

Challenges and Prospects of Private Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

Private Higher Education (PrHE) in Pakistan has experienced significant growth in recent decades, contributing substantially to the nation's educational landscape. This study explores the multifaceted challenges and prospects confronting PrHE in Pakistan. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the current state of PrHE and its potential trajectories.

The desk research was used to gather information and data from books, journals, reports, databases, and online resources, including relevant websites related to PrHE in Pakistan.

The challenges facing private Higher Education Institutions (PrHEIs) in Pakistan encompass diverse dimensions. Financial sustainability emerges as a prominent concern, with institutions grappling with funding constraints, tuition fees, and students' economic realities. Quality assurance and accreditation processes pose inherent challenges, necessitating a robust framework to uphold educational standards and credibility. Furthermore, issues related to governance, regulatory frameworks, and equity in access underscore the complex landscape within which PrHE operates.

Despite these challenges, the prospects for PrHE in Pakistan present opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and positive contributions to national development. The sector has demonstrated adaptability, responding to evolving demands by introducing diverse programmes and modes of delivery. The potential for public-private partnerships, industry linkages, and global collaborations offers avenues for enhancing educational quality and relevance. Moreover, the role of PrHEIs in fostering entrepreneurship and addressing specialised educational needs is critical for addressing the evolving demands of the job market.

This research underscores the need for a strategic and collaborative approach to address the challenges while capitalising on the prospects within PrHE in Pakistan. By identifying key areas of improvement and fostering a conducive environment for growth and innovation, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can contribute to the continued development and sustainability of PrHEIs in the country.

Keywords: Growth, Challenges, Prospects, Private Higher Education, Pakistan

Introduction

The world's population is inevitably rising, and currently, it is over 8 billion (Worldometers, 2023), with projections indicating continued growth in the coming decades with estimates suggesting it could reach 9.7 billion by 2050 (United Nations, 2021). This demographic expansion is accompanied by a growing demand for Higher Education (HE) as individuals seek to acquire the knowledge, skills, and qualifications necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive global economy (Altbach et al., 2009). Rapid socio-economic transformations, technological advancements, and shifts in labour market dynamics further underscore the importance of HE in fostering innovation, driving economic development, and addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, healthcare, and social inequality (Marginson, 2016). Consequently, there is a pressing need to expand access to HE, improve its quality and relevance, and ensure its affordability and inclusivity to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of a growing global population. Consequently, the demand for HE has grown phenomenally in the world (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021).

PrHEIs are funded by different means and have varying levels of control by the Government, representing fully, partially, or partially autonomous institutions (Zia, 2023). They can be profit-generating or non-profit society-centred institutions (Shenaz, 2011). They are managed and funded by private entities rather than directly owned or managed by the Government. These institutions typically receive funding from various sources, including tuition fees, donations, endowments, research grants, and revenue-generating activities some sources are similar to Public Higher Education Institutions (PuHEIs) such as tuition fees, donations endowments and research grants (Šestanović, Qureshi, & Khawaja 2021, Šestanović, Qureshi, & Khawaja 2023).

PrHEIs may vary in their autonomy and government regulation levels, ranging from fully autonomous institutions to those that are partially regulated or subject to government oversight. The levels of autonomy can depend on factors such as the legal framework, accreditation requirements, and contractual agreements between the institution and the Government.

The most straightforward understanding of a PrHEI is that of an organisation with private ownership and funding, while a PuHEI is an organisation with state ownership and funding (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021, Qureshi, 2023).

PrHEIs in Pakistan are mostly funded by the private sector, including individual philanthropists, corporations, and foundations. The tuition fees for private institutions are usually higher than those charged by public institutions.

Evolution of Private Higher Education in Pakistan

The roots of PrHE in Pakistan can be traced back to pre-independence times, with religious and community organisations establishing missionary schools, madrassas, and private colleges. These institutions played a crucial role in providing educational opportunities to diverse populations, particularly in areas where government provision was limited.

Following independence in 1947, the government of Pakistan inherited a fragmented education system characterised by regional disparities and limited access to HE. In the early decades, public universities dominated the HE landscape, with limited presence of private institutions.

At the time of Pakistan's independence in 1947, the University of Punjab was indeed the only public university in the newly formed country (Tanveer et al., 2021). There were no private institutions of higher education established at that time. The University of Punjab, founded in 1882 in Lahore (Bruce, 1933) played a crucial role in providing higher education and producing skilled professionals in various fields for the region that later became Pakistan. However, in subsequent years, numerous public universities were established across the country, including Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad, University of Karachi, and University of Peshawar, among others.

In the decades following independence, there was a notable surge in the demand for HE, driven by population growth, urbanisation, and economic development. Reforms aimed at decentralisation, privatisation, and deregulation led to a surge in the establishment of PrHEIs. Government initiatives encouraging private investment in education and promoting competition in the sector facilitated the growth of PrHEIs. These reforms, also initiated in response to the growing demand for quality education and the need to alleviate the burden on public universities, have created an enabling environment for private investment in education. As a result, numerous private universities, colleges, and vocational institutes have emerged, offering a diverse range of programmes and innovative learning opportunities. This expansion of private higher education has not only increased access to education but has also fostered competition, innovation, and excellence in the sector, contributing significantly to Pakistan's educational landscape and socioeconomic development.

A combination of socio-political factors, economic dynamics, and educational policies has influenced the historical development of private higher education in Pakistan. The emergence of PrHEIs and the shaping of regulatory frameworks have evolved over several decades, reflecting shifts in government priorities and educational philosophies. Historically, private initiatives in higher education emerged in the early decades of Pakistan's independence on 14 August 1947, with philanthropic organisations, religious trusts, and community groups establishing educational institutions to meet the growing demand for post-secondary education (Zia, 2016). However, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that private higher education experienced a notable expansion, fuelled by liberalisation policies, deregulation measures, and market-oriented reforms introduced by successive governments (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

This period saw the establishment of numerous private universities, colleges, and vocational institutes across the country, catering to diverse academic disciplines and professional fields (Bano & Ahmad, 2017). Private higher education continued to grow rapidly in the 1990s, with the introduction of liberalisation policies and deregulation measures by the government.

New private universities, colleges, and professional institutes were established across various academic disciplines and fields of study especially in the urban areas such as Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi/Islamabad.

The supply of PrHEIs in Pakistan has also increased in recent years to meet the growing demand. Most of these are located in Punjab (35) and, Sindh (30), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (14) province, with a smaller number in Balochistan (1). For more information, see table 01.

Table 01: List of PrHEIs in Pakistan

Capital and Provinces	Number of PrHEIs
Islamabad	7
Balochistan	1
Kyber-Pakhtoonkhawa	14
Punjab	35
Sind	30
Total	87

Source: <http://www.digitallibrary.edu.pk/Private%20Uni.html#1>

There are many PrHEIs in Pakistan, offering a range of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programmes in various disciplines. Here are some of the prominent PrHEIs in Pakistan:

List of PrHEIs

1. Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)
2. Aga Khan University (AKU)
3. Habib University
4. Institute of Business Administration (IBA)
5. National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (FAST-NU)
6. Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST)
7. Forman Christian College (FCC)
8. Beaconhouse National University (BNU)
9. Lahore School of Economics (LSE)
10. University of Central Punjab (UCP)
11. Superior University
12. National College of Business Administration and Economics (NCBA&E)
13. The University of Lahore (UOL)
14. Preston University
15. Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST)
16. COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI)
17. Greenwich University
18. Riphah International University
19. University of Management and Technology (UMT)
20. GIFT University

Note: This list of twenty PrHEIs in Pakistan is created without biased.

Today, PrHEIs play a prominent role in Pakistan's education landscape, complementing public universities and contributing to the country's democratisation, diversification, and internationalisation of higher education.

Growth of Private Higher Education in Pakistan

The economic scenario started to change rapidly worldwide in the early 1990s from a command economy to a market economy after the disintegration of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1989 and officially ceased to exist on December 31, 1991 (history.com,2023).

The transition from command economies to market economies in the early 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, sparked a wave of privatisation initiatives worldwide. As centrally planned economies crumbled and socialist regimes collapsed, governments faced pressure to liberalise their economies, deregulate industries, and encourage private enterprise (Bennett & François, 2011). Privatisation emerged as a critical strategy for reducing state intervention, stimulating economic growth, and attracting foreign investment in formerly state-controlled sectors such as telecommunications, energy, transportation, and finance (Megginson & Netter, 2001). The shift towards market-oriented policies and privatisation reflected a broader ideological shift towards free-market capitalism and neoliberal economic principles, as governments sought to harness the efficiencies of the private sector and promote competition, innovation, and efficiency in the provision of goods and services (Harvey, 2005). This global trend towards privatisation reshaped the economic landscape, transforming state-owned enterprises into privately owned companies and fostering a more dynamic and competitive business environment in countries around the world.

Consequently, economic policies of many countries including Pakistan started encouraging private ownership (liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation), allowing PrHEIs to proliferate in most parts of the world, particularly since the 1990s (Qureshi and Khawaja,2021).

The liberalisation and privatisation of education policies in the 1990s marked a turning point in developing PrHE in Pakistan. The decentralisation, privatisation, and deregulation policies in Pakistan's HE sector have catalysed a surge in the establishment of PrHEIs across the country. The country also experienced the rapid growth of private medical colleges, from a few to 122 (Zia, 2023), while private universities are 87 in Pakistan but public higher education is still dominant with 192 state universities (Tanveer et al., 2021). PrHEIs have evolved more rapidly and may be considered to supplement and complement the public higher education system (Qureshi, 2023).

Socio-economic factors such as rising incomes, urbanisation, and aspirations for upward mobility have also contributed to the growth of PrHE in Pakistan. Middle-class families, in particular, view investment in education as a means of securing better opportunities and improving social status.

Critical Issues and Challenges

Quality and Ranking

There is a difference between public and private HEIs that sometimes have similar characteristics with variations and different attributes (Qureshi, 2023). Globally, differences in the quality and standards of higher education are evident, influenced by factors such as educational systems, types of institutions, regulatory frameworks, resource availability, and cultural contexts (Zia, 2023). Typically, the quality and standards of higher education are overseen by regulatory bodies, such as the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK and similar agencies in the other countries.

The establishment of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002 represented a significant milestone in regulating and overseeing higher education, including private institutions. The HEC is an independent, autonomous, and constitutionally established institution of primary funding, overseeing, regulating, and accrediting the higher education efforts in Pakistan (HEC, 2023). The HEC was tasked with formulating policies, regulating quality assurance, and accrediting programmes to ensure academic standards and promote excellence in higher education.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 2005 by the HEC with a following vision and strategic goals.

Vision

"To promote, enhance and assure the quality of higher education across HEIs in Pakistan"

Strategic Goals

- Policy making and development of practical guidelines of quality assurance related to the higher degree programs.
- Developing guidelines for establishment of Quality Enhancement Cells and their Monitoring & Evaluation.
- Capacity building to enhance the standard of quality assurance in higher education at national level.
- To monitor and regulate HEIs for implementation of policies to improve quality and standard of higher education in Pakistan.

Source: HEC, (2023)

The QAA plays a pivotal role in Pakistan's educational landscape, serving as a policy-making and monitoring body dedicated to ensuring the enhancement and assurance of quality across public and private HEIs. QAA's comprehensive approach to quality assurance aligns with international best practices that state that effective quality assurance mechanisms are essential for fostering excellence and competitiveness in higher education. Through its rigorous evaluation processes and continuous monitoring efforts, QAA safeguards the credibility of HEIs and contributes to the overall improvement of the higher education sector (Tanveer et al., 2021).

Thus, QAA is a cornerstone in Pakistan's pursuit of academic excellence and global recognition. Barely any of Pakistan's 192 state universities are close to becoming a university in the world's real sense (Alvi et al., 2016; Ahmad et al., 2013). Pakistani universities could not get a place in the first 400 universities in simple understanding and the world's rankings, such as Times Higher Education, QS, and Shanghai (Khan et al., 2011). Alvi et al. (2016) and Ahmad et al. (2013) discuss the factors contributing to this situation, including issues such as inadequate funding, limited research infrastructure, challenges in faculty development, and a lack of international collaborations. These factors collectively hinder the ability of Pakistani universities to compete with their counterparts on the global stage. Efforts to address these challenges may involve strategic investments in research and development, initiatives to attract and retain talented faculty members, strengthening academic-industry linkages, and fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within universities. By addressing these underlying issues, Pakistani universities can work towards enhancing their global standing and becoming recognised as institutions of excellence in the true sense.

The HEC introduced accreditation processes and quality assurance mechanisms to assess and monitor the performance of PrHEIs. Accreditation criteria include faculty qualifications, infrastructure facilities, curriculum design, and research output. Accredited institutions must meet minimum standards set by the HEC to maintain their status and eligibility for funding and recognition.

According to Niland (2000), the fundamental attributes of a world-class university include the excellence of faculty, a strong reputation in research, talented undergraduate students, a global presence, efficient resource utilisation, strategic alliances, a multidisciplinary approach, technological proficiency, effective management practices, and a commitment to internationalism. While additional factors have been proposed by various authors and the list may have evolved over time, these characteristics are widely regarded as foundational aspects of a leading university. Quality in PrHEIs is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and dynamic concept and the variations in quality and standards of learning and teaching make the sector heterogeneous in terms of quality and standards (Qureshi, 2023). A spectrum of universities in Pakistan exists, ranging from reputable, quality institutions recognised by HEC to fake and unrecognised entities that offer dubious qualifications. Below is the list of the top ten PrHEIs.

List of top ten HEIs in Pakistan

1. Aga Khan University
2. University of Management and Technology
3. Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)
4. University of Lahore
5. Bahria University
6. National College of Business Administration & Economics
7. Abasyn University
8. Superior University Lahore
9. National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences
10. University of Central Punjab

Source: AD Scientific Index (Pakistan Private Universities Rankings 2024)

Genuine PrHEIs accredited by the HEC adhere to established standards of academic quality, faculty qualifications, infrastructure, and research output. These institutions are crucial in providing students with quality education and contributing to the country's intellectual and economic development.

On the other hand, fake and unrecognised PrHEIs operate without proper accreditation. These institutions often lack the necessary infrastructure, qualified faculty, and academic rigour for legitimate higher education.

The presence of fake or unrecognised universities in Pakistan poses a significant challenge to the country's higher education system. These institutions often operate without accreditation from the HEC of Pakistan, which regulates and accredits HEIs. Such institutions may offer degrees or diplomas with little to no value in the job market or for further academic pursuits.

The proliferation of fake universities can harm students, who may invest time and money into obtaining degrees employers or other educational institutions do not recognise. Additionally, it can undermine the credibility of Pakistan's entire higher education system.

Table 02: List of Fake HEIs in Pakistan

Capital and Provinces	Number
Islamabad	2
Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)	3
Balochistan	0
Kyber-Pakhtoonkhawa	11
Punjab	95
Sind	34
Total	145

Source : Adopted from HEC

<https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Pages/AJK/Illegal-DAIs.aspx>

Efforts to combat this issue involve increased vigilance and enforcement by the HEC to identify and shut down fake universities. Public awareness campaigns can also help educate students and parents about the importance of verifying the accreditation status of universities before enrolling in programs. By taking these steps, Pakistan can work towards ensuring that its higher education system maintains integrity and provides students with quality educational opportunities.

Expensive PrHEIs

PrHEIs in Pakistan are often perceived as costly compared to their public counterparts. This perception stems from several factors, including tuition fees, additional charges for facilities, and other expenses associated with private education.

Private higher education is costly and is identified as a contributing factor to the limited enrolment in higher education institutions. The expensive costs associated with education

in Pakistan render it beyond the financial means of most households, particularly those residing in rural regions (Khwaja, Zafar, & Faize, 2022).

Table 03: List of Elite/Most Expensive PrHEIs

S.No	Institution
1	Forman Christian College Lahore,
2	GIK Institute Swabi,
3	Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Lahore,
4	Habib University Karachi
5	The Aga Khan University Karachi

These five institutions in table 03 are considered the most expensive in Pakistan. Firstly, tuition fees at PrHEIs in Pakistan tend to be higher than at PuHEIs. PrHEIs often have higher operating costs due to smaller class sizes, better infrastructure, and more personalised learning experiences. As a result, they may pass on these costs to students through higher tuition fees.

Moreover, private universities often charge additional fees for various facilities and services, such as laboratory usage, library access, and extracurricular activities. These fees can significantly contribute to the overall cost of education for students attending private institutions.

Furthermore, PrHEIs may also have higher admission requirements, such as entrance exams or interviews, which could entail additional expenses for students preparing for these assessments.

The prevalence of high tuition fees imposed by PrHEIs can be attributed to the limited capacity of public institutions to accommodate the vast majority of students. Moreover, students from rural regions encounter supplementary obstacles, including limited access to resources and support networks, impeding their ability to pursue post-secondary education (Tahira, Hassan, Malik, & Yousuf, 2020).

Low-income students often encounter difficulties when attempting to enrol in PrHEIs due to the often-exorbitant tuition fees associated with these institutions. This imbalance within the educational system results in students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds having limited choices (Bordoloi, 2012).

Prospects

The prospects of private higher education in Pakistan are significant and hold several opportunities for growth and development. Here are some key prospects for private higher education in Pakistan:

Increasing demand and Quality higher education: One of the primary drivers of growth in private higher education in Pakistan is the widening gap between the demand for tertiary education and the limited capacity of public universities to accommodate it. With a growing population, there is a high demand for higher education in Pakistan. As a result, the private sector has been heavily investing in establishing new institutions to meet the increasing

demand. Thus, the sector has endeavoured to fill the gap, but the HE market is still lucrative due to an imbalance between demand and supply.

Indeed, the high demand for higher education in Pakistan has led to the establishment of numerous PrHEIs nationwide. These institutions aim to meet the growing demand for quality education and provide students with diverse academic opportunities and innovative learning experiences.

PrHEIs in Pakistan are often associated with higher quality education and better facilities than PuHEIs (Zia, 2023). Examples of renowned PrHEIs in Pakistan include Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Habib University, and Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology (GIKI). These institutions are widely recognised for their commitment to academic excellence, innovative teaching methods, and research-driven curricula.

LUMS, for instance, is renowned for its rigorous academic programmes, world-class faculty, and vibrant campus life. It offers various undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programmes across various disciplines, including business, economics, social sciences, humanities, and engineering.

Habib University, located in Karachi, is known for its interdisciplinary approach to education, focus on liberal arts, and emphasis on critical thinking and creativity. The university offers unique undergraduate programmes that encourage students to explore diverse fields of study and engage in experiential learning opportunities.

Similarly, GIKI, located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is celebrated for its engineering and technology education excellence. The institute provides students with state-of-the-art facilities, hands-on learning experiences, and opportunities for research and innovation in various engineering disciplines.

These PrHEIs in Pakistan are shining examples of institutions committed to fostering academic excellence, nurturing talent, and preparing students to meet the challenges of the modern world. They play a vital role in shaping the future of higher education in Pakistan and contributing to the country's intellectual and economic development.

Increased Access: Privatisation has played a crucial role in expanding access to higher education by creating additional avenues for students to pursue tertiary education. The growth of PrHEIs has significantly increased the number of available seats for higher education, reducing the pressure on public institutions and providing alternative options for students who may not have been able to secure admission in government-funded institutions.

Flexibility and innovation: PrHEIs in Pakistan often exhibit flexibility and innovation in their academic programmes, teaching methodologies, and campus environments. PrHEIs are often nimbler and more innovative than PuHEIs, allowing them to respond more quickly to economic and job market changes (Qureshi, 2023).

These institutions are known for their ability to adapt to changing educational trends, cater to diverse student needs, and foster a culture of innovation and creativity.

One aspect of flexibility in PrHEIs is a mode of delivery in the evening and weekends, primarily to cater to working professionals' needs.

Therefore, many PRHEIs offer their Executive MBAs in the evenings and weekends. For example, the University of Management and Technology (UMT) offers a year Executive MBA weekend programme, which HEC recognised as 18 years equivalent degree, with a unique and innovative educational model (for more information, visit the link <https://admissions.umt.edu.pk/prog/E-MBA.aspx>). These institutions often provide a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programmes across various disciplines, allowing students to choose courses that align with their interests, career goals, and aspirations. Additionally, private universities may offer specialised programmes or interdisciplinary studies that cater to niche fields or emerging industries, providing students with unique learning opportunities.

Moreover, PrHEIs in Pakistan are known for their innovative teaching methodologies and learning environments. These institutions often incorporate modern pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, experiential learning, flipped classrooms, and collaborative learning activities. By integrating technology and interactive teaching tools into the curriculum, PrHEIs create engaging learning experiences that stimulate critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students.

Furthermore, PrHEIs prioritise student support services and extracurricular activities to enhance the overall learning experience. These institutions may offer counselling services, career development programmes, mentorship opportunities, and student clubs and organisations to promote holistic student development and well-being.

Overall, the flexibility and innovation exhibited by PrHEIs in Pakistan contribute to a dynamic and vibrant educational landscape. By embracing change, fostering creativity, and catering to diverse student needs, these institutions play a vital role in shaping the future of higher education in the country and preparing students for success in an ever-evolving global environment.

PrHEIs in Pakistan are often more flexible and innovative in their approach to medical education and are able to adapt to changing market demands and trends (Zia, 2023). For example, the Aga Khan University's Centre for Innovation in Medical Education (CIME) is one in Pakistan and Kenya and will soon be joined by Uganda and Tanzania.

(More information visit <https://www.aku.edu/cime/about/Pages/home.aspx>)

Public-Private Partnerships: Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have gained popularity in various sectors in the last few decades and are being commonly applied in education (Rinda & Shah, 2022). The option of PPPs was found to be innovative and received support from the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (LaRocque & Sipahimalani-Rao, 2019).

In recent years, the government of Pakistan has increasingly emphasised PPPs as a strategy for expanding access to higher education and improving quality. PPP initiatives involve collaboration between government agencies, private investors, and non-profit organisations to establish and operate higher education institutions with shared funding and management responsibilities.

Conclusion

As the population has grown and the economy has expanded, there has been an increasing demand for skilled professionals and graduates with specialised knowledge and expertise. PrHEIs have stepped in to fill this demand-supply gap, offering a range of academic programmes and opportunities for students.

The liberalisation of education policies in Pakistan, generally in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s, played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of private higher education. Reforms aimed at decentralisation, privatisation, and deregulation of the education sector created an enabling environment for private investment and entrepreneurship in education.

Despite efforts to regulate and monitor private higher education, challenges remain in ensuring compliance with quality standards, addressing issues of affordability and accessibility, and promoting equity and inclusivity. The rapid growth of PrHEIs has raised concerns about the proliferation of substandard institutions, degree mills, and diploma factories, highlighting the need for stricter regulation and enforcement mechanisms.

Recommendations

A demand-supply balance mechanism for HE should be established to reasonably determine the scale, structure and distribution of Private HEIs across the country. Establishing a demand-supply balance mechanism for HE is imperative to judiciously determine the scale, structure, and distribution of PrHEIs across the country. Such a mechanism would ensure that the growth and distribution of PrHEIs align with the evolving educational needs and demands of the population by province and district wise, promoting accessibility, equity, and quality in HE provision

To incentivise the establishment and growth of PrHEIs in small cities and rural areas of Pakistan, several measures can be considered:

1. **Financial Incentives:** Provide financial support, grants, or subsidies to PrHEIs willing to set up campuses or branches in underserved areas. This could include tax incentives, low-interest loans, or direct funding to cover initial infrastructure and operating costs.
2. **Infrastructure Support:** Offer assistance in acquiring land or infrastructure development for new PrHEIs in small cities and rural areas. Government assistance in building or renovating educational facilities can significantly reduce the upfront investment required by private institutions.
3. **Regulatory Support:** Streamline regulatory processes and reduce bureaucratic hurdles for obtaining licenses, approvals, and accreditation for new private HEIs in underserved regions. Simplifying regulatory procedures can encourage private investors to venture into these areas.
4. **Public-private partnerships:** Facilitate partnerships between private HEIs and local governments, community organisations, or businesses to foster collaborative initiatives. These partnerships can help leverage resources, share expertise, and develop programs tailored to the needs of the local community.

5. **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** Offer scholarships, grants, or tuition waivers to students from rural areas to incentivise enrollment in PrHEIs located in their vicinity. Financial assistance can make higher education more accessible to students from underserved communities.
6. **Research and Development Grants:** Provide research grants or incentives for PrHEIs in small cities and rural areas to engage in applied research projects addressing local challenges or contributing to regional development.
7. **Outreach and Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of higher education and encourage PrHEIs to expand their presence in underserved areas. Government-supported initiatives can highlight the importance of education in driving socio-economic progress and improving quality of life.

By implementing these incentives, policymakers can encourage the expansion of private higher education in small cities and rural areas of Pakistan, thereby enhancing access to quality education and fostering regional development.

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