices to improve their learning and for planning of institutional policies. The tool was circulated for validation to eight professionals for review and comments. It was then distributed to 50 undergraduate students for pilot testing. The reliability of tool was measured by using Cronbach's alpha which found to be .759 that showed the reliability of tool. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 22.

Results of the study

Effects of public and private sector on institutional facilitation for students' voices to improve learning

Data was analyzed to understand what are the students' perceptions regarding their voices towards improvement of learning at public and private sector. An independent samples t test was conducted to explore the effect of sector on institutional facilitation for the four categories of students' voice as reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations and t- Tests for Institutional Facilitations for Student Voice by Public and Private Sector

Public	Private								
	t. test								
Institutional facilitations for student voice to improve their learning	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	T	Sig(2 tailed)	Mean Difference
Understanding of term students voice	50	7.04	1.67	62	6.53	3.03	1.122	.265	0.50
Inquiry of learning process	50	40.92	12.02	62	33.46	11.53	3.321	.001	7.45
Facilitation towards best learning	50	19.30	5.90	62	13.61	4.82	5.494	.000	5.68
Implementation of student voices	50	14.18	4.95	62	11.91	4.86	2.419	.017	2.26
Sum of overall statements	50	81.44	20.45	62	65.53	20.82	4.058	.000	15.90

The t- test indicates the results were statistically different in overall statements (M = 81.44, SD= 20.45), p = .000, of Institutional Facilitations for Student Voice by Public and Private Sector, with public sector reporting higher institutional facilitation for three of the four categories of students' voice. The difference for the inquiry of learning process is greater (M = 40.92, SD= 12.02), p = .001 than facilitation towards best learning (M = 19.30, SD= 5.90), p = .000 and then the implementation of student voices (M = 14.18, SD= 4.95), p = .017 has differences in public sector universities facilitations.

Results report there was no significant difference in perception of both public and private sector students on the category of understanding of the term students' voice ($M = 7.04$, $SD = 1.67$), $p = .265$.

Results of chi-square

Contingency table (chi square statistic) was used to examine the relationship between sector and institutional facilitation for students' voices to improve learning. The following section reports the use of contingency tables (chi square statistic) to examine the associations between the independent variable (sector), and the four dependent variables or categories mentioned in the instrument. Results which have a significant value of Chi square, $p < .05$ are reported.

Sector and understanding of the term student voice.

Three items fall in this context, of which one "I understand the term student voice" had a significant association between sector and students' voice, $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 18.41$, $P < .05$, ($p = .018$). Private sector university students' have more understanding in this regard instead of public sector university students. The second "I know the strength of student voice in an educational institution" also significantly associated with the sector and students' voices, $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 22.67$, $P < .05$, ($p = .004$). Statistically private students have more knowledge about the strength of their voices in an educational institution instead of private sector university students.

Sector and Inquiry of Learning Process

This section includes fourteen items regarding the inquiry of learning process in both public and private sector universities. A statistically significant association was found for "We are frequently asked about our learning process" in sector and students; voices $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 17.78$, $P < .05$, ($p = .023$). High frequency was found of private sector university students for the frequent inquiry of the learning process by competent authority rather than the public sector university students. The statement "We have opportunity to evaluate our teaching learning process" had a significant association between sector and students' voice, $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 18.18$, $P < .05$, ($p = .001$). The private sector university students have more opportunities to evaluate their teaching learning process than public sector university students. So on, the effect of sector was found for "We are asked for opinion regarding the improvement of teaching learning process by teachers/head of the department" on the students' voices $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 70.09$, $P < .05$, ($p = .000$). It was statistically indicated that private sector University students are asked more for their opinion towards the improvement of teaching learning process by teachers and head of the department instead of public sector university students. Most of the private sector university students have online inquiry system for curriculum feedback comparatively few public sector universities have such online feedback system students. So statistically significant effect for the sector and the students' voices was found as "Online feedback is taken regarding our curriculum" $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 22.20$, $P < .05$, ($p = .005$).

Sector and Facilitation Towards best learning

This section consisted of seven items in the context of sector wise facilitation towards best learning. It presents sector wise statistical effects for the students' voices as "We have maximum resources for our best learning practices in our institution" $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 17.15$, $P < .05$, ($p = .029$). The analysis indicated that private sector university students have maximum resources for their best learning practices in their institution as compared to the public sector university students.

Another one “We have freedom to demand required material essential for best learning” had significant association between sector and students’ voice, $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 15.76, P<.05, (p=.046)$. It was also concluded that private sector university students have more freedom to demand the required material essential for their best learning as compared to the public sector university students. In the same way “we have freedom to participate in learning activities at our institution” had significant association with sector and the students’ voice $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 18.20, P<.05, (p=.020)$.

Similarly, private sector university students have more freedom to participate in learning activities at their institution instead of public sector university students. Furthermore “We are encouraged to organize co-curricular activities” also had significant effect towards the organization and arrangements for both public and private sector university students $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 17.18, P<.05, (p=.028)$. It was indicated that private sector university students are encouraged more to organize co-curricular activities than public sector university students. The last one “Our institution has a complaint cell or harassment cell for reporting any sort of misbehavior” indicated the significant relationship of sector and institutional facilities for both public and private sector university students $\chi^2 (2, N=113) = 34.96, P<.05, (p=.000)$. It was concluded that private sector university students have more institutional facilities including complaint cell or harassment cell for reporting any sort of misbehavior than public sector university students.

Effect of Perception of Students’ Voice to field of studies, year of study and status in class

The differences in the perceptions of students with reference to the field of studies, year of study and status in the class are reported below.

Table 2 *One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for status of student in the class*

Inquiry of learning process	M	SD	F	P
Class CR	41.35	13.85	3.442	.035
Class topper	32.44	10.82		
Random student	37.40	11.85		
Total	36.83	12.23		

Note: Class CR =class representative), Class topper = high scorer in the class, Random Student = any random student in the class

The result of variance indicated that the effect of student’s status in the class (whether he/she is class representative, high scorer or random) was statistically significant at $F (2,110) = 3.442, .035$, for the inquiry of learning process at public and private sector university. The effect of class CR was significantly higher ($M =41.35, SD =13.85$) than the class topper and random students ($(M =32.44, SD =10.82), (M =37.40, SD =11.85)$). The results of multiple comparison of student’s status shows that the value of class CR and class topper lies on $(-3.6 \text{ to } 11.6)$, 95% confidence interval, (Mean difference = 8.90). Similarly, the comparison of class topper and random students lies on

(11.7 to 1.7), 95% confidence interval, (Mean difference = -8.90), which shows their significance towards the inquiry of learning process.

A one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) was run to determine the influence of field of study and year of study on the participants' perception of Student's Voice, and results revealed statistically significant differences.

Discussion of the Results

This study intended to investigate the students' perception regarding institutional facilitation for student voice to improve their learning. The findings of the results showed that public sector has greater differences about institutional facilitations for the inquiry of learning process. The result showed statistically Public Sector University have differences in provision of facilitation for their students' voices to improve their learning. Furthermore, the analysis shows the difference in Public sector and private sector university have differences in implementation of student voices to improve their learning process. The overall mean of public sector university student's response was high than private sector university students which showed that the public sector students have more facilities for their voice to have a say to improve their learning. Previous studies stated that students are a valuable asset of the educational institutes (Gärdebo and Wiggberg 2012), their involvement in the welfare of any educational institution is essential (Ahlfeldt et al. 2005). Literature also stated that most universities do not involve their students in making decisions about learning process. They considered the decision making for learning is administrations task such organizations lacked to hear student voice (Mann 2008). In another study it was reported that if students are not given the opportunity to be a part of learning process; it would not be possible to achieve the learning outcomes (Konings, et al., 2010).

The results also indicated that public and private sectors reported significant effects to the institutional facilitation for students' voices to improve learning in relation to the understanding of term student voice; knowledge regarding the strength of their voice in an educational institution, frequent inquiry about learning process by competent authority, opportunities students have to evaluate their teaching learning process; students opinion regarding the improvement of teaching learning process by Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC), online inquiry by students for curriculum feedback; maximum resources for best learning practices in an institution; freedom to demand the required material essential for best learning; having freedom to participate in learning activities in an institution; students encouragement to organize co-curricular activities and institutional facility of complaint cell or harassment cell for reporting any sort of misbehavior. Technology supports educational institutions, and educational services.

Previous studies reported that educational institutions have to provide students with opportunities to perform in different ways, including curricular and co-curricular activities and students' opinions should be given priority while making decisions (Cook-Sather et al. 2014).

The result of existing study also stated that the status of students in the class has significant effect on the inquiry of learning process. As the interest of student about the inquiry of their learning process vary to be a class representative, high scorer or random student. Past studies were stated that students' quest for speech, performance, emotional and mental attachment is very important for learning improvement (Kuh et al. 2010).

Conclusion

The study concluded that public sector universities are giving more facilitation than private universities to involve their students' voices to improve the learning process. Public universities are inquired more by students about their learning process and have more facilities for their better learning. Student voices are being implemented more for the improvement of learning process and to plan the institutional policies. The research also concluded that the interest of students about the inquiry of their learning process and their concern was based on their status in classroom whether he/she was class representative, high scorer or random student.

Furthermore, it was also concluded that sector also significantly effect students understanding about term student voice, its strength and to what extent they have opportunity to use this right in public and private university. Technology helps to make better education more collaborative process and interactive. Inquiry of learning process by competent authority, right of feedback on teaching and learning process, availability of resources, complaint cell and freedom for its demand was also depends on sector. Students' encouragement to organize co-curricular activities is also based on institution facilitation of public and private university.

Limitations

This study was limited to the Lahore district and intended to investigate the students' perceptions about institutional facilitation for student voice to improve their learning at undergraduate level. Such studies can be conducted for more districts or provincial level. Further studies can also be conducted for school level that may require more attention for such studies. This study is quantitative in nature' qualitative studies can be conducted for depth and detail investigation.

Recommendations

This study may suggest to expand it by cross checking the ways to hear students voices by quality enhancement cell (QEC), academic bodies and the cell of student affairs. It may also be explored where the Student voices are being used for multipurpose (for planning, assessment, feedback, course development and research). In future, universities will enhancement certainly human resources that will easily accessible through technology.

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