



RESEARCH PAPER

Core Issues of the University of Balochistan: A Way Forward

¹Shah Meer*, ²Asadullah Raisani and ³Pairman Bazai

1. Research Assistant at Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan
2. Research Officer at Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan
3. Research Officer at Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: shah.meer@btttn.org.pk

ABSTRACT

The University of Balochistan (UoB) is a foundational educational institution in Balochistan, offering a diverse range of academic disciplines. Despite its expansion to encompass multiple faculties, departments, and campuses, it grapples with a myriad of challenges. Misgovernance, financial crises, political interference, security concerns, and administrative inefficiencies have plagued the Institution, often resulting in disruptions to academic activities. This study aims to investigate the core issues of the UoB which hinder its smooth functioning, and provides doable policy solutions. This research, while employing a mixed-method approach combining literature review, structured questionnaire surveys, qualitative interviews, and thematic analysis, argues that there is a need of enhanced safety measures and infrastructural development in the institute, need of legislative changes in the Balochistan Universities Act of 2022, urgency of increased funding with transparent financial practices and requirement of administrative reforms to promote merit-based practices are highly significant to run the University at par with other national universities.

KEYWORDS

Financial Crises, Security, Enforced Disappearances, Protests, Political Interference, Nepotism

Introduction

Established in October 1970, the UoB stands as the first University in the province, providing higher education in Science, Arts and Humanities. Originating with three departments, the University has expanded to 6 faculties, 50 departments, 5 centers, and a law college. Additionally, UoB has established various sub-campuses, including Jungle Bagh Campus Quetta, City Campus Quetta, Mastung Campus, Kharan Campus, Pishin Campus, and Killa-Saifullah Campus, along with several affiliated colleges, solidifying its commitment to widespread educational accessibility. However, given the University's serious financial problems, the expansion seems to have been made without considering the financial resources. The University ran without any proper act between 1970 to 1996. Then it was running under the University of Balochistan Act 1996. In 2006-2007, a new ordinance was prepared which rationalized the number of members in the Senate and other statutory bodies. Senate for instance used to have 125 members. There was only one incomplete meeting of the Senate which was hijacked by noisy students and outsiders who had no business to be in the Senate. The Act of 2006/7 was yet to be passed by the Provincial Assembly and kept dragging its feet as it was excluding the MPAs and students. However, under the direction of the Chancellor/Governor the University was run according to this Draft Act from Oct 2006 till 2008. In 2007, four Senate Meetings were held. From the beginning of the University, till the end of 2006 only one Senate meeting, that too was broken up midway due to noisy students and politicians, was held. However, following the imposition of Emergency in October 2007, the Act was automatically enacted. This Act was to some extent similar to the Balochistan Universities Act 2022 (Kaleem Ullah Barech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024). After the

departure of Pervez Musharraf, the former President of Pakistan (1999-2008), the politicians and some politically active members of the faculty revived the old Act and forced the University to revert back to the 1996 Act (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024). Dr. Kaleem Ullah Barrech, the President of ASA, said that the Act was highly exclusive that provided discretionary powers to the VC and annulled the representation of elected members of the student unions and teachers (Kaleem Ullah Barrech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024). He was of the opinion that a joint front was set up against it at the time of promulgation and implementation, and seeing the resentment of all stakeholders of the University against it, it was abrogated when 'Martial Law was lifted. No academic association was confirmed about the act. In 2022, a comprehensive Act for all the universities of Balochistan was passed by the Provincial Assembly known as Balochistan Universities Act 2022 which is again contested by the student unions and teacher associations. It has great similarity with the Act of 2006/2007.

Since its inception, the University has faced multifaceted challenges in its development. For the last few years, the Institution has been marred by challenges of misgovernance, financial crises, political interference in the University's internal affairs, security, and the enforced disappearances of a few students of the University. The University has also faced multiple closures owing to ethnic conflicts and protests against financial mismanagement. Academic activities are interrupted every now and then due to protests against nepotism, non-payment of wages of teachers, and security issues, especially protests against the enforced disappearances of students. For instance, in November 2021, two students from the University premises went missing, which resulted in the closure of the Institute for approximately a month (Registrar, 2021). The widely known scandals of 2020 are said to have further exposed the flaws in the governance of the University (Notezai, 2020). During the academic year 2022, the ethnic-based student groups and the University Administration ended up in a deadlock over the entry test procedure that not only delayed the admissions but also closed the Institute for days. In 2023, the Academic Staff Association (ASA) stopped administrative and academic activities at the University and postponed annual and semester exams in protest against the Vice-Chancellor (VC), accusing him of financial mismanagement (News & Desk, 2023). Administratively, the decisions of the University, as they are commonly perceived by teaching staff, students, and associations, are influenced by external, mostly, political interference. ASA also seems to have significant influence over university operations, while distancing itself from responsibility for the outcomes.

The longstanding governance concerns genuine or perceived, are also arising from changes in the University's legislation. The University's transition from the University of Balochistan Act of 1996 to the erstwhile 2006-8 and then to the Unified Act of 2022 has also raised certain concerns among students as well as the teaching staff of the UoB. Additionally, the administrative and infrastructural areas of the University are also deteriorating with every passing day. Delving into the challenges, one cannot avoid their implications. Despite being a major academic Institute, the University does not host international students, as reported by Times Higher Education (THE, 2024). The internal security situation and certain other factors do not allow it.

Student-to-staff ratio is a metric used to quantify the number of students enrolled at an educational institution relative to the number of staff members, typically teachers or faculty, employed by that institution. Notably, UoB maintains a student-to-staff ratio of 48:1, with a gender distribution of 35 percent females to 65 percent males. The University's total full-time equivalent (FTE) student count is 22,802, while its research

output, as indicated by Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) publications, stands at approximately 23 percent (THE, 2024).

The UoB has expanded its academic offerings, establishing multiple campuses, and increasing its faculty. Instead of consolidating what it had and not diluting its financial resources, it went on opening sub-campuses and increasing subjects. This study aims to analyze these issues and challenges, identify viable strategies, and propose actionable recommendations.

The study primarily relies on primary data collected through interviews and surveys conducted with faculty, union leaders, student groups/organizations, and senior students who have spent at least two years at the university.

Literature Review

Being the first and leading public sector institute in Balochistan, the UoB played a crucial role in shaping the region's educational landscape. However, it has been observed during the analysis of the scholarly literature and policy reports that the public universities in peripheral regions, especially in conflict-prone and underdeveloped areas, face chronic governance, financial issues, administrative dysfunctions, etc. These issues are not restricted to the universities of Balochistan but also in the universities across Pakistan, yet key distinctions lie in how these institutions adapt, reform, and survive within broader structural constraints.

The literature underscores how misgovernance and politicization in Pakistan's public sector universities have undermined institutional autonomy and compromised academic quality (Hoodbhoy, 2009; Usman, 2014). The University of Balochistan (UoB) exemplifies these issues, intensified by regional instability and weak administrative oversight. UoB struggles with funding delays, security threats, and inconsistent implementation of reforms (Scholars at Risk, 2024). In contrast, the University of Karachi and the University of Punjab are competent at managing these issues better, as they have sound governance and financial management (HEC, 2022; HEC, 2024).

In 2022 the Balochistan Universities Act 2022 was introduced, which has centralized the authority in the Vice Chancellor's office with reduced faculty and student representation with provoked resistance (Rehman, 2025). The provisions of the Balochistan Universities Act 2022 closely mirror those found in the university acts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Mustafa, 2012). Unlike the University of Peshawar, where faculty and students actively defend participatory governance, UoB lacks strong institutional checks, leading to administrative gridlock during crises. Research suggests that inclusive governance leads to more stable and productive academic environments (Dell et al., 2022), which remains an unmet need at UoB.

The financial instability is another central challenge for UoB. Unlike UoB, where expansion appears disconnected from fiscal planning, successful models such as COMSATS University Islamabad have strategically balanced campus growth with revenue generation through international student programs, industry linkages, and research commercialization (COMSATS, 2021). The National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) serves as a model for financial sustainability, having developed strong financial systems and endowment structures that reduce reliance on government funding—offering valuable insights for improving UoB's long-term viability.

Literature also gives university models that are based on decentralization, inclusivity, and community engagement to promote and improve stability and trust amid governance and security challenges. For instance, the University of Dhaka ensures student and faculty representation in governance, while South African universities include local stakeholders on their boards to enhance transparency (Hossain, 2018). In conflict-affected contexts like Nigeria and Afghanistan, institutions have implemented security protocols, trauma counselling, and outreach programs to safeguard academic continuity (Kester et al., n.d.). Conversely, UoB lacks institutional learning from global best practices despite having opaque governance, disrupted senate proceedings, and failure to provide basic campus security, evidenced by student disappearances and closures.

Despite the existing literature on governance and politicization of universities of Pakistan, limited research specifically addresses how these systemic issues uniquely impact the UoB. This study will not only explore the main issues but also the obstacles in resolving those issues. Also, an empirical analysis on the effectiveness of legislative reforms like the Balochistan Universities Act 2022 is required, as only a few studies explore stakeholder perspectives on viable, context-specific policy solutions for UoB.

Material and Methods

The research was conducted through a mixed-method approach, comprising literature review and fieldwork. This methodology aimed at gathering diverse perspectives and insights from various stakeholders within the University community.

The research commenced with an extensive review of existing literature related to the core issues faced by the UoB and strategies for improvement. This involved analyzing academic publications, reports, and relevant documents to establish a theoretical framework and identify key areas of inquiry.

During the initial fieldwork phase, a structured questionnaire was administered to UoB students. A representative sample of 400, out of some 22,000 students, was selected using a formulaic approach. The questionnaire sought to collect quantitative data on students' perceptions regarding the University's core issues. Rigorous quality checks were implemented. Incomplete and/or improperly filled questionnaires in all, 13 out of 400 were excluded from the analysis. Students who have spent more than 2 years in the University were targeted.

This study employed a descriptive analytical approach to explore the core challenges at the University of Balochistan. Given the exploratory nature of the research, the focus was on identifying broad trends and perceptions rather than comparing mean differences between predefined groups. The data, largely based on Likert-scale responses and categorical variables, was better suited for graphical and percentage-based interpretation. Additionally, the objective was not to test specific hypotheses between subgroups (e.g., gender, faculty types), but to provide an overview of systemic concerns. Therefore, inferential statistical tests such as the T-test were not applied, as they were not aligned with the study's goals or data type. The recommended sample size would be approximately 385 students. To get precise results, 33 out of 50 departments were targeted for the purpose, as shown in Figure 1.

Subsequently, in the second phase of the fieldwork, qualitative interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including student unions of Baloch and Pashtun

ethnicities, groups, organizations, lecturers, heads of Administrative Officers Association (AOA) and ASAs. These interviews provided deeper insights into the perspectives of different actors within the University community, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the identified core issues and potential solutions.

The research culminated in the third phase in a meeting with the (then) VC of the UoB Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman. This engagement offered an opportunity to glean insights from the University's leadership, comprehend their viewpoints on the identified issues, and explore potential strategies for addressing them.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and patterns in student responses. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically to discern common themes and emerging issues. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the core issues facing UoB and to formulate evidence-based recommendations for the way forward.

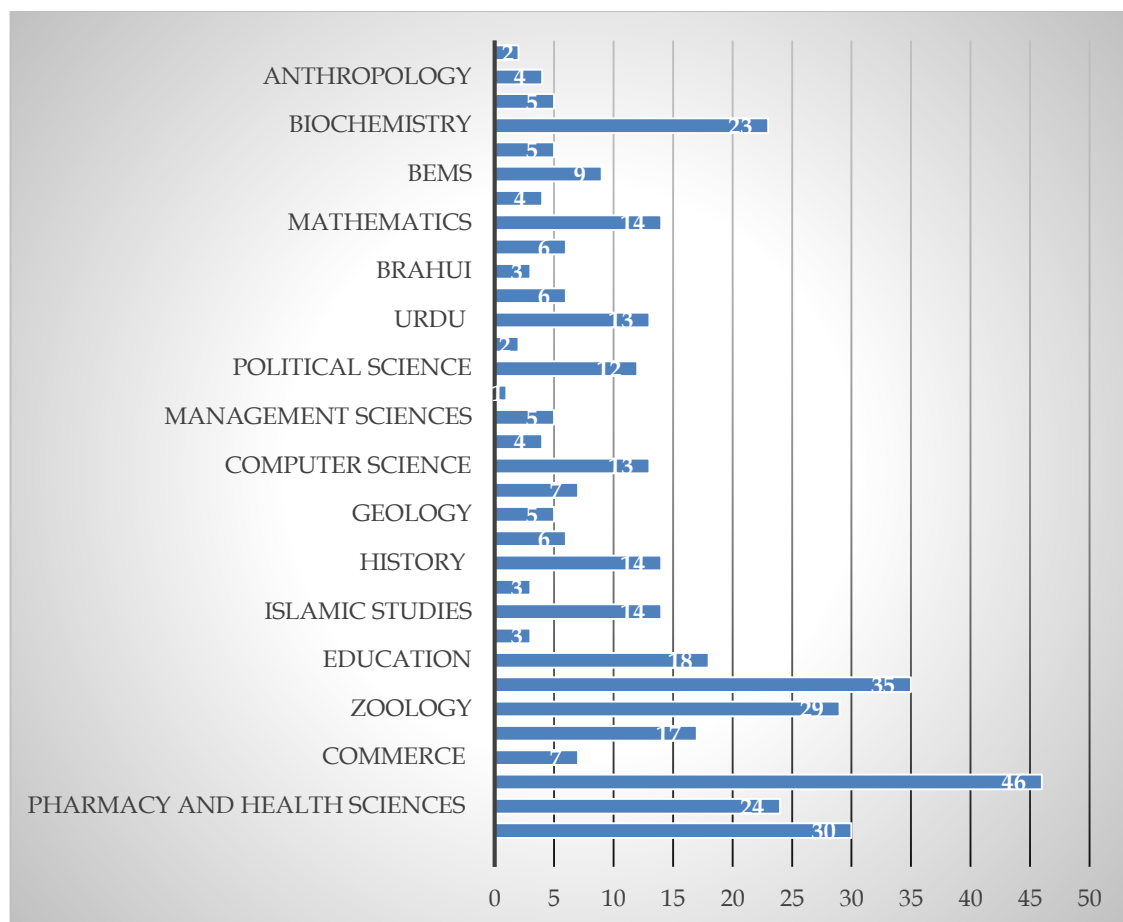


Figure 1: Number of students (sample size) from 33/50 departments

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were paramount. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and measures were taken to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. The research adhered to ethical guidelines and principles of academic integrity.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research, including potential response biases in the questionnaire survey and subjectivity in qualitative data analysis.

Additionally, the scope of the study was constrained to the perspectives of students and selected stakeholders, which may not fully encompass all dimensions of the University's challenges.

In summary, the research methodology employed in this study aimed to provide a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the core issues faced by UoB with the ultimate goal of informing evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

Results and Discussion

Financial Issues

UoB is confronting an acute financial crisis, with increasing pensioners, rapidly growing expenditures, and lacking finance. A meager 14-16% of revenue is collected from the students' fees. The remaining about 85% financial requirement must be met from government funding. The government finds itself unable to finance the UoB, indeed, even other universities. The Institute is unable to pay salaries to the academic staff, administrative staff, and other employees. As a result, the entire staff of the Institute is providing services without regular pay at a time when the inflation in the country is increasing by leaps and bounds. Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, the VC UoB, believes that the academic atmosphere of the University is widely linked with the wider external environment of the country and the province (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024). He basically refers to the macroeconomic conditions of the state, which create financial issues for the Institute. The more the economic conditions of the state turn worse, the more they will affect the educational institutions, he added.

He also stated that the Institute has suffered from financial mismanagement due to political recruitments resulting in administrative incompetency. Another reason for financial mismanagement is the decision of 1991-92 taken by the then administration of the University regarding the provision of pensions to the pensioners. From the 1970s until 1992, the University employees were appointed without the facility of pensions. However, it was decided in 1992 that all employees appointed since 1970 would receive pensions. It was a major blow to the financial condition of the University as it placed a huge financial burden on the University. Therefore, to manage the financial issues, pensions and salaries of the employees of UoB must be paid by the Government of Balochistan (GoB) since these significantly add to the economic liabilities of the University. If the government pays the pensions and the salaries, the revenue generated by the University would probably be sufficient for running the Institute. GoB should allot an endowment fund of Rs 10-15 billion for all the universities of Balochistan. The sub-campuses either be closed or downgraded to colleges and no more sub-campuses should be opened. On the question of returning the higher education subject to the center, contrary to 18th Amendment, the VC had clear ideas that higher education should remain with the province (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024), "we will learn with time to manage it," he added.

Due to the lack of salaries, classes are often called off by the Joint Action Committee (JCA) which is composed of the ASA, University Employees Association (UEA), and AOS. It is also often noted that the faculty often leaves the classes to join the protests and rallies of JCA. Based on the responses collected through the research questionnaire/survey, surprisingly, the student body seemed satisfied to the role of ASA. According to the survey conducted for this study, 32% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with its role, 16% showed extreme satisfaction, 16% stayed neutral, and 25% expressed dissatisfaction. While only 11% expressed extreme dissatisfaction as shown in Figure 2. At face value actually, there are 36% who are not satisfied with the role of the ASA.

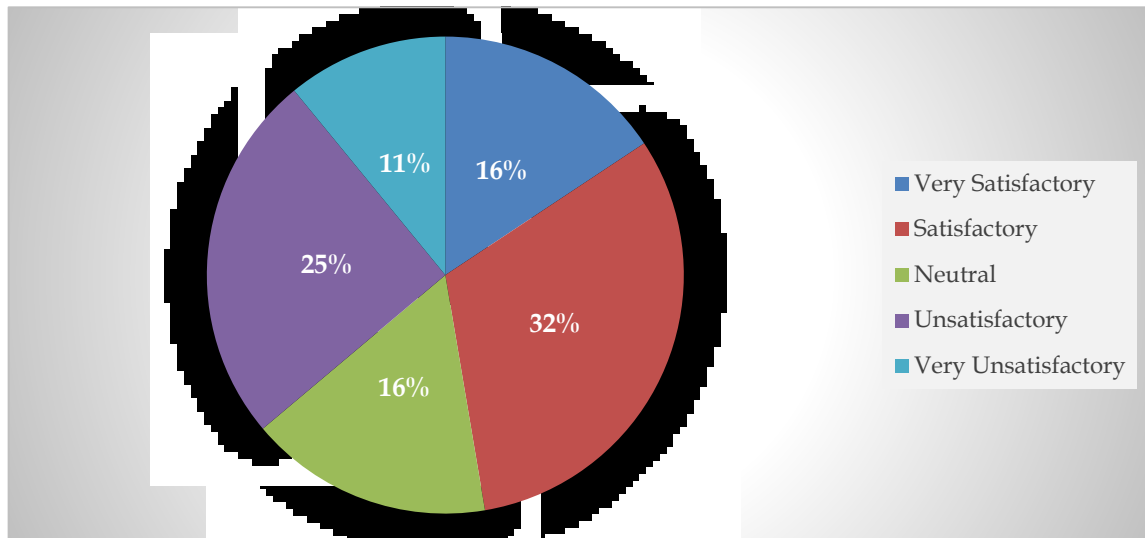


Figure 2: Students' response to the question, "How would you rate the performance of academic staff associations?"

Given the increasing poverty in Balochistan, the UoB best suits the poor and lower middle classes of the province. As compared to other universities in the province, the fee structure of the institute remains very low and affordable to the poor and lower middle class. Any uncertainty in the Institute, arguably, comes at the expense of the education of the youth of the province which is already vulnerable to several distractions.

An additional irony regarding the University is its lack of revenue sources aside from fee increments. The student unions and students themselves are activists, often blocking any attempts at fee increases with persuasive rationale. This is because many students of the UoB come from poor or lower-middle-class backgrounds, with some working part-time to fund their education. Consequently, they are unable to afford fee hikes.

During the Grand Dialogue held under the title "Unresolved Financial Crisis of the UoB" on December 26, 2022, Dr. Kaleem Ullah Barech, President ASA, commented on the financial crisis at UoB. He mentioned that the Federal Government allocates Rs. 3.5 billion to the GoB annually for the 12 universities in the province. However, out of this amount, the provincial government only provides Rs. 2.5 billion to these universities. The universities carry more than three thousand faculty members, five thousand officers, and two thousand pensioners. The amount allotted, Dr. Kaleem says, is much less for running these 12 universities (Kaleem Ullah Barech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024).

Shah Ali Bugti, President UEA, said that the annual recurring budget of the UoB is Rs. 4 billion while the liabilities have kept increasing over the years in recent times. Mr. Bugti emphasized that the UoB is the oldest University in the province, therefore, it has almost 800 pensioners, which Dr. Kaleem says are 2,000, a number which is increasing every year. Comparably, other universities of Balochistan have either none or manageable number of pensioners (Shah Ali Bugti, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). Jeyand Khan Jamaldini, Treasurer UoB, also talked about the liabilities of the University in the Grand Dialogue on “Unresolved Financial Crises of the University of Balochistan & to Propose Amendments for inclusion of Elected Representation of Teachers, Officers, Employees and their Associations & Students in the Statutory Bodies of Universities of Balochistan Act 2022 (UoB, 2022). The treasurer holds the view that increasing bills, utilities, and oil consumption have further aggravated the scenario.

The student unions of the Institute gave quite a contrary depiction of the financial crisis of the Institute. Besides accepting the lack of financing, they are convinced that financial mismanagement is also causing a severe dent. They pointed out the rampant corruption and unnecessary civil works. They also highlighted that the amount of money demanded for the verification of degrees and transcripts should not be demanded. They further opined that private exam fees for Master in Arts (M.A) and Bachelors in Arts (B.A) used to get increased every year, as these exams have been stopped by HEC as replacement of four-year Bachelor of Studies (BS) programs in the province. More severely, scholarships and grants are also lacking, and in every academic year, the fees are increased manifold. On the whole, these financial burdens are causing substantial economic problems for the students as well (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

The financial issues have also hindered the way of scholarship provision and financial support to the students. As 33% of the respondents were convinced that the Institute is not supportive, 27% consider UoB is not supportive at all as far as financial support and scholarship provision are concerned, 17% stayed neutral, 19% called the financial support supportive while only 4% called it very supportive, as shown in figure 3.

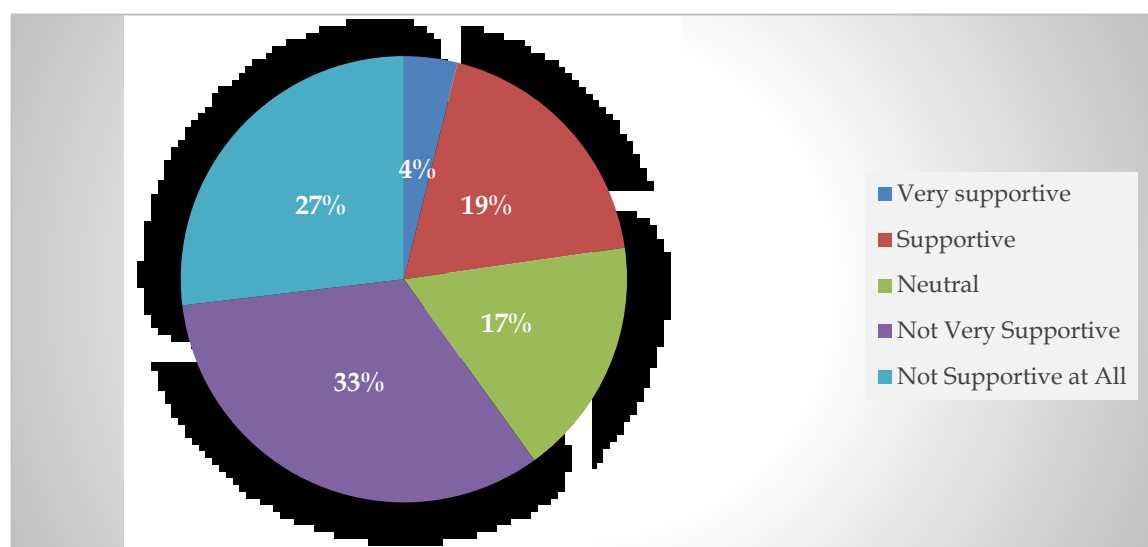


Figure 3: Students' response to the question, "How would you rate the availability of financial support and scholarships for students?"

Moreover, owing to the financial constraints, there are very limited opportunities for extracurricular activities and clubs to engage in. As shown in Figure 4, 38% respondents believed that such clubs or activities are non-existent, 26% considered them limited, 17% declared them inadequate, 12% called them sufficient while only 7% believed that there are abundant extracurricular activities and clubs to engage in (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

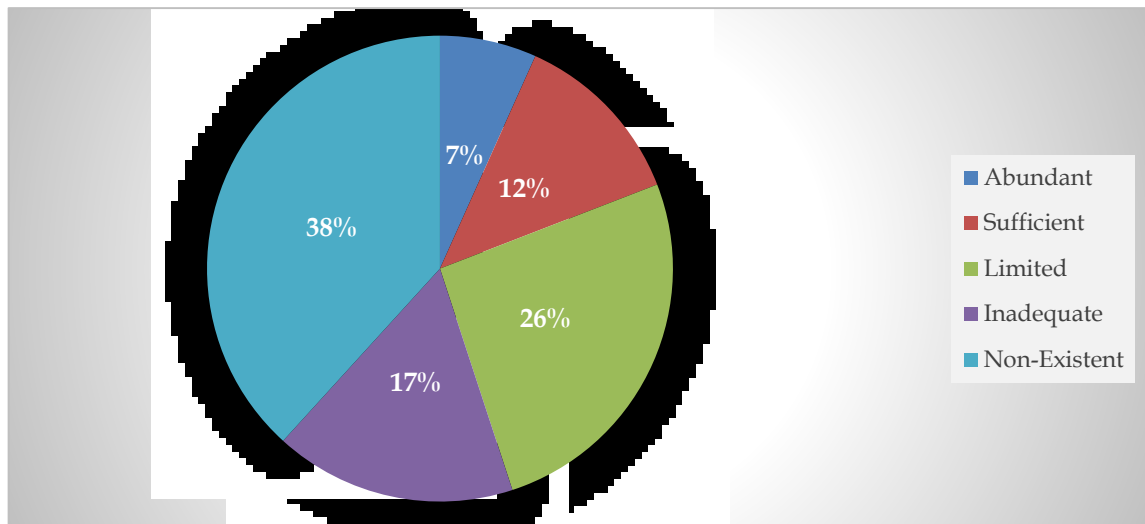


Figure 4: Students' response to the question, "Are there enough extracurricular activities and clubs to engage in?"

The effects of the financial crisis of the UoB are not solely confined to the boundaries of the Institute but also associated with the entire socio-political landscape of the province. A narrative on the ground, a former member of one of the Baloch Students Organisation (BSO), argued that the provincial government can easily allot Rs. 40 billion to Frontier Corps (FC) for security purposes, but it has failed to increase the budget for higher education, it is a deliberate act to paralyze the higher education in Balochistan. Of course, he ignored the crippling security situation in Balochistan. Given the deteriorating relationship between the state and the masses, the financial issues of the Institute coupled with such narratives make the students think that these conditions are not conducive to national integration. A student also contended that student unions/organizations are exploited by the tribal chiefs who misuse the energy of these young people to achieve their political ends. They use them as pressure groups causing unrest and often closure of the University, therefore, the financial crisis solely cannot be blamed for the disruption of academic activities at UoB. The former member of BSO said that he left BSO owing to some serious differences as he observed that the ones who provoked them were not interested in their benevolence and "common Baloch neither has the state nor his Sardars on his side" (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

The Balochistan Universities Act 2022: The Possible Impacts

The UoB was established in 1970, and until 1996, it was run through an ordinance. In 1996, an act was passed for UoB by the Provincial Assembly, which was considered more inclusive, rather than too inclusive. It gave representation to student bodies, teachers, members of the provincial assembly, and the Chief Justice of Balochistan High Court in the policymaking bodies of the Institute such as the senate, academic council, and syndicate. The 1996 Act was perceived as a check on the authority of the VC and was

perceived as more democratic and legitimized (Kaleem Ullah Barech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024). This free-for-all Act proved dysfunctional when the very first Senate Meeting crashed under the unruly noise of persons who had no responsibility to run the university. Then for the next 11 years, there was no Senate Meeting. In 2006-8, a New Act was passed on the basis of the Chancellor's Ordinance. It followed the best management practices of corporations for management. University is also a corporation except that it does not aim at earning profit. There were 15 members of the Senate and the Academic Council had 55 members. During 2007, four Senate meetings were held. This practice could have continued if the vested interests had allowed it to function (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024). In 2022, the Balochistan Universities Act 2022 was passed. The Act provided some powers to VC by ending the incorporation of ASA and student unions in policy-making bodies. In the Senate, VC appoints deans and associate professors, among others (The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 23(1), 2022). No representation is given to students, associations, or members of the Provincial Assembly, except for the Chief Justice of the High Court of Balochistan. The same goes for the formation of syndicates (The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 25 (1), 2022) and academic councils (The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 27(1), 2022).

Student unions, the ASA, the UEA, the AOS, and the faculty have serious concerns about the act in general and the allegedly discretionary powers of the VC in the formation of policymaking bodies for the Institute in particular. They argue that the VC of the University is not appointed through a search committee, as mentioned in Article 15(2) of the act (The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 15(2), 2022), but brought through external influence. This is not entirely true. A search committee is made which processes the selection. It may not be adequately qualified but it works (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024). They allege, "since the VC has discretionary powers and is brought in by external powers, he runs the University as a dictator". He appoints 'yes-men' in the policymaking bodies who, do not contradict his decisions. Moreover, as the VC does not pass through the rigorous selection process and does not fulfill the required eligibility criteria, it ends up lacking strategic foresight and planning for running the University (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

Nevertheless, VC UoB, Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman expressed great satisfaction with the new Act. He said, "I am 100% satisfied with the Act because it enhances the decision-making process of the Institute." He was of the opinion that the Act has correctly shrunk the size of the syndicate, which has increased the efficiency of the decision-making process. Before the Act, the syndicate used to be so polarized and crowded that more than 200 representatives used to take part. The Act has done away with the crowd and enhanced the decision-making power of the syndicate (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024).

The Issue of Governance and Political Interference in the Internal Affairs of UoB

Another aspect reported by some students was external interferences looking for activist Baloch students to curtail the more known 'Baloch Uprising' in the Institute" (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). On the contrary, Dr. Shafique refused any sort of political or any other external interference during his tenure at least as the VC, in the University, especially in the recruitment process (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024).

Admittedly, UoB is the hub of nationalists and subnationalists and many students who were part of BSO are now playing a key role in representing Baloch in different capacities. Some of the BSO students have also participated in the ongoing insurgency in Balochistan. The students of the UoB are politically more aware compared to the students of other universities in the province. The Institute has produced leaders who are serving the province in politically elite positions such as governors, members of the provincial assembly, and bureaucrats. Thus, there are both positive and negative repercussions of student politics in the University. Student unions, all being ethnic and fragmented, and a significant number of key informants allege that the University often suffers from external influences, indicating interference from other institutions in the affairs of the UoB.

Political interference in the affairs of the University is not negligible either. Mainstream nationalist political parties in the province, such as the Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan National Party - Mengal (BNP-M), Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party - Khushal Group (PknAP), National Party (NP) to mention a few, are said to be active in the affairs of the University. These parties have their respective student political organizations/unions. These wings say or do what they are commanded to do by the mainstream leadership of the party, which also has direct effects on the overall running of the University affairs.

As a result, academic activities to a large extent are affected. As shown in Figure 5 (Results of the Survey), 25% respondents believe that the academic quality at the University is poor, 35% called it good, 24% rated it fair, 9% called it very poor and only 7% called the overall academic quality at the University, excellent.

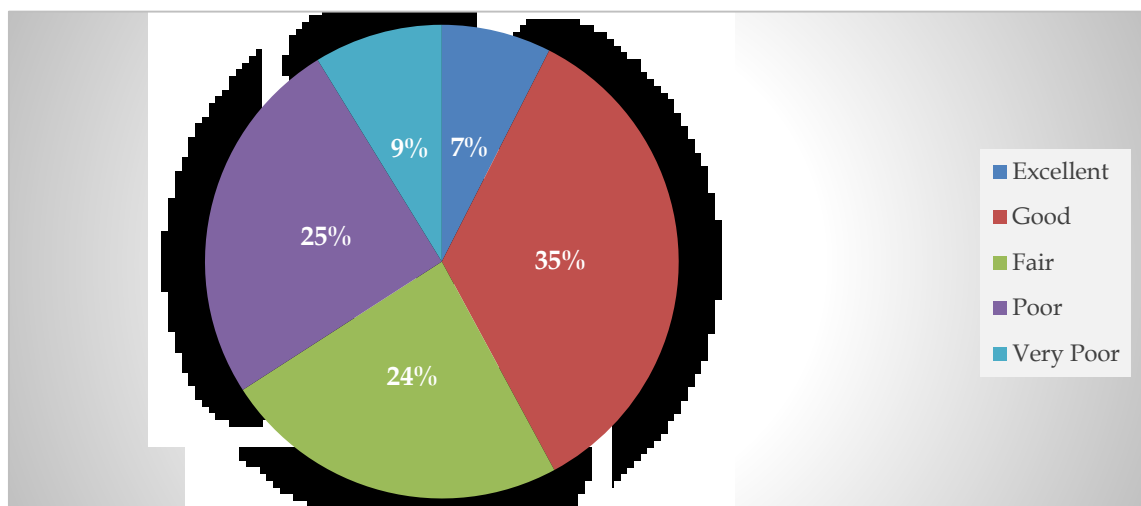


Figure 5: Students' response to the question, "How would you rate the overall academic quality at the University of Balochistan?"

Moreover, 28% of respondents identified political or external influence as the core issue of the University as shown in Figure 6, while 37% cited financial crisis, 14% attributed the core issue to incompetent administration, 9% to nepotism, and 12% mentioned other reasons. Other reasons included corruption, egotistical department chairpersons, inadequate education, short courses, insufficient infrastructure, flawed policies, a multitude of ineffective unions and student organizations, focused on their ethnic and political biases, and administrative shortcomings.

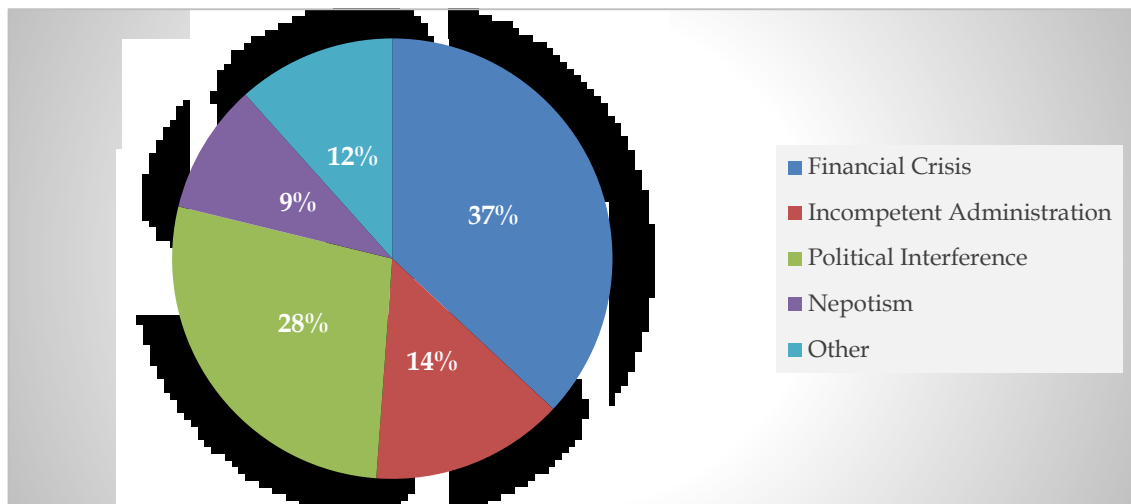


Figure 6: Students' response to the question, "What is the core issue of the University?"

The Issues of Personal Security

The UoB is perceived to be insecure in many senses, including the safety of the students from enforced disappearances, the safety and security of female students in hostels, and securing students from drugs on the premises of the Institute. The conflicts among student organizations on ethnic basis are also a nightmare for the students.

For a decade, the cases of enforced disappearances have been noted at the University. However, the most notable and worth-mentioning case is that of Sohail Baloch and Faseeh Baloch who were forcibly abducted from the hostel of the University in November 2021. It resulted in outrage and a unified front of student unions, civil society, and to some extent the associations of the Institute against illegal abduction in the premises of the UoB. The findings revealed that the hostel's cameras were inoperative during the abduction, and some in the administration of the UoB said that there was also a power outage (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). In contrast, Ameer Hamza, public relations officer of the University contended that CCTV footage was shown to the families of the students that went missing in November 2021 and there was no sign of abduction. MPA Nasrullah Zaray from the PkMAP confirmed to Dawn that a conditional agreement had been reached between the government and the relatives of the abducted. He mentioned that the issue had been presented to the (then) Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo (Nihad, 2021). However, no clue of the abductors was found.

The academic activities at the Institute were called off. Protests were staged and rallies were carried out. The mainstream media and political actors came to the forefront. A committee was formed to investigate the matter, but no facts were transparently brought to light. These incidents have left a sense of insecurity in students and parents leaving a dent in the credibility of the Institute (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

Unlike matters of finance, the VC was silent on the security issues of UoB. On the question of enforced disappearances, he plainly refused to comment on anything (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024).

The survey shows that 31% of the respondents feel unsafe, while 17% strongly deny the presence of safety and a conducive learning environment at UoB hostels, in light of such prevailing issues. Additionally, 26% agree that the University hostels are safe, secure, and conducive to a positive learning environment. However, 17% strongly disagreed with this notion, while only 7% strongly agreed, as shown in Figure 7.

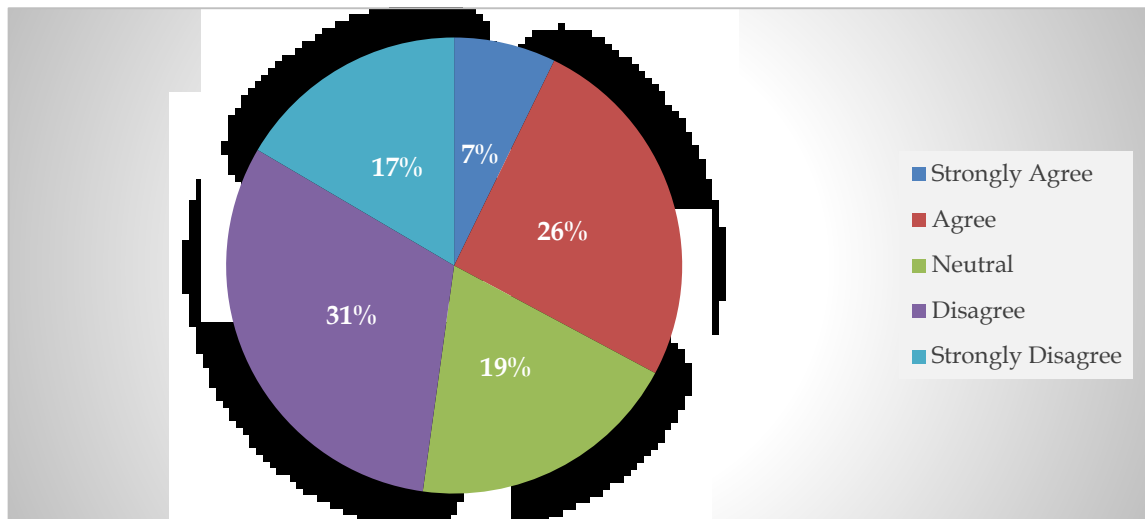


Figure 7: Students' response to the question, "Do you agree that the University hostels are safe, secure, and conducive to a positive learning environment?"

The 2020 scandal at the University also exposed the Institute in terms of lack of personal security. The widely infamous scandal basically involves harassing female students and demanding unethical favors (Notezai, 2020). Categorically, there are two schools of thought that explain the overall essence of the scandal. First, people believe that surveillance cameras were illegally fixed in the washrooms of the female hostel, and their recorded videos were used to blackmail them for demanding favors from them. Second, the student unions and a few stakeholders of the University are convinced that the surveillance cameras were fixed more than the number approved by the University, and the additional cameras were fixed surreptitiously. These cameras are said to have recorded the videos of students and were used against them. It is also believed that the blackmailed female students were not only blackmailed and asked for sexual favors by the administration of UoB but also by people outside the UoB, as a few on the ground claimed.

Consequently, many female students had to quit their studies. The Institute was again politicized and the academic activities were stopped. A commission was also established to investigate the matter, but no facts were brought to light. A common perception when the commissions or committees are made in the country is that they are formed to divert attention and that such matters are not meant to be resolved at all. However, the then VC was suspended and the security personnel who were involved were also suspended. The infamous scandal caused a sense of insecurity among the parents and students and hatred in radical or grieved circles (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).

The violent conflicts among the ethnicity-based student unions are also detrimental to the security of the UoB. The student unions, especially those of Baloch and Pashtun, usually end up in violent conflicts over minor issues, and the fight spreads like wildfire across the University. The nonpartisan Baloch and Pashtun remain in perpetual fear and insecurity as they are vulnerable to a sudden attack.

The presence of drugs (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023) in the premises of the UoB is also a serious threat to the overall well-being of the students. In the entire survey and the interviews conducted with the faculty and key informants, only one student organization highlighted this issue. They were of the opinion that drugs were being sold in the University, in which the administration was involved (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). The members of BSO (Pajaar) argued that they had staged protests and lobbied against the sellers, and they claim that they had curbed the drug business in UoB. In summary, as illustrated in Figure 8 (Survey's Result), considering all aspects of personal security in the University, 41% of the respondents feel secure, while 25% feel neither secure nor insecure, 17% feel insecure, 7% perceive the environment as extremely unsafe, and 10% consider it to be extremely safe.

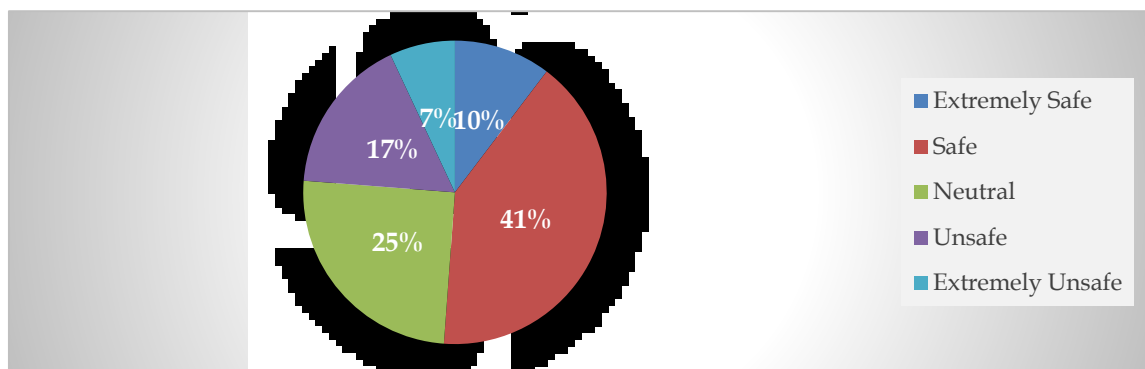


Figure 8: Students' response to the question, "How safe do you feel on campus in terms of personal security?"

Administrative Issues

The fieldwork revealed that the administration of the UoB is influenced by lobbies of Pashtun and Baloch students, who try to further the interests of their respective ethnicities. The administrative situation is further deteriorated by the involvement of other institutions, who influence the decisions of the Institute for their own interests. Another administrative issue faced by students is the non-provision of scholarships, degrees, and transcripts. The administration is said to be sluggish and slow in the provision of services. According to the field visits as shown in Figure 9 (Survey's Result), 38% of the total respondents believe that the administration of the University is not satisfactory, 27% stayed neutral, 15% expressed extreme dissatisfaction, 14% believed it is satisfactory, and only 6% expressed extreme satisfaction.

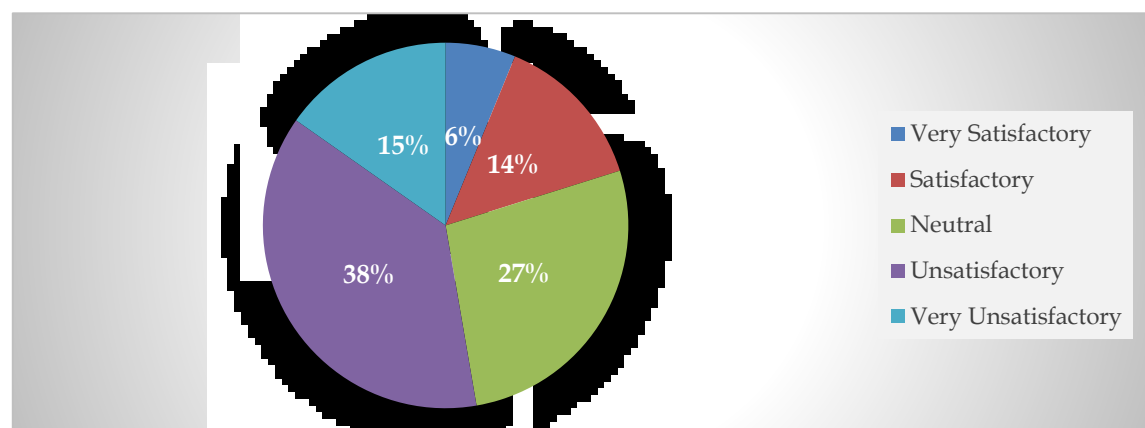


Figure 9: Students' response to the question, "In your opinion the overall state of administration and governance in the University is_____."

Lack of cleanliness and improper plantation in UoB also betray the unsatisfactory state of the administration of the Institution. The student unions have shown grave concerns, and it was also observed by the research team that proper plantation and gardening were unsatisfactory. Besides, key informants have repeatedly stressed the rampant corruption in administrative affairs. Reportedly, in the name of infrastructure development projects, money is reportedly embezzled and the contracts are given on the basis of connections. For instance, in the current laptop schemes where, as key informants believe, enormous irregularities were observed (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). Consequently, the students are losing confidence in the administration of the Institute.

The majority of the respondents, as shown in Figure 10, 35% believe that the administration is unsupportive, and 23% of respondents stayed neutral on the question, 24% believed that the administration supports students, 13% strongly disagreed with the notion and only 5% strongly agreed that the administration of the University is supportive. As a whole, the overall administrative reputation of the UoB is not good.

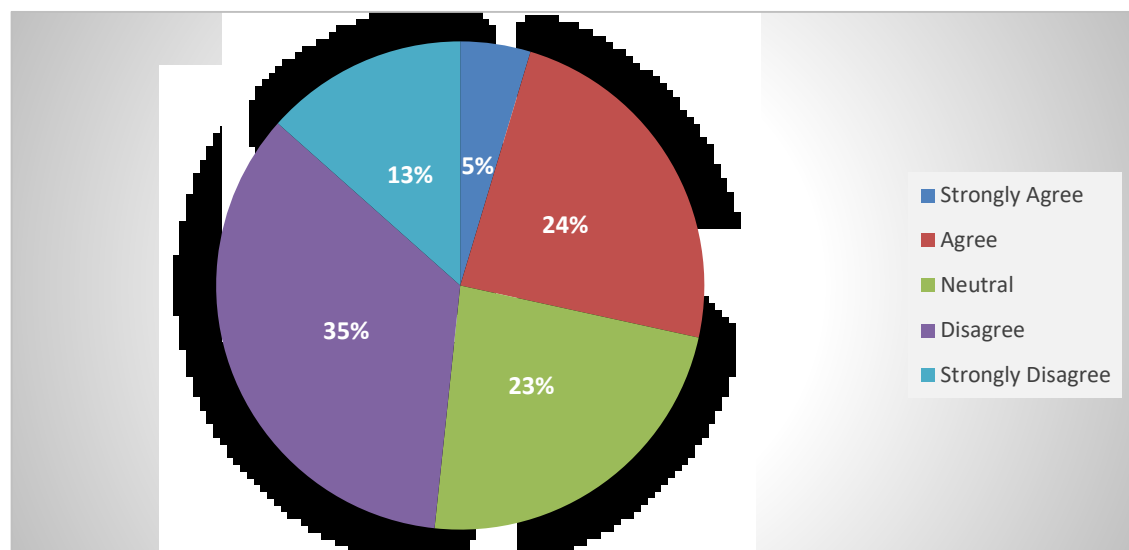


Figure 10: Students' response to the question, "Do you agree or disagree that the administration of the University is supportive?"

Infrastructure Issues

The infrastructure of UoB is not as per the educational standards of the 21st century. The classes are not digitalized. The Internet connections are not supportive of promoting research. The library is comparatively small as the number of students has hugely increased. There are no well-equipped research centers and laboratories for students. Many students brought to the attention of the research team that proper washrooms and sanitation are significantly lacking and the buildings require proper maintenance and renovation. Also, no facilities like ramps or brail for differently able students were observed by the team in the UoB vicinity. As shown in Figure 11 (Survey's Result), 34% respondents expressed dissatisfaction in terms of campus infrastructure and facilities including internet and technology resources, 21% expressed satisfaction, 18% stayed neutral, 18% showed extreme dissatisfaction while only 9% were extremely satisfied in this regard.

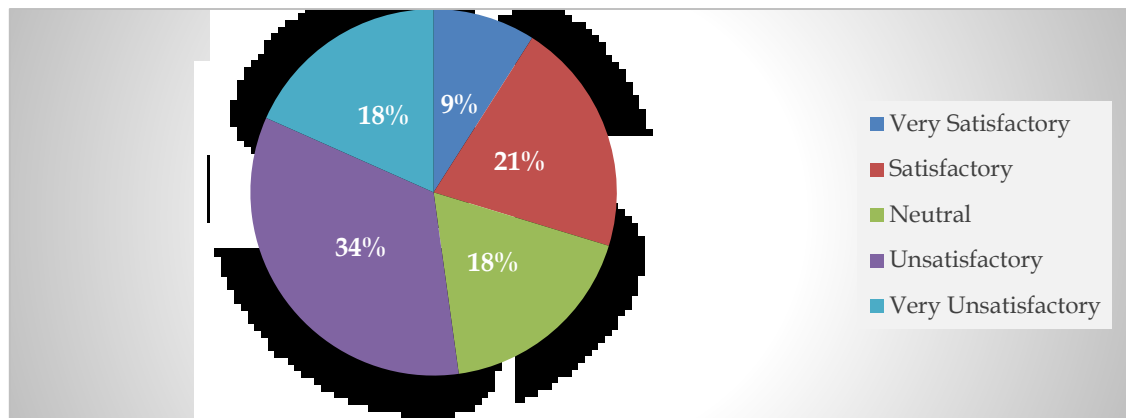


Figure 11: Students' response to the question, "How satisfied are you with the campus infrastructure and facilities, including Internet and technology resources?"

Nepotism/Degradation of Merit in Admissions and Recruitment

Degradation of merit is widely believed in the affairs of the UoB. A great number of students and a couple of key informants believed that violation of merit is common in the University during the admission of the students and the recruitment of the staff. The students are given admission on the basis of their connections with the department's faculty. The students are also admitted under the duress of student unions. These students admitted through connections, bring several problems such as that they fail and are again given admission. They bully other students and also behave inappropriately towards the faculty. They demand marks while pressurizing the teachers (Survey's Result). As a consequence, these students become privileged over others. The biggest harm they do is, they waste seats (Focused Group Discussion with Student Organizations, Direct Correspondence, December 2023). In the recruitment process, major irregularities are noted in the appointment of contracted employees. However, there are chances of transparent appointments of permanent members of the faculty due to the presence of the selection board and the eligibility criteria (Kaleem Ullah Barech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024).

As shown in Figure 12 (Survey's Result), 34% respondents have agreed that there are biases in classrooms, 25% strongly agreed to the question, 21% stayed neutral, 15% shunned any idea of favoritism and only 5% strongly disagreed to the question.

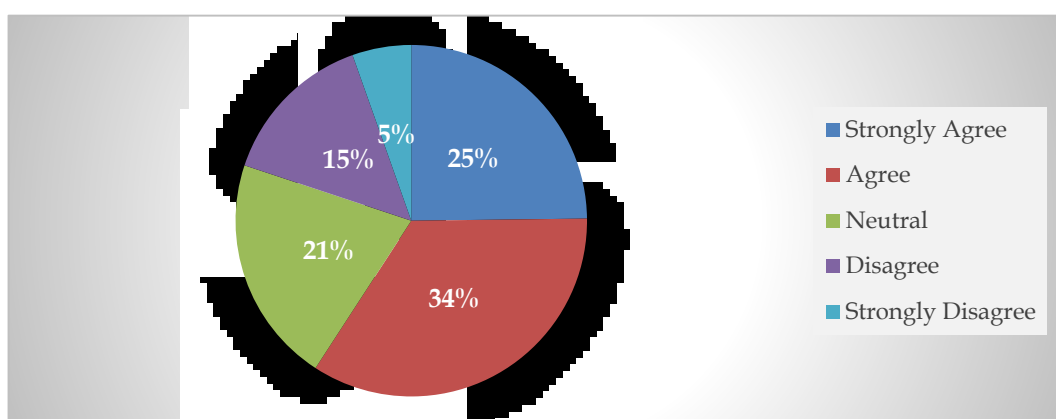


Figure 12: Students' response to the question, "Do you agree or disagree that there are prejudices (biases/favoritism) in classrooms?"

Academic Issues

As already depicted in Figure 5, the overall academic quality at the University is deemed unsatisfactory, the VC UoB acknowledges that the academic atmosphere is compromised and he blames acute financial issues for such a compromised atmosphere (Kaleem Ullah Barech, Direct Correspondence, August 2024). The lack of resources, political interference, and administrative flaws further exacerbate the situation, significantly impacting the Institute's academic quality.

The academic quality at UoB is also hampered because many respondents believe that while there is a healthy interaction between teachers and students, the chairpersons of certain departments have personal issues with the teachers or sometimes even with the students. This creates an atmosphere that is not conducive to quality interaction or learning. A great number of them also shared their personal instances of how the chairpersons of their respective departments get personal with other teachers as well as with students. As shown in Figure 13 (Survey's Result), 30% respondents stayed neutral on the question of healthy student-teacher interaction, 29% agreed and 15% strongly agreed that there is healthy student-teacher interaction, which indeed is satisfying. 17% disagreed, while 9% strongly disagreed to the notion.

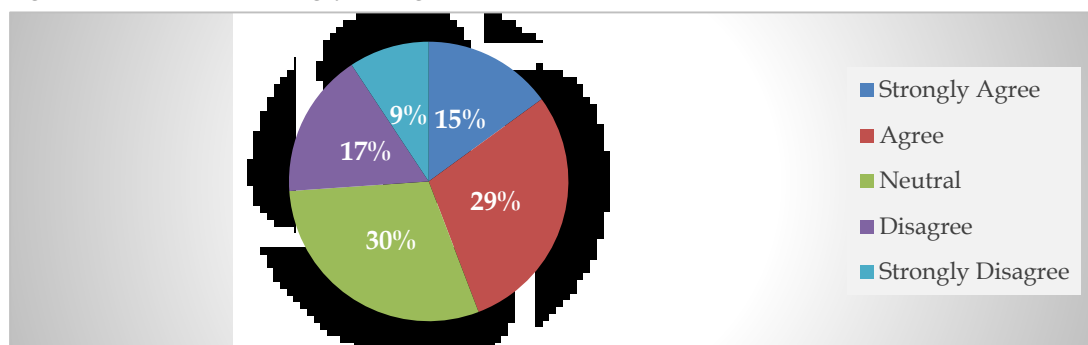


Figure 13: Students' response to the question, "To what extent do you feel there is a healthy interaction between students and teachers?"

In short, the University faces a myriad of structural issues. Core concerns include misgovernance, financial crises, incompetent administration, political interference, nepotism, corruption, autocratic and egoistic chairpersons, condensed courses, poor policies, and issues with myriad unions based on ethnicity. The irony is that despite being the largest University in the province, research opportunities in the UoB are almost non-existent, as shown in figure 14.

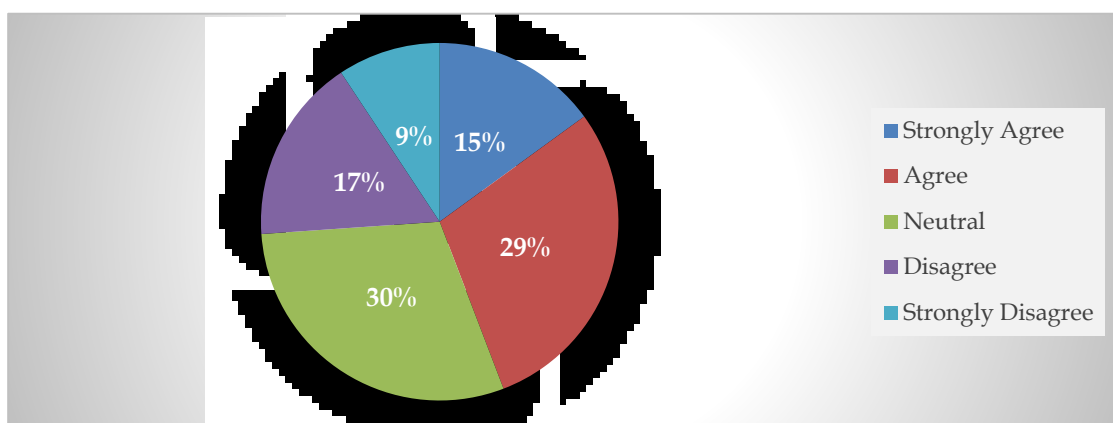


Figure 14: Students' response to the question, "Are there sufficient research opportunities available to students at the University?"

Conclusion

The UoB is the oldest Institute of higher education in Balochistan. With its expansion, the UoB faces a variety of difficulties, including problems with governance, financial crises, political meddling, security concerns, and inefficiencies in the administrative processes. Changes in the law, most notably the adoption of the Balochistan Universities Act of 2022, have made some things better and some adverse. Political interference from sub-nationalist parties and other institutions further muddles academic decision-making and adds to the uneasy atmosphere. Security issues, including enforced disappearances and scandals involving harassment, further erode the Institution's credibility. Inadequate infrastructure hinders the pursuit of modern educational standards, while administrative inefficiencies, degradation of merit, and favoritism compound these problems. Stated differently, the UoB faces a systemic crisis that imperils its capacity, integrity, and ability to fulfill its educational goals.

Recommendations

To safeguard both the University's future and the aspirations of its students, swift and significant reforms are needed. Surprisingly, almost all the respondents of the faculty, staff associations as well as various ethnic student unions had only grievances to share but no solid recommendations to offer to solve them. The recommendations are arrived at by the research team and submitted as follows:

- a. At the individual level, it is the responsibility of every student, teacher, administrative staff, and all others associated with the UoB to ensure the smooth functioning of the University. To achieve this, various posters could be displayed throughout the University, reminding stakeholders that they have a vested interest in the Institution and should contribute to its well-being with honesty and integrity.
- b. Those who fail to adhere to basic protocols should face appropriate sanctions according to the rules, ensuring that no one is exempted from the rules and regulations governing the UoB.
- c. With the authority granted to him under the Act, the VC can take measures to prevent external influences from disrupting academic activities on campus. However, he ought to be supported by the Chancellor and the Chief Minister of the province.
- d. Students should contribute a small amount of money daily for bus services, let's say Rs. 30-50 per student per ride, which will help maintain these buses, as they otherwise require a significant amount of money for regular maintenance (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024).
- e. As far as financial crises and monetary mismanagement are concerned, there is weight in the VC's contention that the national financial crisis casts its shadow on the financial matters of the University. Therefore, considering the ongoing economic hardships faced by Pakistan, no more sub-campus or main campuses should be made for at least the next 10 years.
- f. As for the finances of the current universities, the research team agrees with the VC UoB that the subject of Higher Education should not be given back to the center; instead, the provincial authorities should learn to run this sector, as many

of the problems faced by the University are because of administrative incapability and not because of limited provincial or federal powers (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024).

- g. However, due to poor standard of education in Balochistan, reliance must continue on HEC for policies and methodologies which are being followed by other universities in the country.
- h. After the 18th Amendment, the removal of Education from the Concurrent List also made the provinces responsible for running the universities. The provincial government must include expenditure on the universities in its annual budget.
- i. The government should pay the pensions and the salaries through the budget. The revenue generated by the University would be sufficient for the expenditures of the Institute. GoB should also plan to allot an endowment fund of at least Rs. 12-15 billion for all the universities of Balochistan. This amount could be built gradually on an annual basis.
- j. Many students attend five to six semesters without paying their fees and then leave for other universities, resulting in significant financial losses for the Institution. To address this, students should be prohibited from taking exams if they have not paid their fees, starting from the first semester. Currently, fee payments are only enforced during the clearance process after eight semesters, and there is inadequate oversight on fee clearance bodies, which must be improved.
- k. As recommended in Grand Dialogue on “Unresolved Financial Crises of the University of Balochistan & to Propose Amendments for inclusion of Elected Representation of Teachers, Officers, Employees and their Associations” & “Students in the Statuary Bodies of Universities of Balochistan Act 2022” (UoB, 2022), on the administrative side there should be a transparent financial method of regular audits, clear budget allocations, granting pensions, and public reporting of financial expenditures. The Education Minister being the Pro-Chancellor of the provincial universities should take a keen interest in their smooth running and report on their operations to the Chief Minister at least quarterly or biannually.
- l. The administrative reforms are also necessary to address inefficiencies and nepotism in the University administration. This could entail encouraging merit-based hiring, expediting procedures, and cultivating an accountable culture. For example, a feedback form should be filled out by students after every semester, keeping their identities confidential. They should have the option to neither write their names nor roll numbers on it. In this form, students should provide feedback about each teacher who taught them in that semester. The results of these forms should be shared with the teachers, heads of relevant departments, relevant deans, and the VC.
- m. Teachers should also fill out an annual form related to the overall functioning of the University, the efficiency of the VC, and the administration. This form should be submitted to the Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor every year.

- n. The Vice Chancellor of the university should also compile an annual report on the overall functioning of the institution, including the efficiency of the administrative and teaching staff, and submit it to the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, and the Chief Minister of Balochistan.
- o. The concerned authorities for points l, m, and n should take a serious interest in these feedback reports and make relevant, optimal, and prompt decisions based on them to ensure the effective functioning of the Institution.
- p. Promotion of legislative changes is essential to Balochistan's higher education system, such as the creation of a regional Higher Education Commission is the need of the hour to meet urgent institutional needs that have been made mandatory by the 18th Amendment (Shah Ali Bugti, Direct Correspondence, December 2023).
- q. The safety and security of all students within the University premises, regardless of gender, should be ensured through collaboration with LEAs.
- r. It was surprising to learn that the hostels were divided between Pashtun and Baloch students, and they did not share rooms. The VC affirmed to the research team that he has ended the segregation of hostels (Dr. Shafique Ur Rehman, Direct Correspondence, January 2024), which is indeed a positive step. There should not be any such segregation in the future. Instead, the University authorities should ensure the creation of a conducive environment for diversity. This will play a key role in terms of the personal security of the students, particularly those living in hostels.
- s. The University requires infrastructural development to modernize facilities and meet the needs of students and faculty. Investments are needed in digitalization, both in academic and regular administrative activities, as well as upgrading research centers and laboratories, and improving sanitation and maintenance standards.
- t. Proper attention be given to the infrastructural and technological needs of the University. As the only University in the province offering extensive courses at affordable fees, students from poor and lower-middle-class backgrounds can only afford higher education from this Institution. Such investments can ensure the removal of class barriers in Balochistan.
- u. The Balochistan Universities Act 2022 should be reviewed by a competent body to ensure the elimination of nepotism and bypassing of merit in the Institution.
- v. Relegating the powers of the Chancellor to the provincial government's minister and functionaries has brought down the autonomous nature of a university. Instead of dealing with one Chancellor, now the VCs have to deal with Pro Chancellor and a number of junior secretaries and officials. This diffusion of authority will be detrimental to higher education (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024).
- w. Expenditures on staff vehicles, including those for the Deans, should be reduced, and additional fuel grants should not be provided, as their duties do not require travel.

- x. There are ghost employees and others who are frequently on leave, working only two to three months but receiving pay throughout the year (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024). They should either be forced to be disciplined in their conduct or be terminated.
- y. Departments that have fewer than 15 students should be closed/merged, if not permanently, at least for a few years until more students express desire to get admission in these departments or the scope of these departments gets a high nose, as the financial crunch does not allow for running such departments. It is also not wise to pay a faculty of seven to ten members for fewer than 15 students, as it is a waste of money, time, and space (Brig Agha Ahmad Gul, Direct Correspondence, June 2024).
- z. All the above-mentioned measures will be in vain if external interference in the internal affairs of the university is not countered and eliminated. This can only be achieved if the CM and the Governor fully support the VC and neither interfere themselves nor allow any other institution to interfere in the administration and overall functioning of the university.
- aa. No pressure group should be allowed to disrupt academic activities at UoB.

References

- Calculators, G. (2022). *Sample size calculator*. GoodCalculators. <https://goodcalculators.com/sample-size-calculator/>
- COMSATS. (2021). *COMSATS Annual Performance Report 2020–2021*.
- Dell, E., Esterman, M., & Marchetti, C. (2022). Equity and Inclusion Considerations in the Work of Academic Governance. *Proceedings of the 2022 Conference for Industry and Education Collaboration, CIEC 2022*. <https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2-1120-45676>
- HEC. (2022). *Annual Report 2022-23*.
- HEC. (2024). *news Governance and Quality Assurance Key Challenges of Higher Education Sector: Chairman HEC*. <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/news/news/Pages/Governance-and-Quality-Assurance-Key-Challenges-of-Higher-Education-Sector-Chairman-HEC.aspx>
- Hoodbhoy, P. (2009). Pakistan's Higher Education System – What went Wrong and How to Fix it. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 48(4), 581–594. <https://doi.org/10.30541/V48I4IPP.581-594>
- <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/news/AnnualReports/Annual-Report-2022-23.pdf>
- Kester, K., Abura, M., Sohn, C., & Rho, E. (n.d.). *Higher education peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies: beyond the good/bad binary*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-04-2022-0027>
- Mustafa, G. (2012). *Education Policy Analysis Report of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*.
- News, & Desk. (2023, May 2). *Balochistan university teachers, staff continue protest against salaries non-payment*. 24 DIGITAL. <https://www.24newshd.tv/2-May-2023/balochistan-university-teachers-staff-continue-protest-against-salaries-non-payment>
- Nihad, G. (2021, November 16). *Missing students: Educational activities suspended again at Balochistan University as protest resumes*. DAWN. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1658806>
- Notezai, M. A. (2020, September 8). *UoB's video scandal: the tip of the iceberg*. DAWN. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1578777>
- Registrar, U. (2021). *Closure of the University*. University of Balochistan. <http://www.uob.edu.pk/Notification/circulardata/close%20notice.jpeg>
- Rehman, D. aziz U. (2025). *The erosion of university autonomy*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2525784/the-erosion-of-university-autonomy>
- Scholars at Risk*. (2024). <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>
- The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 15(2), Pub. L. No. 8106, 85 (2022). <http://www.uob.edu.pk/aboutuob/The%20Act%202022.pdf>

- The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 23(1), Pub. L. No. 8106, 85 (2022).
<http://www.uob.edu.pk/aboutuob/The%20Act%202022.pdf>
- The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 25(1), Pub. L. No. 8106, 85 (2022).
<http://www.uob.edu.pk/aboutuob/The%20Act%202022.pdf>
- The Balochistan Universities Act, 2022, Article 27(1), Pub. L. No. 8106, 85 (2022).
<http://www.uob.edu.pk/aboutuob/The%20Act%202022.pdf>
- Times Higher Education. (2024). *University of Balochistan, World University Rankings*.
<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-balochistan>
- Usman, S. (2014). Governance and Higher Education in Pakistan: What Roles do Boards of Governors Play in Ensuring the Academic Quality Maintenance in Public Universities versus Private Universities in Pakistan? *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(2), 38. <https://doi.org/10.5430/IJHE.V3N2P38>