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CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CENTRALIZED ADMISSION PROCESS FACED BY FEMALE HIGHER SECONDARY COLLEGE STUDENTS. A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The current education system in Pakistan is rooted in the colonial era, with a centralized structure inherited from British India. While there have been some reforms and changes over the years, the system has remained largely unchanged since the country's independence in 1947. SECCAP, the Sindh Electronic Centralized College Admission Program implements the Centralized Admission Process (CAP) for Intermediate colleges in Sindh (SECCAP, 2022). The aim of this study is to gather insights from students to understand their perspectives on the effectiveness of CAP, and to explore insights from students to understand its benefits or challenges. This research opts for a qualitative and phenomenological study design due to the nature of the research objectives. The population under consideration for this study comprises students who enrolled in Intermediate (11th grade) using CAP in Govt. college. The sample selected for this study involved twenty-five 11th-grade students who have undergone the Intermediate admissions process via CAP. This research has embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the CAP in Pakistan, with a specific lens on the challenges faced by female HSC students. As we delve into the three key themes Challenges with the CAP, Gender-related Challenges, and Suggestions of improvement. The student-led recommendations for CAP system in Pakistan echo a collective call for transformative improvements. Students emphasize the urgency of enhancing the CAP app's speed and use–friendliness, ensuring it caters to diverse tech skill levels. Future study can be a longitudinal study tracking the experiences of students over multiple academic cycles could provide insight into the long-term impact of CAP on their educational trajectories.

Keywords: Sindh Electronic Centralized College Admission Policy, Gender Inequality, Admission Policies, Education in Pakistan, Challenges of HSC students

INTRODUCTION

Education system in Pakistan is divided into six levels of education: Pre-Primary, Primary, Middle, Secondary (SSC), Higher Secondary (HSC/FSC) and Higher Education (UNESCO, 2010). Transition from one level of education to other level plays a critical role in the development of a student, especially from Secondary to Higher Secondary. Because this phase helps learners advance towards intellectual openness. This is the point which lays the foundation for the future career path of an individual. Access to information is one of the critical elements of social capital theory. Denial or lack of which can seriously hamper the future development of an individual.

This study is aimed to understand the challenges and opportunities of Centralized Admission Process (CAP), under Sindh Electronic Centralized College Admission Program (SECCAP), faced by female HSC students. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG-4) is key part of seventeen interrelated SDGs (Abbas et al., 2021). Main aspect of SDG-4 is ensuring the access to quality education and foster opportunities for lifelong learning (Diemer & Khushik, 2020). The lack of this can be attributed to many reasons and many researchers have discussed it. The report by Hunter (2020) lists a few of them. According to the report several key challenges faced by country are, high number of children out of school, gender and socioeconomic disparities, regional disparities, lack of infrastructure and resource, private education, and lack of standard national curriculum.

According to study by Hunter (2020) on Pakistan's education system, gender disparities are strongly marked with, significant gap between boys' and girls'

attendance at school. Issues such as safety concerns in rural areas, giving low or no value to girls' education and child marriages, make it difficult for females to continue the school for longer periods (Fayaz et al., 2023).

The report further mentions the more challenges faced by secondary education system in Pakistan. Education system of Pakistan has roots to British colonial rule (Ahmed, Lashari & Golo, 2023). Development of it, after partition, was not ideal. This system heavily relies on rote learning and competitive examination having high stakes. A very small fraction of students moves on to Class XI after the matric examinations. This low transition rate depicts the extensive systemic issues in the education system (Hunter, 2020). These coupled with challenges faced by female students make the problem even worse.

In the context of Pakistan, education holds immense significance for the country's progress and development (Mooman, Ali & Lashari, 2023). Pakistan faces various challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, and gender inequality. Education has the potential to address these challenges by empowering individuals, promoting economic growth, and fostering social cohesion (UNESCO, 2010).

The current education system in Pakistan is rooted in the colonial era, with a centralized structure inherited from British India (Salman, et al., 2023). While there have been some reforms and changes over the years, the system has remained largely unchanged since the country's independence in 1947.

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, passed in 2010, devolved education from a federal to a provincial subject. The decentralization aimed to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of the education system by empowering the provincial government to tailor education policies to their specific needs (Amir, et al., 2020).

Pakistan's secondary education system emphasizes high-stakes exams and rote learning. Students complete middle school and pass provincial exams to enter secondary school which consists of lower-secondary (grades 9-10) and upper-secondary (grades 11-12). Previously for admission to a government college, the students would require an attested copy of SSC Part 1, admission form, and admission fee, and the admission was done manually (Wenr, 2021).

SECCAP, the Sindh Electronic Centralized College Admission Program implements the Centralized Admission Process (CAP) for Intermediate colleges in Sindh (SECCAP, 2022).

A Centralized Admission Process can improve efficiency and consistency, attract a more diverse applicant pool, and boost an institution's reputation. Streamlining the process ensures equal treatment for all applicants. By expanding outreach and applying inclusive standards, a centralized can attract a more diverse pool of students (Machado, & Szerman, 2021).

Despite its potential benefits, the centralized admission process (CAP) can also present challenges for learners in third-world countries. These challenges stem from the unique socio-economic, technological, and infrastructural factors that hinder their access to information, resources, and support during the admission process (Samad & Lashari, 2022). The challenges that the learners face include limited access to information & resources, technological divide & lack of digital literacy, lack of guidance & support network, and cultural & and socio-economic disparities (Goba, 2023).

The transition from matric to intermediate is a critical juncture in the educational journey of students in Pakistan. However, many students face challenges during this transition, which can have a negative impact on their academic achievement and prospects (Business Recorder. 2011).

One of the biggest challenges associated with the transition from Matric to Intermediate is the admission system at the college level. Forbes in the article "Privilege bias" highlights the influence that money has during college admission. Furthermore, the article points out the competitive edge that privileged children have due to their resources (Murrell, A., 2019). This indicates that money is one of the socioeconomic factors that have an impact on college admission. In addition to the lack of awareness, female students also face practical barriers to accessing the CAP. The challenges faced by female students during the Centralized Admission Process were exacerbated by the existing gender disparity (Stokes, 2023).

Due to the inaugural implementation of SECCAP and CAP in Govt. colleges in Sindh, current literature on this academic year's specific context and the challenges encountered by female students are notably scarce. The novelty of these programs in their initial year restricts the availability of comprehensive academic resources, highlighting the need for research to address the dearth of information

on the experiences faced by female students within the SECCAP and CAP system.

Research Objectives

- To gather insights from students to understand their perspectives on the effectiveness of CAP.
- To explore insights from students to understand the challenged in of CAP.

Research Questions

- What are the perspectives of female students regarding the effectiveness of CAP?
- What are the perspectives of female students regarding the challenges of CAP?

Literature Review

Introduction to CAP and SECCAP in Sindh

The Centralized Admission Policy (CAP) in Sindh was introduced in the year 2000 by the Education Department, Government of Sindh. Its primary objective was to streamline the admissions process for Class XI in colleges and higher secondary education, eliminating irregularities and ensuring equal opportunity for students based on merit (KARACHI: Each Town to Have One Model College Soon, 2006). The policy was deemed successful in achieving its targets and was continued in subsequent years, with a committee overseeing the admissions process. This policy was later transformed into the Sindh E-Centralized College Admission Program (SECCAP). The change to a digital platform aimed to further streamline and modernize the admissions process, making it more accessible and transparent (SECCAP, 2023).

"Centralized admission policy will regulate all admissions in Colleges / Degree Colleges / Post Graduate Colleges under the jurisdiction of College Education Government of Sindh under the system of 'Sindh Electronic Centralized Admission Policy', built to granting admission in Government Colleges of Sindh in XI-XII, for students who have completed their Matric Level education from any of the board of Pakistan are eligible for this admission (Fayaz et al., 2023). The policy is to streamline the process of admission and eliminate all sorts of irregularities as well as to provide equal opportunities to the students getting admissions in the Government Colleges of Sindh and selected Higher Secondary Schools of Karachi as per laid down procedures." (SECCAP, 2023)

Admission process to the intermediate colleges had been unchanged for large part of history after independence. In 2002 after a long delay, the committee established for admission to class XI in intermediate colleges of Karachi, laid down the schedule of admissions (Dawn, 2002). Even though CAP was implemented, the whole process was mostly manual from the administrative side of the policy. Students were supposed to buy the physical application booklets and then submit the same along with paid vouchers at respective banks. The data was manually handled by CAP employees and a merit list was prepared. Technology adaptance level was low among the CAP management and also the students along with their family members. And this process was followed until the SECCAP policy was enforced in 2018 onwards.

CAP (Centralized Admission Process) means the complete admission process, which includes the submission of application forms for admission (Law Insider, 2013). SECCAP (Sindh Education Centralized College Admission Program) is a 2023-2024 program, and the goal of this program is to regulate the admissions of class XI (SECCAP, 2023).

The theoretical framework used to understand the challenges faced by students during the transition from Matric to Intermediate was the theory of social capital. According to social capital theory, the network of relationships and resources that people have access to plays a vital role (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241–258). According to this theory, students with a high level of social capital are more likely to be successful in life.

Social capital theory gained the attention of sociologists and experts in sociology. This theory was advanced by Coleman (1988) by focusing on the function of social capital and considering it key in the creation of human capital in children. He presents the concept that social capital exists in the relationships between peoples and plays the role of catalyst in outcome of individual under certain situations (Buriro et al., 2023). His study is very well taken by the educationist and sociologist, having great influence in future theory development.

Theory of social capital came in public discourse after publishing of a book "Bowling Alone" by Putnam (2000). He argues that social capital features the network of civil engagement norms of reciprocity, and trust among the citizens.

Furthermore, he highlighted the decline of social capital in America and its impact on democratic and civic life.

Overview of CAP and SECCAP Implementation in Government Colleges in Sindh

This centralized admission policy was aimed to address the admissions in the colleges of Karachi only. An application form was supposed to be bought from authorized locations and students had to fill in the form manually and submit the same. This process even though facilitated the student in general but serious issues surfaced due to shallowness of the policy (Fayaz et al., 2023). For example, the admission policy for the students having passed their matriculation exam with computer science as a subject would not be able to get admissions to pre-medical classes at colleges (Dawn, 2002). Several such incidents were reported. Students along with their parents were left with difficult choices to make. If the CAP policy had been given more thought and various previous decisions had been taken into account, then such incidents could have been avoided. Whenever there is significant change in policy, especially a policy which has an effect on thousands of students, it should be dealt with rigorous undertaking (Samejo, Lashari & Mahar, 2023). This would avoid loop holes and greatly reduces complains and grievances of the affected parties.

National Education Policy (2009) highlights various challenges and shortcomings of the prevailing education system. Access and participation levels are at low levels as compared to other countries of region, and worldwide. The policy focuses on developing counselling at higher secondary level. The policy mentions the need to develop a system of ranking among educational institutions across the country. Also, the National Merit Program to be introduced to award bright student (National Education Policy, 2009). While addressing various facets of the education system, implicitly dealt with issues related to admissions and dropouts through its broader objectives and strategies. The policy recognized the systemic deficiencies in the education sector, particularly emphasizing the commitment and implementation gaps. These gaps affected the overall educational environment, likely contributing to issues in admissions and increasing dropout rates. The lack of commitment was reflected in inadequate funding and neglect of public schools, leading to disparities in educational quality and accessibility. This situation would likely have influenced both the admission rates in quality institutions and the dropout rates due to poor educational infrastructure and resources.

Furthermore, the policy highlighted the divide in educational opportunities between public and private schools, which can be directly linked to challenges in admissions and dropouts. The disparity in infrastructure, quality of teachers, and examination systems created an uneven playing field, where students from less privileged backgrounds faced obstacles in gaining admission to quality schools and were more prone to dropping out due to inadequate support and resources. The focus on enhancing teacher professionalism and the need for higher qualifications was a step towards addressing these issues, albeit indirectly. By aiming to improve the standard of education and teaching, the policy sought to create an environment conducive to retaining students and ensuring equitable admission opportunities across different socio-economic strata.

National Educational Policy 2009 implicitly highlight the issues of gender gap by addressing it through broader educational reforms. The policy's vision for the inclusive and accessible education for everyone is a pointer towards the gender disparity in educational system of Pakistan. Also, it highlights and aims to rectify the systemic lacking, such as governance and adequate resource allocation, and emphasizing the professional development of teaching staff. In doing so, it indirectly supports toward creating an environment more conducive to girl's education. These steps can ultimately reduce the gender disparities and provided equitable educational landscape for entire population.

After the devolution of power of education sector to provincial government due to 18th amendment in the constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD) was given green signal, to attain full jurisdiction of the education in Sindh. The first Sindh Education Sector Plan 2014-18 was thus formulated. It was mainly the provincial policies guiding documents and watchword for the given service delivery in the province.

The "Sindh Education Sector Plan & Roadmap 2019-2024" document outlines a strategic plan aimed at improving the education sector in Sindh, Pakistan. This comprehensive plan focuses on several key areas, including capacity building in educational

management, enhancing the quality of education, ensuring equitable access for all children, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The plan emphasizes the importance of efficient resource allocation and utilization, strategic planning at various administrative levels, and the need for improved governance and management within the education sector. It aims to address challenges such as management effectiveness, human resources management, and strategic planning to improve educational outcomes across Sindh (SESP, 2019).

The document also prioritizes issues like increasing female teacher recruitment, particularly in rural areas, and improving learning outcomes through curriculum development and teacher qualifications. It discusses the need for a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape, targeting early childhood education, primary, middle, and secondary levels, and focusing on reducing the number of out-of-school children. Additionally, the plan highlights the importance of community engagement and the role of School Management Committees in enhancing educational quality and accountability. However, due to the length and complexity of the document, this summary might not cover all aspects in detail. For a complete understanding, a thorough review of the entire document would be necessary (SESP, 2019).

Global Perspectives on CAP (Centralized Admissions)

The case study (Lyren & Wikstrom, 2020) in the chapter from Cambridge University Press outlines Sweden's higher education admission system. It particularly focuses on the selection instruments used, such as upper secondary grades and the SSAT admissions test. The Swedish educational system is characterized by a high degree of centralization and a strong emphasis on opportunities, lifelong learning, and second chances.

Admission processes for the student aspiring for higher level of education are varying globally. There is no single method adopted worldwide. If we were to characterize or group them, we would come up with five major streams.

One of the major paths taken by students progressing in their academic is to take the standardized entrance test such as SSAT, ISEE, PSAT, SAT and ACT. Some schools may require entrance examinations as part of First year college (Grade 11) admission process. For example, in India, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducts the All India Senior School Certificate Examination (AISSCE) for the First year and Second Year admission in the affiliated schools (CBSE, n.d.).

The second stream is those of the Continuous education system. Countries with continuous education system progress to Class 11 from Class 10 directly in same school. These policies ensure that there is a smooth transition from one grade to the next. There is no need for the formal admission procedures, thus making the transition seamless.

The third stream can be classified as regional quota stream. Institutions which go with this admission policy prioritize students based on their residence in the same region. For example, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Catchment Area Policy (Canada) students are eligible to attend specific public schools. Such policies are formulated with respect to geographical locations of the students' residence. And prioritizing admission accordingly (TDSB, n.d.).

The fourth stream can be admission policy based on merit. Institutions adopting merit policy prepare the merit list from the performance in the previous exam and sometime add various other factors with different weightage. Admission is thus granted to top students as per seat availability. Example of this is the CAP and SECCAP policy adopted in Sindh.

And the fifth stream is of admission policy adopted by high schools or colleges to go for Holistic Assessment and interviews. For example: United World Colleges (UWC) is a network of international schools that follow the holistic approach to admissions. They perform interviews and assessments along with academic performance to evaluate the admission decision (UWC, 2022). This ensures that both institute and students have fair chance. Students who might have due to some reason not performed in one instance would get the opportunity to prove their aptitude in other ways and thus overcoming potential refusal.

Students with better information on choosing colleges and majors with the help of application guidebook plus a school workshop can significantly improve the student-college match by 0.1 to 0.2 standard deviation (Ye, 2023). The findings of Ye (2023) are inline the Social Capital theory. Centralized admission system rewards the candidates having better information to make strategic choices for colleges. Access to information with additional

support of workshops and/or coaching session can make significant improvement.

Looking at the global perspective of centralized admission versus decentralized admission process, there are significant differences among the students of varying abilities. According to Hafalir et al. (2018), students demonstrating lower ability prefer the decentralized admission process, and vice versa. If we analyze it in context, these findings correspondence with reality. As the students having higher ability perform well in various centralized tests and exams, they tend to prefer to have merit based centralized admission process. By virtue of which, they would be most likely to being admitted to the most preferred college in the respective field. Whereas the students with significantly lower capabilities would like to get preference of other factors, such as distance from place of residence, difficulty of mobility, gender diversity, and etc., Such that, these students are able to secure the admission in preferred college.

Gender disparity in Admission Process and Educational Access

With the adoption of digital technologies, the female students have got relief while applying for admission through centralized admission process. Ease of applying from the comfort of home has empowered them to seek the admission as per merit to any college (OCAS, 2022)

There are many studies being carried out to provide the explanation for the gender gap in Higher education enrollment (Blau, 1998; Goldin et.al, 2006) and their different choices due to difference in gender. From literature review, it can be suggested the presence of plausible. Various factors affecting the colleges choices by female students as compared to their male counterpart is giving more weight to distance to college from home, and their male counterpart focusing more on to the admission to colleges which are more likely to give better job placement opportunities (Saygin, 2012).

As per Marta & Michelle (2023), despite the overall progress in bridging the gender gap in OECD countries, yet, gender gaps persist in favor of boys in fields like mathematics and numeracy. This disparity is attributed to persistent gender stereotypes and cultural constructs that negatively impact girls' confidence and interest, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field.

Gender gap in labor market and economic growth in OECD countries is still not bridged. Women, often face limitation in employment, are less likely to become managers or entrepreneurs, and earn less than men Gender disparities in labor force and education have significant implications, with potential income losses in different regions due to these inequalities.

According to study by Mehmood et al., (2018) females in Pakistan face significant obstacles in accessing higher education due to a range of socio-economic and cultural factors. Key challenges include personal safety concerns, gender discrimination, early marriages, and financial constraints. Specifically, the study found that 62.10% of females face sexual harassment in various settings, including public transport and educational institutions. Feudalism and religious misconceptions also impact female education, with 69.8% and 54.9% respectively. The study also notes that early school dropout among girls is often caused by financial limitations, early marriages, and domestic responsibilities

Another research aimed to identify obstacles faced by female higher education students in Pakistan and to examine what enables some women to overcome these obstacles (Laiqat, 2022). The study was based on Connell's framework of gender relations and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. It found that factors such as the role of the father, women's social and cultural subordination, gender division of labor, travel and security risks, urban-rural divide, and the role of government and educational institutions play a critical role. The research highlights the importance of paternal support in daughters' access to higher education and notes that overcoming these challenges often starts at home (Laiqat, 2022).

International Perspectives on Gender Equity in Education

In exploring international perspectives on gender equity in education, it is essential to compare and contrast the experiences of female students in Pakistan with those in other countries that share similar centralized admission systems. This analysis aims to shed light on potential best practices and lessons that can be applied to the Pakistani context.

Research studies globally highlight the impact of centralized admission systems on female students. A cross-cultural examination reveals common challenges faced by female students, such as limited

access to resources and societal expectations. For instance, a study by Garcia et al. (2017) indicates that in countries with centralized admission processes, girls often encounter barriers to accessing higher education due to socioeconomic factors and gender stereotypes. Comparing these findings with the challenges faced by female students in Pakistan within the CAP system can provide valuable insights into shared struggles and potential solutions.

Several countries have implemented effective strategies to promote gender equity in education. Nordic countries, for instance, are known for their successful initiatives in fostering equal opportunities for male and female students. Research by Svensson et al. (2019) highlights the importance of comprehensive policies that address both structural and cultural barriers to gender equity in education. Analyzing such best practices can offer valuable lessons for Pakistan in enhancing the inclusivity of its centralized admission system.

Learning from the experiences of countries with established centralized admission systems, especially in addressing gender disparities, can inform policy enhancement in Pakistan. The case of Sweden, as studied by Anderson et al. (2020), demonstrates that positive outcomes of proactive measures to counteract gender-based educational gaps. Lessons learned from the implementation of supportive policies, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns in these countries can guide similar initiatives in Pakistan.

An international perspective on gender equity in education provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges faced by female students in Pakistans centralized admission system.

Method & Procedure

This research opts for a qualitative and phenomenological study design due to the nature of the research objectives. Qualitative research methods, particularly a phenomenological approach, allow for an in-depth exploration and understanding of individuals' lived experiences, perceptions, and the subjective nature of their realities. In this specific case, the aim is to delve into the unique experiences and challenges encountered by female HSC students in the context of the CAP system.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research methods, such as phenomenological studies, are well-suited for exploring individuals' experiences, attitudes, and the meaning they attribute to specific phenomena. These methods allow researchers to gain a deep understanding of the complexities and nuances inherent in the subjective experiences of the participants.

The study collected the primary data from the First-Year college students of Zamzama college. The selection criteria included the student having firsthand experience of CAP in year 2023. Responses were gathered from qualifying students until the saturation point was reached. Time period selected was the CAP admission process of 2023. Semi-structured interview was conducted in the Urdu/English language.

The population under consideration for this study comprises students who enrolled in Intermediate (11th grade) using CAP in Govt college. These students represent the broader ground affected by the CAP system in their education pursuits.

The sample selected for this study involved twenty-five 11th-grade students who have undergone the Intermediate admissions process via CAP. This sample-size approach enables the study to gather in-depth insights from individual experiences within the CAP system, as opposed to generalizability to a larger population (Patton. M. O, 2015).

The research participant selected for study, were appropriate as they met the inclusion criteria of being a Female candidate, which secured admission via SECCAP.

The research applied to gather the primary data from the participants of the selected sample population, was a semi-structured interview. The interview included open-ended questions to entice participants to share their experience. All necessary precautions and steps were taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, which allowed researcher to get honest and candid responses. This interview was designed to align with the theoretical framework of the study being conducted. It was directly based on specific research questions to ensure the directed and focused exploration of the CAP system's impact on Matric students' transition to Intermediate college. Research instrument was also designed to understand the perceptions and differences about the CAP implemented under the SECCAP launched by Sindh Government. Focus was on the challenges and issues faced by female students applying for admission into intermediate colleges via centralized admission policy.

The interviews were recorded using recorder to collect first hand data about the research questions.

The interview was preceded by informal discussion aiming to make students relaxed and get genuine responses.

Results

The Qualitative data analysis tools were performed in this study. This study being phenomenological, thematic data analysis of the interviews were performed. Also, the analysis of the articles published on the various digital channels, such as magazines, online articles, etc. was done.

1. The investigation into students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the CAP yielded diverse insights. A significant proportion of participants expressed overall satisfaction, citing the streamlined application process and adherence to guidelines as positive aspects. The appreciated the standardized approach, which eliminated ambiguity and provided a structured a framework for admission to Class XI. However, this positive sentiment was balanced by a substantial number of participants who faced challenges and exhibited dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the CAP system.

Technical glitches emerged as a common theme, disrupting the otherwise smooth process for some students. Issues with email communication added another layer of complexity, with occasional troubles in receiving timely and clear information. While some participants reported a generally hassle-free experience, others emphasized the need for improvements to enhance the system's functionality and user-friendliness. The challenges were not limited to technical aspects; concerns about field placements were prevalent.

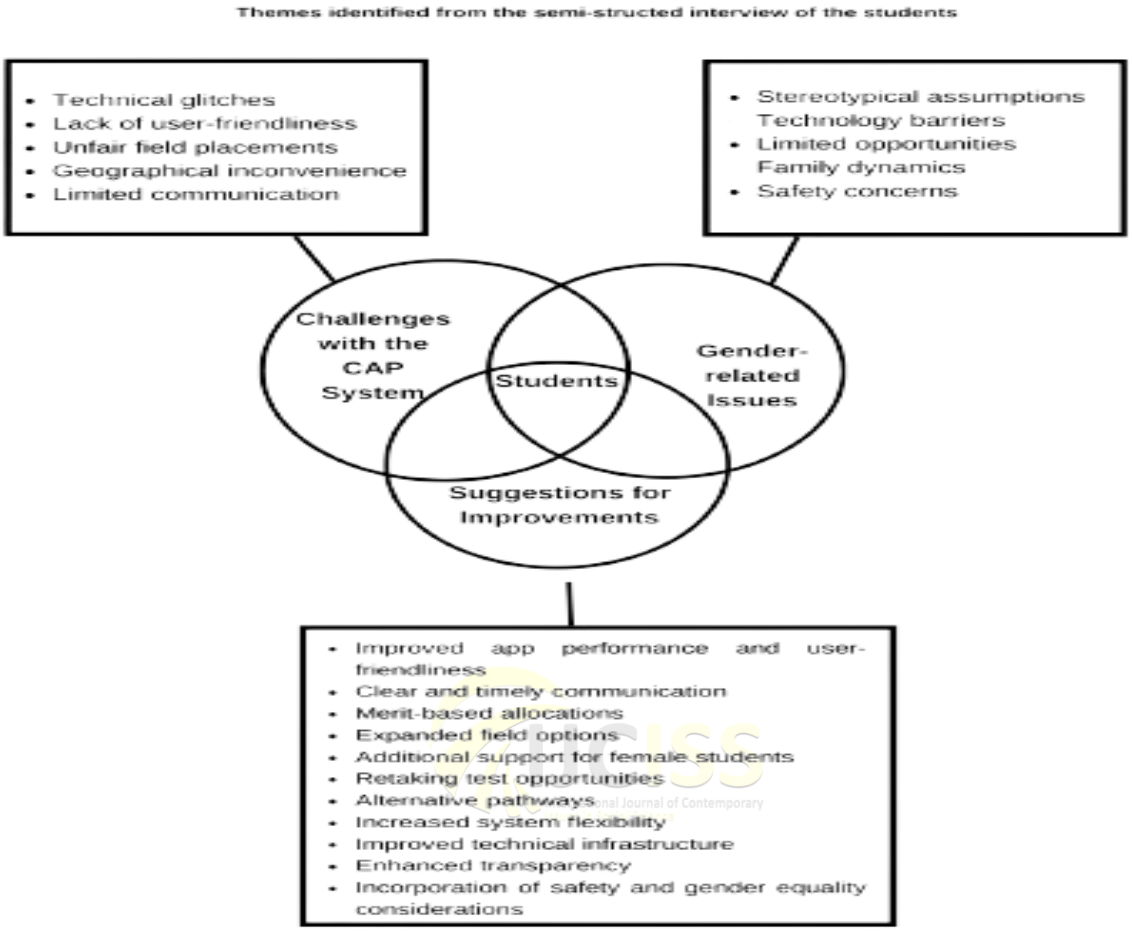
Participants described instances where the CAP system assigned them to colleges for from their merit plans and preferences. The geographical inconvenience became a significant challenge, particularly for female students, leading to discussions around transportation logistics and safety concerns. The dissatisfaction with field placements underscored the importance of a more flexible and responsive system that considers individual student needs.

2. The exploration of students' insights into the benefits and challenges of the CAP system uncovered a nuanced landscape. Positive aspects included the system's ability to streamline the application process, providing a standardized and clear pathway for students. Female candidates, in particular, appreciated the guidelines that contributed to a sense of fairness in the admission process.

However, challenges were substantial and multifaceted. Gender-related biases were evident, with stereotypical assumptions influencing students' choices of academic streams. Female participants highlighted technological barriers, where lack of computer knowledge and support from family members hindered their ability to navigate the CAP system effectively. The unequal impact of technology literacy illuminated gender disparities in the educational technology landscape.

Dissatisfaction with the field placement, geographical inconvenience, and family dynamic further shaped the challenges faced by students. The one-size-fits-all approach of the CAP system clashes with the diverse needs and circumstances of the student population, leading to calls for increased flexibility and customization.

In summary, while the CAP system demonstrated benefits in terms of process standardization, it faced significant challenges related to technology accessibility, gender biases, and the need for a more personalized and responsive approach to field placements. These findings provide valuable insights for refining the CAP system to better align with diverse needs and experiences of the student community.



Conclusion

This research project has embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the CAP in Pakistan, with a specific lens on the challenges faced by female HSC students. As we delve into the three key themes Challenges with the CAP, Gender-related Challenges, and Suggestions of improvement.

The systematic challenges inherent in the CAP system have emerged as a central focus of this study. Accessibility issues, concerns about transparency, and questions of fairness have been recurrent themes. The female students navigate the intricacies of this digital admission framework have encountered obstacles in form of technical glitches, limited access to information, and perceived lack of clarity in the selection process. The CAP system, while designed to streamline admissions, requires careful scrutiny to ensure it truly serves the diverse needs of the student of the population.

The study has shed light on how these factors influence not only access to education but also the choices female students make within the CAP framework. Striking a balance between the societal expectations and individual aspirations.

The students' recommendations go beyond mere identification of challenges for proactive suggestions for improvement. Their collective voice advocates for transparency and fairness in field placement, emphasize merit-based allocation and student preferences.

As we conclude this study, it is imperative to acknowledge the dynamic nature of educational systems and the continuous evolution of policies like CAP> The challenges unveiled in this research project provide a roadmap for policymakers,

educational institutions, and stakeholders to reflect on the current state of affairs and chart a course towards more inclusive and equitable practices. The CAP system has immense potential to be a catalyst for positive change, ensuring that ever students, regardless of gender has equal opportunities in their pursuit of higher education.

Recommendations

In response to the collective feedback from students regarding the Centralized Admission Policy (CAP) system in Pakistan, a series of structured recommendations have been formulated. These suggestions aim to revamp the admission process for class XI, ensuring it is more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. The following points encapsulate the key areas of improvement identified by the students:

- Prioritize the improvement of the CAP application's speed and user-friendliness, making it accessible for users with diverse technological skills. Establish clear, timely, and reliable communication channels, with an emphasis on consistent and efficient email correspondence for updates and inquiries.
- Expand the options and flexibility in field selection to enhance student satisfaction and reduce educational limitations. Simplify and streamline the documentation and verification process to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and make the admission process more efficient.
- Implement specific measures such as technology training, workshops, and mentorship programs to address gender-based disparities in the admission process.

Future Research

This study offers a springboard for future research endeavors aimed at deepening the understanding of educational support provision for disadvantaged students:

1. A longitudinal study tracking the experiences of students over multiple academic cycles could provide insight into the long-term impact of CAP on their educational trajectories.
2. Incorporating a comparative analysis with international centralized admission systems could offer a broader perspective, allowing for identification of best practices.

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Appendix

Challenges associated with CAP (Centralized Admission Process) faced by female HSC students. A case study.

Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire for Students Transitioning from Matric to Intermediate

- Please describe your experience with the CAP system.
- What were your expectations for the CAP system?
- Did the CAP system meet your expectations? If not, in what ways did it fall short?
- Can you highlight the 2 biggest challenges with the CAP system?
- **Additional Questions for Female Students**
- Have you faced any unique challenges as a female student going through the CAP system? Or any incident or event that occurred?

Can provide at least 1 suggestion that you have for improving the CAP system for female students?