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RESEARCH ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF REGIONAL STUDIES REVIEW (JRSR)

Institutional Conditions of Transgender Student Inclusion in Pakistani Higher Education

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Abstract: Students' access to or utilization of university provision is a determinant of institutional inclusion; formal institutional provision exists. This article is based on a case study conducted as a part of an MPhil study at Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan, which highlights the aspects of administrative recognition, facilities and support and accountability based on the findings reported. Snowball sampling resulted in 7 students selected for this parent-study, interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Reported experiences appear as a targeted interpretation of the institutional findings, distinguishing them from the claims, which have to be verified with document. Participants noted restrictive classifications, limited access to safe facilities, lack of knowledge about support and lack of confidence in accountability. Absence is reported at the institutional level with the presence of a Counselling Centre reported, faculty awareness activity reported and individual advocacy reported. The main interpretation was that there might be some helpful individuals that access might be dependent on, as there were not clear formal routes or easy access routes. The article adopts this strand of thinking to present the so-called framework of recognition, access, support and redress transitioned into responsibilities and indicators for future assessments. Its input is a differentiation between provision and perceived usability and verified absence that can guide an institutional enquiry. This framework is not an assessed intervention and analysis is restricted by single case and incomplete source records and a lack of policy or facilities audit.

Keywords: Institutional Inclusion, Transgender Students, University Governance, Social Citizenship, Campus Infrastructures, Pakistan

Introduction

Inclusion is implemented in the university in procedures and relationships. Facilities define the space for student, registration documents categorize students, and complaint documents determine who can challenge. In instances where the use of these arrangements may be challenging, admission may be only partial to the building of a foundation for participation. The issue is an organizational one – do routines to support access to education exist and do students understand and rely on them.

This problem is discussed in this article from an institutional perspective, obtained by the research of Ullah in MPhil course from Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan hence forth AWKUM. The experiences of transgender students throughout the social, academic, physical and ethical lives of the campus are reported. Its users include individuals who are helpful, individuals having difficulty finding records, individuals concerned about the facilities and those who are uncertain about formal support. As assistance and

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uncertainty are both present, there are questions to be asked regarding what "institutional inclusion" could be beyond the warm and welcoming staff. An institutional approach doesn't take away the need for interpersonal support.

It poses questions like, can I get help when a specific teacher is out, or am I able to understand a procedure before I get stuck on something or can I discuss a concern without necessarily sharing myself with a lot of people or having to be exposed. These questions include a change in the unit of analysis from the individual interaction to the arrangements of the way through which a university organizes participation.

A limited interpretation of the contribution of the article is that student facing arrangements can be set up in ways where inclusion is more or less reliable. Increases implementation framework based upon the reported case and differentiates between recommendation and observed outcomes. Our companion article explores the same thesis on the issue of identity recognition, disclosure and belonging. The focus of this paper is on administrative and material conditions, without pretension to any special sample, nor a second study.

Conceptual and Policy Context

Social Citizenship as an Institutional Question

Attention is brought to the practical enjoyment of the membership and of social rights through Marshall's (1950) description of social citizenship. It could be extended and employed in a university context to ask whether institutional arrangements support students to avail of educational opportunities on a dignity compatible basis. The following is a partial implementation of the framework.

Not identical to student status, nor does it consider all civil, political and social rights. Institutional inclusion is when the process of recognising, gaining access to facilities, support and pathways to respond to harm are clearly understood and available. These dimensions are analytic arbitrary categories of the thesis and not a validated measurement scale. They enable a reported problem to be considered without the assumption that it is either a personal/relational or a process/practical issue.

There could be a policy a university has place of which students are unaware, there could be a service available but which a student is hesitant to seek out, or there could be helpful staff that don't follow a consistent process. These circumstances are various. Social citizenship is analytically important because it points to the action space between formal provision and students' capacities to do so. The present study is not able to answer the question of which of the explanations is applicable in the case of all the reported difficulties; however, it can identify the areas that need further investigation at the institutional level.

Moving beyond Individual Accommodation

Martino et al. (2022) challenges this practice of school inclusion which are based on the visibility of a transgender pupil and an explicit request for adjustment. They comment on a contemporary comparison that is relevant; institutions can continue in fairly stable and consistent ways without having to constantly mark students as exceptions.

When applying to a Pakistani university, caution should be exercised as the environment and management is different. The AWKUM case permits a focus on this concern in the context of student accounts of formal processes, revealing the commonplace. If the student has to find a person to be sympathetic to a difficulty with records, facilities or assistance each time, this can get increasingly heavier.

The question here is one of analysis: does an individual goodwill become a supplement to a reliable procedure, or does it replace a procedure? The difference should not be taken for granted because of the presence of either a policy document or a supportive staff member. Divan et al (2016) place the marginalization of transgender as part of broader issues that hinder participation in education and society. Their work facilitates the treating of institutional setups as part of the context of inclusion. It does not determine if or why barriers exist at AWKUM, but rather evidence from the specific institution would be necessary.

Policy Aspirations and the Limits of this Analysis

Pakistan's Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, as enacted, contains section on education, which includes a provision on discrimination (Government of Pakistan, 2018). This enactment in its original form is employed as historical background of policy. The article is neither binding nor bindingly binding the current legal implications of controversial regulations or provisions nor does it assess the compliance of the institutions or presume that the legal framework does not change. Those questions need to be considered in a different time and place, and a legal one.

The 2030 Agenda provides a general education reference, drafted by the United Nations. Goal 4 is about quality education, inclusive and equitable; target 4.5 deals with inequalities in access to education. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a specific objective of Goal 5 (United Nations, 2015). While transgender inclusion can be addressed under the umbrella of the general Agenda's inclusion, it cannot be framed as a policy to govern operation on a university level or as a clear alternative to national laws.

No combination of policy aspirations or lack of participant knowledge is proof of formal arrangements. This paper sees statement of the missing policies as an indicator of students' experience of institutional legibility – or being able to see rules, assistance or avenues for redress. It does not mirror the thesis' wide assertion that there is no corresponding federal (Higher Education Commission) policy.

Research Questions

The research question relates to the following:

- How did students characterize administrative recognition, access and formal supports at AWKUM?
- It then poses the question about individual staff or peer assistance in the way of making these arrangements.
- Lastly it deals with questions of what institutional responsibilities and indicators seem to be aided by these accounts and what seems to be reasonable to propose even if the effectiveness of the offer has not yet been tested out.

Methodology

Case and Source Material

Designed in this article is a focused analysis of institutional findings in Ullah's thesis (n.d.). The parent research is defined as an ethnographic case study of a research nature and held with the interpretive aspect where the respondents are transgender students in AWKUM. The principal basis for understanding the accessibility of its arrangements is the bounded case, the university.

For the purpose of this article, no new interviews or site inspection or policy-document audit were conducted. The text from which taken has various versions of each chapter. The later findings chapter gives the main account in this analysis, which, by comparison with the former, leads to the identification of recurring themes and inconsistencies. Administrative barriers, formal and informal inclusion, support services, physical climate and ethical climate are considered as the analytical elements. It does not re-create the missing institutional descriptions or use participant understandings in its analysis as official descriptions provided by the university.

Parent Study Participants and Methods

The number of the participants profiled in the thesis was seven and the ages were between 20 and 25 years and it was achieved through a sampling method known as snow ball. It includes individual interviews, lasting about 45-60 minutes; focus groups and field observations for a period of approximately 12 months. It does not keep a full session inventory nor contains enough observation records to take account of every institutional finding and report it back to an independently observed visit.

While snowball sampling helps identify students who may not want to be identified publicly, certain student experiences may not be identified via this approach. Students who do not come through the recruitment networks may not know as much about how things function at the university, or may have other access requirements. Analysis doesn't assume transgender student population size, nor take uniform measures of barriers from the occurrence of themes.

Focused analytical approach

The thesis outlines the process of the thematic analysis which included familiarization, coding and theme development. Braun and Clarke (2006) offer the methodological models behind the organization of patterns in qualitative data. This present article skips over the broad themes and accounts of the thesis to focus on the specific level of those themes. The categories are: Administrative recognition, physical access, and support pathways and accountability; a dependence on individual assistance is addressed in a cross-cutting manner.

The interpretation includes a breakdown for each category of reported experience, a plausible institutional issue, and evidence that demonstrates this institutional issue. For instance, if a counsellor does not feel confident in his or her own skills, he or she creates an internal barrier to approachability. It doesn't necessarily mean that counsellors were not trained.

Likewise, a reported difficulty with a form uncovers a concern or issue that was faced by students but it doesn't identify the design of every information system used in the university. Consideration of this distinction is fundamental to analytical rigour. Supportive evidence and exceptions are not lost in a broader patterns of failure in institutions. Estimation of causal model is not conducted, and framework of policy implementation is not shown as a product of policy testing. It is an analytical output which may inform subsequent institutional evaluation.

Ethics and reporting boundaries

Informed consent and anonymization as well as approval from the university's Advanced Studies and Research Board is stated in the thesis. The approval reference, Conditions and Consent for publication will need to be confirmed with the research record. This article does not include any individual demographic fingerprint or any possible combinations of such a fingerprint. Chapter/section participant evidence pointers provided. Selected responses from the later findings chapter are listed verbatim (with original terms and participants' labels and grammatical irregularities) in italics

. Because of duplication of source versions, these quotations from originally reported studies still have to be verified against the original study record. The analysis takes into account that this may result in a greater risk of identification if the naming includes a small number of children taking part in the research and the name of a university. Therefore publication decisions must be reviewed in light of the approved protocol and participants' consent. This reporting of source is open and transparent in line with the aims of Qualitative Reporting Standards (O'Brien et al., 2014) and the reporting of researcher position, collection procedures and limitations.

Findings

The following are participant responses reproduced in the thesis later on (Version 4 Chapter 4, Ullah, n.d.). The participant labels reflect that, and separate analysis has been made to distinguish those reports from independently verified institutional facts.

Administrative Classifications Constrained Recognition

The results indicate that the forms typically feature only the terms male and female, and there is friction in updating a person's institutional documents. Students related these encounters with the sense of being unknown by the University. The problem was not only an outward adversarial approach, it was also one that

was faced as part of the daily routine in relation to administration (Ullah, n.d., Chapter 4, section 4.2.1 and section 4.3.4).

"Generally at university data, there are only two genders assigned. For that reason, regardless of my will, I am forced to select either option from the two genders" (Participant 2)

Participant 2 writes about feeling forced to select options that did not represent his or her preference. It reflects that influential boundaries have been crossed at the interface of administration. It does not define the design of all university system or if there was another option available. There is an analytical problem with the categories given to a student and the identity the student aims to enunciate, and this would require a records audit to find out which forms, rules and correction processes created this encounter.

The point about practicality is that an ordinary outing may be a recurring opportunity for reaching an explanation of identity. Helpful staff may solve an individual difficulty without leaving a reliable path for the next student, where a correction process is not clear. That this is a question for institutional assessment as opposed to a single administrative cause is specified by the case.

Physical Access Affected the Practicality of Participation

The physical-climate sections refer to the discomfort of binary bathroom facilities, perceived risk of harassment and the uncertainty about being placed in a hostel. One reported incident related to going off campus in search of a suitable bathroom. These are accounts that relate to the physical surroundings, and to the students remaining or re-entering campus and engaging in normal university activities (Ullah, n.d., Chapter 4, section 4.5.3).

"I need to use the bathroom frequently, but I don't always have access at a safe option. Sometimes I have to leave campus to find somewhere I can go." (Participant 2)

"The hostels were segregated by gender. I don't know where I would be allows to stay." (Participant 3)

The text extracts refer to various access issues. Participant 2 describes being moved off of campus to address needs immediately, in which facility implementation can cause disruption of time on campus. Participant 3 does not report a documented denial of a hostel place, but rather that they are not sure if they would be eligible for such a place. It's an exaggeration to say there is proof that both are denial. Together, they suggest the physical provision is the different component of the rights to understand.

The source divides the potential issues into number of points such as availability of facilities, knowledge about the permitted use, behaviour of other users etc. These should not be merged together to make one Infrastructure problem. "If the problem is not with the lack of access, a facility won't cure that half if a student doesn't feel 'safe' going to it, or if he or she thinks that the other half of the issue is harassment going to those facilities."

Support was Present, but its Suitability was Uncertain

A participant account noting the presence of a counselling centre and uncertainty about the staff's understanding of transgender aspects of a concern are included in the thesis. Other accounts wanted specific support or said that they felt isolated. Supportive advisors and teachers have also been reported. Combined with the lack of in-house support services altogether, this combination cannot be interpreted as though the university did not have support services at all (Ullah, n.d., Chapter 4, sections 4.3.3 and 4.4 on institutional mechanisms).

"The counseling center is available but I'm not sure if the counselors are trained in transgender issues. I've been hesitant to go." (Participant 4)

"I wish there is a dedicated support service for trans students where we could easily share our problems." (Participant 6)

A counselling centre is established, but it is mentioned that participant 4 is hesitant in participating. This means that in this account, awareness of provision was not sufficient to engender confidence in approaching provision. Although Participant 6 mentions they would like to have someone to help them independently, it does not show that they would want an alternative service to the current one, that it would be preferable to have an alternative service to the current one or that such a service would be desired by other students.

The evidence suggests that areas for investigation will include perceived suitability and trust, but not necessarily actual staff competence nor the most effective service model. Faculty advocacy/awareness activity is also mentioned in some accounts. It is significant that these are important exceptions where it is claimed that no inclusion work took place. They suggest that, although the local may operate, it may not be high profile across the institution. The extent, duration or impacts of their cases are not addressed and they would not warrant the description of a full-scale programme.

"A professor in my department have been working for raise awareness about transgender issues among faculty. They've organized workshops and training sessions." (Participant 3)

Provided by this account, there is a tangible 'qualifier' to the statements that there was no awareness activity. Whether students in other departments knew about the sessions or benefitted from them is left up to the discretion of the particular department. A subsequent evaluation should thus make a clear distinction between the extension of the initiative and the change of practice, and its actual existence.

Accountability was not Experienced as Dependable

The ethical-climate findings refer to the differences perceived between institutional values and actual treatments. Students felt there was a lack of respect and were asking about consequences of discriminating behaviour. There were also references to a lack of a formal process for inclusion noted (Ullah, n.d., Chapter 4, sections 4.4.1 and 4.5.4).

"There's no accountability of discrimination. People can say and do hurtful things without consequences." (Participant 7)

"There's no formal process of inclusion. No policy, no committee, no support system. It's like the university doesn't even think about us." (Participant 2)

Participant 7's statement has to do with perceived "repercussions" of "dangerous behavior. The broader claim of no policy, committee or support from Participant 2 reflects an institutional lack of recognition. This needs to be read in conjunction with the counselling and faculty-activity reports, and one finds evidence of some support being reported.

It is analytically useful that there is no apparent tension, even if the services exist, but they are not adequately seen, accessible, or part of a recognizable inclusion process. Material alone does not know which explanation applies, because there are no complaint documents or policy documents – and also further enquiries.

A process may not be working well with regards to participation if students do not know what it is and what disclosure it demands. The various uncertainties reported would therefore remain important even if there were formal mechanisms in place. In order to resolve that uncertainty, the analysis of procedures, which can be coupled to the students' understanding of how procedures work.

Individual Assistance Bridged Uncertain Arrangements

Some of the findings across the institutions showed that peers and staff were very supportive to students as a way of helping them through difficult situations. Advocacy and Academic Guidance are reported respectful classroom practices. The following actions indicate resources in the university community that an institutional response could build upon (Ullah, n.d., Chapter 4, sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3).

"My advisor have been advocating of a policy on transgender students. They've been meeting with the administration and pushing for change." (Participant 6)

There is evidence of attempts to go further than individual help as participant 6's advisor account says 'still trying to advocate to administration. Does not assert that a policy was implemented. Participant 4 instead emphasizes current reliance on a small group of individuals in the response below located in the present. The difference between advocacy and delivered provision is salient: to access a better service or setting, students need access to a relationship outside of that relationship; to bring about a change, the advocate needs to try, there needs to be effort and struggle to change.

"I wish there is more institutional support. But for now, I rely on the support of a few individuals." (Participant 4)

Discussion

Distinguishing absence from Inaccessibility

Not all relevant policies or services lacked institutional strength is the strongest institutional conclusion. The evidence, rather, points towards arrangements that students found confusing to approach or understand, or challenging to use. This split changes the questions that a university can ask. If a procedure does not exist, then build it; if it does exist, but we don't know about it, then communicate; if someone does know about the procedure, but it's not trusted, then look at practice and safeguarding.

If these situations are viewed as the same, an ineffective response can be achieved. If the challenge is getting around confidential records correction, a new statement will have limited impact. Students may not feel access is gained from opening a service if they don't know who is viewing the information that they provide. The case therefore lends itself to an exploration of the pathway of provision to usage and not to a simple assessment in terms of institutional commitments.

The contribution from the point of view of social citizenship is to identify where formal membership can, in practical terms, come up against some boundaries: for a student to identify provision, approach it with confidence and use it in everyday study life. This is for assessment question only, not necessarily a stage achieved by this data. In this article we do not ask the question, as was asked in the companion paper, what does belonging to others look and feel like? but instead we ask the question what might the responsibility of the organisation look like which would make access less dependent on an individual ally.

Competing Explanations and Evidence Needed

The results suggest three possible reasons behind uncertain pathway of provision for support: it is either not there, maybe there but not communicated, or it's there but because of past experiences they are distrustful. The counselling account, even as simple as it is, renders "absence" an insufficient explanation for that service and the reported workshops call into question a general statement of "no awareness activity" in the area. Different accounts can also be due to different departments/periods of the same product. These possibilities are not differentiated by the thesis, which does not provide sufficient dates or similar service records.

An institutional enquiry should therefore correspond to every allegation to evidence that should be required. Records and forms can explain administrative arrangements; visits to the facility and guidance on use permitted can include exploration of provision; information about services and confidential feedback can explore approachability. Complaint procedures and anonymised case histories can also provide an evaluation of what happens after a concern is raised. These would support the participant accounts, but retain their value as evidence of lived access.

An Institutional Framework for Implementation

The framework proposed assigns responsibilities under the headings of recognition, access, support, redress. They are interrelated but can be measured individually. A college, or any institution for that matter, may be

able to improve its procedures for assignment record-keeping but fails on facility access, or access to counselling but students are not sure about complaints.

Decoupling the dimensions allows players to make partial progress without seeing that one change as evidence of complete inclusion. Recognition relates to comprehensible, confidential methods of names and other records strewn to applicable requirements. Access is a question of whether students have access to facilities that they need during normal learning and teaching. Support describes the availability, appropriateness and accessibility of support.

Redress whether it is possible to raise and deal with a concern using a known process. There is no possible way in which these dimensions can be judged purely by means of a policy title. The reported case is then transformed into the following matrix of the proposed action and evidence used to evaluate the case. Responsible offices are proposed functions and do not constitute an agreement upon or description of the existing structure of AWKUM. The measures are to be used with future students and are not outcomes of this research.

Table 1

Proposed Institutional Actions and Indicators

Dimension	Proposed action	Suggested responsible function	Evidence for future assessment
Recognition	Publish a confidential records enquiry and correction route	Registrar and student records	Route clarity and anonymised completion times
Physical access	Review facility access and publish clear guidance	Estates and student affairs	Usability checks and confidential user feedback
Support	Explain confidentiality and relevant staff preparation	Counselling and student services	Referral experience and perceived suitability
Redress	Explain reporting steps and protection from retaliation	Designated complaints function	Process awareness and documented follow through
Continuity	Assign ongoing responsibility and review progress	University leadership	Review schedule and completion of agreed actions

Evaluating Meaningful Change

Implementation should look at the record from the administrator, and at the record in the student's eyes. Staff training completed is an input and does not show evidence of respectful encounters. Output = publication of procedure does not equal 'student is able to use confidently'. Focus should therefore be on practical issues, e.g. can the records enquiry be addressed without the need for repetitive unnecessary disclosure?

The small population size and potentially identifiable population may necessitate caution in the design of the evaluation. Disclosing counts that are very small, or fairly complex sub-combinations of demographic data, can make students identifiable. Limited access to confidential information to facilitate evaluation without required visibility and confidentiality can support assessment. These are recommendations based on disclosure and access issues in the case, not necessarily existing features of the institution.

Also, the cases identified as positive should not be removed from the institutional assessment. Practices that work can come from a service or department students are already familiar with and find helpful. It would be more helpful to compare these accounts with other, less facile ones, rather than presume that all offices are the same type. The next step in research, therefore, will be a structured review of the variations with supported student accounts and relevant institutional documents.

Limitations

One thesis is analyzed and involves seven students at one university. Limitations include restricted transferability because of recruitment via social networks, not having a representative sampling frame, and incomplete reporting of fieldwork. There is insufficient evidence from the reported accounts to either understand the national prevalence of the sort of arrangements that AWKUM has implemented, or to conclude that these are indeed typical for Pakistani higher education.

All the information contained in this article takes place in the absence of any current policy audit data, facility inspection data, or staff interview data sets. Specifically, lack of counselling competence cannot be determined by uncertainty; and lack of policy can not be determined by perceptions of the policy. The fragmentation of the source versions of the duplicates and the fact that traceability of quotations is by no means complete further degrades the level of evidence of the participants in the claims. The 10 snippets are from five participant labels – the distribution does not reflect how many students faced each barrier as this was determined through the institutional content selected for this analysis.

The Framework is interpretive and prospective. It was not validated as an assessment instrument or costed or tested in terms of implementation. The study is not able to assert that a proposed intervention will relate to increased retention, attainment or wellbeing. Future comparative analyses should be conducted with procedures documented, and participants' perspectives included, and examined with regard to change over time, but with the premise of maintaining voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Conclusion

The AWKUM case reported on in the thesis indicates that institutional inclusion was contingent upon the capacity of students to understand, access, and operate within the University in the context of the regular university academic system. Different constraining information about classifications, facility concerns, and uncertainty around support pathways suggests specific barriers to involvement, and counseling provision, staff initiatives, and individual advocacy suggest an absolutely absent involvement. Suggestive people might create patchy connections, but the connections achieved through their support did not provide a steady institutional pathway. The insight provided by this article is to differentiate the felt absence from non-reachable promises of provision and the actual institutional absence. Attention is focused in its proposed framework on the following points: confidential records procedures; usable facilities; approachable support and visible ways to seek redress. It is not appropriate to consider these proposals as proven interventions. A small, single-institution case was analyzed, with incomplete source records and without an institutional audit. Future enquiry should consider participant views, along with recorded processes, to evaluate improvements in the reliability of access in various university contexts.

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