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**ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to explore the impact of discrimination against certain students based on characteristics such as favoritism, bias, and victimization in the context of higher education in Karachi. These factors can be observed at different stages of teaching-learning, especially during assessment and evaluation. It was descriptive in nature, and researchers collected quantitative data. The universe of the study was universities in Karachi, Pakistan. The sample was selected from five universities located in Karachi, two from the public and three from the private sector, using stratified sampling. The sample size consisted of 95 respondents equally from both sectors. The value of Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0.888, which was satisfactory. An independent sample t-test was applied to determine the effects of discrimination on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, and organization. The Independent Sample t-Test and one-way ANOVA were applied to check the difference in discrimination and academic performance based on the demographics. It was observed that there was a significant difference based on age and ethnicity. The linear regression showed that there is a moderately positive and significant relationship between discrimination and academic performance according to students at a higher level of education. The result of the study was satisfactory at some level, as there was no discrimination observed based on gender or organization. Discrimination has a significant impact on academic performance at higher levels of education.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Favoritism, Teacher's Bias, Victimization, Academic Performance

**INTRODUCTION**

Higher education has a very significant role in the social, economic, and intellectual development of the nation. It is considered a major tool to bring reforms and to construct the high moral grounds of society (Shaikh et al., 2020). Universities are not only degree-awarding institutions, but also serve as a center of social development, regeneration of knowledge, research, innovation, and leadership transformation. It is a place where individuals from different backgrounds come together to acquire specialized knowledge, learn professional competencies by enhancing critical thinking capabilities that enable them to constitute their effective role in the contribution of the development of society. It is widely considered the professional development stage in the country and has secured a special status in the sector. In recent decades, universities have been promoting the values of diversity, equality, and inclusiveness by ensuring democratic participation. In this sense, higher education is observed as the pathway to social mobility and national empowerment. Educators are the masters of the system. Educators at the university level have a very crucial role in an individual's academic and career development and are the backbone of the system. Their common role at the specific level is to design curricula, plan and execute the instructions by different channels, assigning projects in terms of presentations, assessing their performance, and grading them. Along with them, they must supervise the research projects, dissertations, and theses of students. Another role is in terms of evaluation by grading the semester performance. In the recent past, the culture of universities has been reshaped by being more diverse, where students from different backgrounds and socio-economic status, ethnicity, genders, and religion share the common academic spaces. This multidimensional environment enriches academic exposure by fostering multiple perceptible and intercultural understanding. This multicultural and diverse university environment poses some social challenges that can hinder students' academic performance. These challenges include visible and invisible factors in the educational setting.

Discrimination is one of these challenges that can be observed in all institutions, even at the classroom and individual levels. Sometimes it is done willingly or unwillingly, but it has a huge impact on academic performance that leads to facing challenges in a career as well. The study will focus only on discrimination in the classroom and discover the causes of it. Being an educationalist, it is our first and foremost responsibility to look at the issues related to the educational sectors that are hurdles in the promotion of education on an equal footing. Educational discrimination is one of the burning problems

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caused by a few students in their academic performance. It may be a conversation issue for teachers and the learning community from their viewpoint, but it is also a reality that this problem exists at the same level and in certain forms. Discrimination in this study's framework can be defined as unjust and unfair practices of individuals based on personal characteristics that are mentioned above, rather than merit and performance that one shows academically. Karachi is considered the mini-Pakistan because of its diverse ethnicity, that diversity reflects in higher educational organizations as well. So, there is a high probability that factors like discrimination can affect the academic performance of individuals at this specific level.

These effects on university students are multidimensional. Psychologically, students who experience discrimination often report higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Ishak et al., 2023). Persistent exposure to prejudice can create feelings of alienation and marginalization, reducing students' sense of belonging within the academic community. The concept of belonging is particularly important in higher education, as students who feel valued and accepted are more likely to engage actively in academic and social activities. Conversely, discriminatory experiences can weaken motivation, increase absenteeism, and contribute to academic disengagement.

Academically, discrimination can negatively impact students' performance and achievement. Students facing bias may avoid classroom participation due to fear of judgment or ridicule. Ghaffarzadeh (2016), in his study, summarized that receiving discrimination-free education is the right of each student. He further added that the existence of discrimination in the field of education varies in different forms, such as gender, race, age, social and financial status, political affiliation, and other factors. To measure the effects of discrimination, it was equally important to investigate the causes that lead to discrimination. In this way, one will be able to counter the situation by giving some suggestions to reduce the causes of discrimination (Rashid et al., 2021). They may hesitate to seek guidance from instructors, resulting in reduced academic support. In some cases, discriminatory attitudes from faculty or peers may lead to unequal evaluation or limited opportunities for leadership and research participation. These factors collectively hinder students' academic growth and may increase dropout rates, particularly among marginalized groups.

Socially, discrimination affects peer relationships and campus integration. University life plays a crucial role in shaping students' interpersonal skills, professional networks, and social identity. When students experience exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or socio-economic status, they may withdraw from campus activities and social groups. This isolation not only limits their personal development but also restricts their exposure to diverse perspectives, which is essential for holistic education.

In developing countries, including Pakistan and other South Asian contexts, discrimination in higher education may also intersect with cultural norms and structural inequalities. Issues such as gender stereotyping in certain academic disciplines, linguistic discrimination against students from rural backgrounds, and socio-economic disparities affecting access to resources further intensify the problem. Although educational policies often emphasize equality and inclusion, implementation gaps remain significant. Therefore, understanding the specific forms and consequences of discrimination within university settings is critical for designing effective institutional interventions. Hence, the present study aimed to know university students' perceptions about discrimination and its implications on their academic performance.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **General objective**

To find out the impact of discrimination on academic performance at the higher educational level in Karachi.

### **Specific Objective**

To explore the students' perceptions about the impact of discrimination on academic performance at higher education in Karachi.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between discrimination and students' performance.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between discrimination and students' performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this study, the researcher focused on the discrimination faced by students by their teachers in the learning environment. The researchers also focused on factors such as favoritism, bias, and victimization of teachers at different

stages, like during assessment, classroom discussion, final grading, or during research projects, etc. Favoritism has deeply existed in our educational organizations, such as during classroom assessment, grading, presentation, and classroom discussion, like giving extra attention to an individual, especially during a research project or final term examination, where the instructor has more power to give someone extra weightage. Some individuals do not consider it a significant issue (Nadler and Schulman, 2006), but it might terminate association, resourcefulness, and confidence. Aydogan (2008) stated that resemblance in viewpoint, social and economic status, sex, association between the educator and pupil, and physical appearance of the student can be a core reason for favoritism.

Hussain et al. (2020) defined that it is related to dealing with someone in a different manner, not because of their capabilities and proficiencies in places like classroom settings, but giving preference to an individual due to personal interest when it is undeserving. The study found that most individuals in the teaching and learning community accept that it occurs in the educational sector at various levels. The type of partiality might be the leading aspect of educators' preferences. The conclusion of the study showed that many teachers give more favor to female students over male students, and give special favor to those who are good-looking, smart, face value, their relatives, or those who agree with their philosophical or political ideas, in the form of extra marks. This act might cause resentment and low self-esteem. So, the students who deserve to get low grades affect their overall performance in academic life. As a result of such actions, teachers lose respect in the eyes of other students. Abdullah and Akhtar (2016) stated that the role of the teacher is very crucial in educational organizations at any level; an optimistic attitude of teachers might have a great impact on both achievement and learning environment of the organization. So, it should be a fundamental responsibility of teachers to adopt fair behavior toward all students and pay equal attention to all, especially in the decision-making process, to maintain their dignity and respect. The next factor of discrimination is the bias of teachers. It is an act of showing unjust behavior by an individual towards another individual or group of individuals, which might be intentional or unintentional. If someone is doing it by knowingly called favoritism, on the other hand, unintentional bias is about prejudging the abilities that they want to communicate, either in class or during assessment, without proper evaluation. It is about the prediction of what someone wants to convey.

Boysen et al. (2009) found that bias can be observed in educational settings both by teachers and pupils. Its occurrence might be in the form of discrimination, prejudgment, labelling, and delicacy. They suggested that teachers have made strategies to counter such kinds of situations. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) concluded in their study that there are three situations that can affect decision-making under doubt, which led to implicit bias. Presentation, it is about when a person is asked to give judgment that objects or individuals are interrelated; accessibility of occasions or circumstances, it will happen when an individual is asked to evaluate the regularity of a class or the credibility of a specific progress; modification from the presenter, it will occur in arithmetical estimation with related existing value. These are the types of unconscious bias that happen but affect the performance of students in different ways. Malouff and Thorsteinsson (2016) found in their study that teachers' bias might lie in factors like gender, class, culture, physical appearance, and the health status of students. Victimization in an educational setting is the next factor of discrimination; it also has the same causes that were obviously discussed. It might be gender based, due to language, overweight, or disability, etc. Curran et al. (2019) cited in conclusion of the study that victimization of teachers was a vital constituent of teaching practice that possibly has an importance for their workforce and in due course on the achievement of students. It may be in different forms like cyberbullying, verbal bullying, victimizing in classroom discussion, showing a look of dislike to an individual, or during the assessment and evaluation process. Its effects can be seen in the form of low motivation, depression, and social isolation in victims, which absolutely result in low academic performance (Poole, 2017). By discussing the above factors, the researcher established the connection that these terms are interconnected and are different forms of discrimination. Existing literature highlights the relationship between perceived discrimination and its causes and effects. However, many studies focus primarily on single dimensions of discrimination, such as race or gender, without examining the combined and contextual effects within specific institutional environments.

The academic performance is the main objective of the student. The existence of this element can be observed in every aspect of life, especially in a teaching-learning community. These factors may be a cause of discrimination in education by the teacher and other relevant staff towards students. On the basis of available literature, null and alternative hypotheses were formulated to see the impact of it on the academic performance of students at the university level. After completion of research, useful recommendations will be suggested to students, teachers, parents, and organizations to reduce the impact of discrimination and deal with it. The study has some serious constraints, such as a limited scope, a small sample, and time constraints.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research studied the students' perception of the impact of discrimination on academic performance, which was descriptive in nature. The quantitative approach for this study was adopted to collect and analyze data to explore and explain the relationship between the variables. The study continued over the period of five months, from March 2022 to July 2022. The population of the study was five universities in Karachi (two public and three private). The sample size for the study consisted of 95 participants, equal from public and private sectors. The stratified random sampling design was used to collect the sample of 95 respondents. A tool for data collection was prepared by researchers, comprised of sixteen questions related to educational discrimination and its impact on achievement of students at the university level on a five-point Likert scale, and four were the demographic characteristics like gender, age, organization, and ethnic group of respondents of the study. Validity of the questionnaire was certified with the judgment of three expert researchers of doctorate level. The rationale behind choosing university-level was that the students at this level were mature enough to respond to these kinds of questions. So, the population for the current study was all students at the university level in Karachi. Reliability of the tool was checked through Cronbach's alpha test = 0.888, no. of items was 20, and the response rate was 100 percent. After collecting data, it was entered into SPSS software for statistical analysis. Independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to check the difference between discrimination and academic performance, and linear regression for the level of association between them.

## RESULTS

*Table 1: Independent Sample t-test for the Impact of Discrimination on the Basis of Gender*

Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig
Male	50	2.0362	61552	-1.967	92.202	0.163
Female	46	2.2993	69145			

In Table 1, the impact of discrimination based on gender was determined; the level of significance is 0.163, which indicates that the null hypothesis was not rejected, so there was no significant difference between discrimination and academic performance of students based on gender.

*Table 2: Independent Sample T-Test for the Impact of Discrimination Based on Organization*

Organizations	N	M	SD	t-value	df	Sig
Public	51	2.1856	73717	0.372	93.524	0.073
Private	45	2.1358	57418			

Table 2 reveals the impact of discrimination based on the types of organization. The level of significance is 0.073, which shows that the null hypothesis was not rejected, so there was no significant difference between the discrimination and academic performance of students in organization setting.

*Table 3: One-Way ANOVA for Discrimination on the Basis of Age*

Variable	N	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig
Discrimination	b/w the grp	27.941	9	3.105	19.354	0.000
	W. the grp	13.795	86	0.160		
	Total	41.736	95			

Table 3 presents the One-Way ANOVA test that was applied to know the perception of students about the impact of discrimination on academic performance, based on age ( $f = 19.354$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), so the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that discrimination has a significant impact on academic performance from the students' viewpoint based on age.

*Table 4: One-Way ANOVA for Discrimination on the Basis of Ethnicity*

Variable	N	Sum of Sqr.	df	Mean Square	f	Sig
Discrimination	b/w the grp	39.222	18	2.179	66.719	0.000
	W. the grp	2.515	77	0.033		
	Total	41.736	95			

Similarly, in Table 4, One-Way ANOVA was applied to determine the impact of discrimination on academic performance based on ethnicity. The value ( $f = 66.719$  &  $p = 0.000$ ) shows that the null hypothesis was rejected and there is a significant impact of discrimination on academic performance based on ethnicity, on the basis of their observations.

*Table 5: Model Summary of Linear Regression between Discrimination and Academic Performance*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	SEE	$\Delta R^2$	F Change	df <sub>1</sub>	df <sub>2</sub>	Sig.F Change	D.W.
1	0.63	0.40	0.39	0.62	0.40	62.8	1	93	0.000	2.131

In Table 5 above, linear regression was applied to determine the relation between discrimination and academic performance. The value of  $R=0.63$  indicated that there was a moderately strong relationship between discrimination and academic performance, and  $R^2=0.40$  meant that 40% variability of academic performance contributed to discrimination. The adjusted  $R^2 = .39$  clearly reflects the reliability and stability of the model.  $F(1, 93) = 62.8$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , which shows that the model is statistically significant and the null hypothesis was rejected, so there was a significant impact of discrimination on academic performance.

## DISCUSSIONS

In an independent sample t-test on a gender basis, the results showed that the null hypothesis was not rejected and there was no significant difference between the discrimination and academic performance, so there is no effect of discrimination on the basis of gender, according to the student.

Second independent sample t-test on the basis of organization showed the same result that the null hypothesis was not rejected, and there was no significant difference between the discrimination and academic performance of students by organization.

The One-Way ANOVA test was applied to look at the impact of discrimination with respect to age and ethnicity. The result showed that there was a significant degree of discrimination and academic performance with respect to student age and ethnicity.

The result of linear regression showed a moderate positive relationship between discrimination and academic performance. There is a significant impact of discrimination on academic performance according to students' perception.

## CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to analyze the students' perceptions of the impact of discrimination on academic performance. The results of the study showed that there is no teacher discrimination on the basis of gender and organization. The study results also showed that there is slight discrimination on the basis of age and ethnicity. There is a moderately positive and significant relationship between discrimination and academic performance according to students at higher levels of education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this research study, the following recommendations are presented that will be beneficial for future studies on the topic. These would also be helpful for the administration, educational leadership of universities, and other related stakeholders of the teaching-learning process.

1. Favoritism, teacher bias, and victimization are the types that might be noticed in the classroom teaching-learning process during assessment and evaluation of students' work.
2. The students who observe discrimination should report it to the right forums, like the management office or in govt. institutions.
3. Involvement of parents could be very effective, if there is discrimination against any student, he/she is supported to share it with parents and friends.
4. All the staff at the university level should be accountable for misuse of power, if they find to discriminate against someone intentionally at any stage.
5. The study further recommended that future researchers explore the causes and psychological effects of discrimination on the academic performance of students. Moreover, such types of future research include the perception of leadership about equality, diversity, and inclusion to encounter discrimination.

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