

Discrimination in Academia: A Critical Analysis of Student Experiences in Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO			ABSTRACT
Article History:			<i>This study, "Discrimination in Academia: A Critical Analysis of Student Experiences in Higher Education" aims to analyze the different dimensions in which students are affected by academic discrimination in universities. An analysis of the different forms of academic discrimination under which the students are suffering and in what ways discrimination affects students' participation and performance. This study employed by research design, using standardized questionnaires to collect data from 250 students. The sample consisted of BS and M.Phil students from The Women University of Multan and University of Southern Punjab, Multan sector. Students' experience of discrimination on the basis of their socioeconomic status, gender, caste, and religion, and how these experiences influence their motivation was the focal point of the questionnaire. Recommendations are for supporting inclusive and equitable learning settings. The study is set to contribute to policy and practice developments that promote an equitable and favorable learning setting for all students. The study is set to contribute to policy and practice developments that promote students' well-being and academic achievement.</i>
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Introduction

Academic discrimination is a common occurrence in universities, influencing the grades and wellbeing of students. Despite the measures universities have put in place to minimize biases in terms of economic condition, belief, and class treatment (Smith & Jones, 2021; Lee & Brown, 2022), discriminatory behaviors remain a major problem for most students. Teachers' caste, religion, and class bias influences the performance of the students (Patel & Kumar, 2021; Garcia, 2023), and despite attempts, the performance of students has not been improved (Williams, 2022). Academic discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of an individual based on race, gender,

cast or appearance (Ahmed & Khan, 2023). The learning environment is extremely negative and destroys precious teacher-student relationships (Robinson & Harris, 2022), and this generates feelings of exclusion and de-motivation among the students (Baker & Kim, 2023). Past research indicates that discrimination damages academic achievement and mental well-being in the long term (Clark, 2021; Fernandes & D'Souza, 2023). Family background and age are determinants of discrimination in Indian higher education (Joseph, 2021; Martinez & Lopez, 2022). Even though there is less research on teacher bias compared to peer discrimination (Nguyen & Tran, 2023; Brooks & Zhang, 2022), it has long-term consequences (Evans & Collins, 2023). As different biases impact students, it is essential to research this field (Simmons & O'Connor, 2021). Based on research, where discrimination is reduced, grades and campus life improve (Thompson, 2022). Discrimination de-motivates students, discourages them, and they do not contribute in any activities. It can also result in stress, poor grades, and mental issues like depression and anxiety (Schwartz, 2011). Most discriminated students have a hard time settling to make friends, or accepting them, and it negatively impacts their studies (Juvonen, 2023). In order to truly make progress, universities must hear the voice of students and engage them in solving problems. By listening to the students, institutions are able to become more aware of them and build a more equal environment (Davis & Carter, 2023). Islamic scholars affirm that education needs to be equal and just because discrimination opposes Islamic teachings of justice and equity. Experts are of the opinion that universities need to fight intolerance, especially against Muslim students who are stereotyped and marginalized. By promoting respect and understanding, institutions are able to build a friendly environment for all students.

Literature Review

Academic Discrimination

Academic discrimination refers to institutional or interpersonal discrimination of students on non-academic grounds like race, gender, socio-economic status, or disability (Gurin, 2011). Examples of its expression are discriminatory grading, unequal provision of resources, and structurally discriminatory policies that place marginalized groups at a disadvantage (Ahmed & Khan, 2023).

Institutional Disparities

They are the results of economic inequalities and discriminatory recruitment. Some universities are typically plagued with persistent underfunding, while other universities deliberately shut out poor students (Johnstone, 2021; Marginson, 2022). Extravagant bureaucratic management of resources exacerbates the gaps (Martinez & Lopez, 2022). Peer culture and cultural stereotype also function to justify exclusion, especially by way of intersectional disadvantage (e.g., intersecting race and class) that amplifies marginalization (Clark, 2023).

Psychological and Academic Impacts

It includes differentiating stress, anxiety, and low motivation among impacted students (Williams, 2022; Baker & Kim, 2023). Discrimination dismantles autonomy, competence, and belonging, and therefore leads to academic burnout (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Longitudinal studies cite heightened dropout rates within marginalized groups (Reed, 2023), and stereotype threat maintains underperformance, especially within the STEM fields.

Research objectives

- To investigate the various forms of academic discrimination encountered by students at higher education institutions.
- To analyze academic discrimination effects on students engagement in their studies

Research Methodology

“The research methodology is the technique and methods applied to acquire, analyze, and draw conclusions about information related to a topic.” During the context of this research, quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires to identify trends of academic discrimination among students. (Plano Clark, 2021). A population refers to the entire group of individuals who resemble one another on some basis and are being considered in a study. The population of the current study consists of undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions in Multan district, as mentioned: The Women University Multan and University of Southern Punjab. Students of four departments, both science and humanities-based, i.e: Science Departments: Chemistry and Physics, Humanities Departments: Education and Statistics. Sample is a component of the population that is chosen for actual participation in the study. In chosen departments, a simple random sampling method was employed to remain objective and to provide an equal chance to all the students to be represented in the research. This approach was taken to maximize representativeness on key variables such as gender, discipline, and institution type, and to be in a position to more closely study how academic discrimination operates in different environments (Etikan , 2016).

Analysis

The results of statistical analysis are to examine the relationship between academics and their effects on student wells. This study used a quantitative study design and data were collected through a questionnaire that managed to sample students. The mean and standard deviation of each encoder element are displayed in the table. The results show the average values which show that there are significant differences in academic levels and impacts on wellbeing of students from different demographic groups. Data analysis was based on statistical methods according to the study goals.

Table 1: Investigate the various forms of academic discrimination encountered by students at higher education institutions.

Academic Discrimination Statement	Frequency		Percentage		Mean	Std.deviation
	A	DA	A	DA		
Academic opportunities are equally available for all students, regardless of backgrounds	167	47	66.8	12.8	2.09	1.290
Gender of teacher effects the confidence level of student	180	31	72	12.4	1.92	1.108
Students religious beliefs causes teaches biasness	105	86	42	34.4	2.71	1.331

Sometimes disable students face discrimination by instructors	142	70	56.8	28	2.44	1.251
Teachers biasness due to students background effects learning	124	77	49.6	30.8	2.62	1.313

The results inform us how students perceive discrimination in academe for various reasons. The assertion, "Academic opportunities are equally available to all students regardless of background," was agreed to by 66.8% of students, indicating a generally positive attitude, but a notable 12.8% disagreed. The mean of 2.09 (SD = 1.290) reflects a comparatively positive attitude, but the standard deviation suggests variability in attitudes. Regarding the impact of the gender of the teacher, 72% of the students agreed that it makes them feel more comfortable, indicating strong feelings regarding gender matters in school. The mean score of 1.92 (SD = 1.108) supports this opinion with a low mean, indicating agreement. Regarding the statement that religious beliefs lead to teacher bias, opinions were more divided. While 42% agreed, 34.4% disagreed. The mean score of 2.71 (SD = 1.331) indicates a more neutral attitude, indicating more differences in experience. Regarding discrimination against disabled students, 56.8% of the respondents agreed that this is a problem, while 28% disagreed. The mean score (2.44) and standard deviation (1.251) indicate moderate agreement, indicating again significant differences. Lastly, 49.6% of the students agreed that teachers' bias against students' backgrounds influences learning, while 30.8% disagreed. The mean of 2.62 (SD = 1.313) suggests agreement but not strongly. Overall, the findings suggest that some academic discriminations are experienced strongly (e.g., gender effects), but others, such as religious or background bias, suggest more mixed reactions, suggesting varying experiences among students.

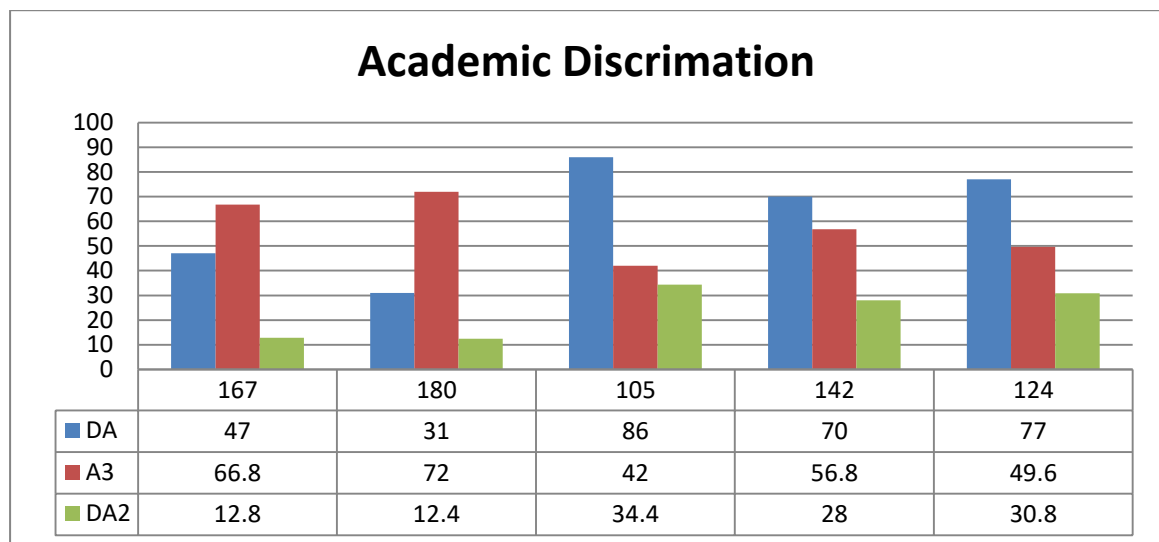


Figure 1: Analyze academic discrimination effects on student's engagement in their studies

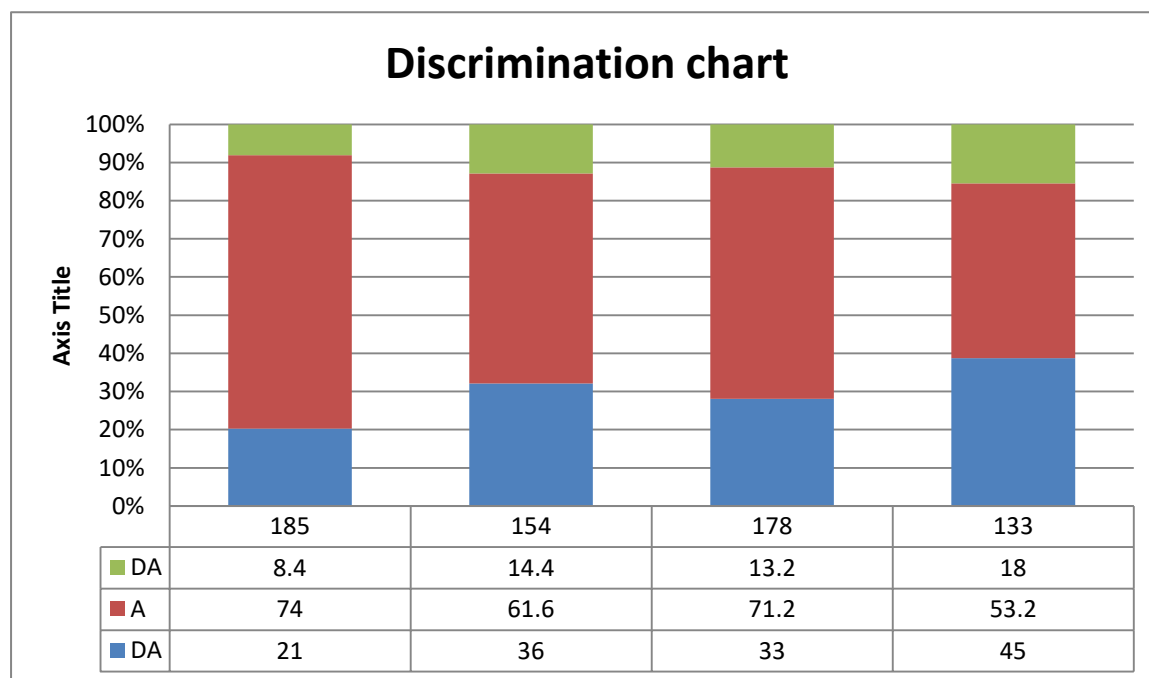
Table 2:

Emotional and psychological well-being	Frequency		Percentage		Mean	Std.deviation
Statement	A	DA	A	DA		

Academic discrimination negatively impacts on students grades	185	21	74	8.4	1.90	.985
Academic discrimination effects negatively for building relationship with peers	154	36	61.6	14.4	2.22	1.133
Students feel uncomfortable While discussing academic concerns with Instructors.	178	33	71.2	13.2	1.95	1.155
Teachers provide supportive attitude towards students from diverse background	133	45	53.2	18	2.38	1.166
University ensure career counseling for every student	131	80	52.4	32	2.58	1.415
Every student get equal access to library and online learning material	152	44	60.8	17.6	2.26	1.293
Students get access to extracurricular activities regardless of any biasness	141	46	56.4	18.4	2.34	1.309

The findings reveal attitudes towards emotional and psychological well-being within the academy, with intense worries and gaps in the institution. Mostly, 74% concur that discrimination within the academy negatively impacts students' grades (mean = 1.90, SD = 0.985), indicating a clear correlation between discrimination and grades. Moreover, 71.2% are not comfortable in discussing study issues with the teacher (mean = 1.95, SD = 1.155), reflecting the lack of trust in student-faculty communication. Over half (61.6%) believe discrimination harms peer relationships (mean = 2.22, SD = 1.133), reflecting its social consequence. While 53.2% see the positive attitude of teachers with respect to diverse backgrounds, 18% disagree (mean = 2.38, SD = 1.166) and provide comments on opposite experiences. Institutional support appears to be uneven: 52.4% agree that universities offer career counseling, while 32% disagree (mean = 2.58, SD = 1.415), expressing dissatisfaction with provision of resources. Likewise, 60.8% experience access to library/online materials as evenhanded (mean = 2.26, SD = 1.293), while 17.6% disagree. Extracurricular access is considered equitable by 56.4% (mean = 2.34, SD = 1.309), and 18.4% perceive bias. Overall, the findings reflect system differences in support systems with wide variability in response (e.g., career guidance SD = 1.415) reflecting disjointed institutional effectiveness and jangled student needs.

Figure 2:



Discussion

Academic discrimination is still a significant problem in the universities. Opportunities are usually denied to students based on gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and disability. Research conducted to date has established that such biases are prevalent and affect the performance of students. Scholarship has established that students undertaking the STEM field, are afflicted with biases resulting in loss of confidence and lower grades (Moss-Racusin, 2023). Likewise, marginalized racial and ethnic group students experience micro aggressions and discriminatory treatment, which also create more disparities in the retention and graduation outcomes (Williams, 2024). Socioeconomic status is another such factor, underprivileged students feeling deprived of resources, advice, and discriminatory grading. In addition, disabled students face inadequate accommodations and stigma, which prevent them from integrating into the student community. Religious minorities, such as Muslim and Jewish students, are also marginalized, as seen in the lack of adequate policies and prayer rooms (Modood & May, 2023). It is not only a matter of academic performance; it also extends into the sphere of mental well-being and interpersonal relationships. Despite some members of staff actively engaging to enhance inclusivity, the absence of institutional backing renders most students secluded. To address these issues, universities must respond jointly through staff bias training, diversification of course materials, and enhanced support services for underprivileged students. Higher equality and diversity can help higher education deliver learning places where any student can fulfill their full potential.

Conclusions

It is this research's finding that academic discrimination persists as a vital concern in the institutions of higher learning, especially public and private universities. In defiance of the assumption by some students that educational opportunities are equalized, the results are a witness to persistent inequalities on the grounds of gender, religion, class, and disability. These

discriminations impact not only the academic achievement of students but also their psychological adjustment and social integration significantly. It is observed from the study that students' self-concept, motivation, and performance are impacted quantitatively by teachers' unconscious or conscious prejudice. Alienation between students contacting their teachers, and the infrequent nature of career counseling and disproportionate counseling by institutions, are indicators of systemic failures that prevent an inclusive education environment. Although faculty support has been positively documented, it is not given to all students at all times and has prompted institution-level consistency and reform. This discrimination digs deeply into students' academic performance, psychological well-being, and social involvement. Teachers' explicit and implicit prejudice, particularly impacts students' academic performance, motivation, and self-esteem immensely. Systemic barriers like unpredictable support, alienation between teachers and students, and poor career guidance also hinder inclusive education settings. Some support from staff does exist, but not necessarily felt, thus institutional consistency and change must be realized for the sake of equal opportunity to all students.

Recommendations

- Increased research on academic discrimination: Increased research needs to be conducted to better understand what students of various backgrounds go through and how academic discrimination can be addressed better.
- Intersectional studies: Research needs to be conducted to research the intersectional life of students, such as the impact of intersecting types of discrimination.
- Assessment of interventions: Studies need to be conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to address academic discrimination

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