

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Educational Diplomacy: Impacts of Pakistan-China Higher Education Mobility under CPEC

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## Abstract

This research examines how educational diplomacy strengthens Pakistan-China relations within the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Educational diplomacy has become an important area of bilateral cooperation, including academic mobility, scholarships, academic cooperation, cultural exchange, etc., in the higher education sphere. The study discusses the increased educational cooperation between Pakistan and China and assesses the effects of the CPEC in academic, socio-cultural, diplomatic, and soft power dimensions. In terms of research design, the research is qualitative and analytical, with both primary and secondary sources of data. The results of the semi-structured interviews with Pakistani students studying in Chinese universities, Chinese faculty, and policy makers are supplemented by the analysis of official reports, Higher Education Commission (HEC) publications, Chinese scholarship documents, and educational diplomacy and soft power-related scholarly literature. Thematic analysis helps discern the main aspects and consequences of higher education mobility concerning CPEC. The analysis shows that since the inception of CPEC, educational partnerships have expanded, with a notable increase in scholarship provisions from China, university partnerships, establishment of Confucius Institutes, and research and development in the field of science and technology. CPEC also shows that increased educational mobility has developed skill sets, intercultural insight, scientific cooperation, and trust in a strategic framework among the two countries. Additionally, gaps involving cultural and linguistic variances, varying levels of academic assistance, and the absence of cohesive policies still impede full participation. The gap this study aims to fill is in the educational diplomacy literature, particularly regarding the strategic use of educational resources as an aspect of soft power and a foreign policy formulation framework in CPEC. The study purports that higher educational mobility has been central in formulating and actualizing Pakistan-China cooperation in the present and in the future.

**Keywords:** Educational Diplomacy, CPEC, Higher education mobility, Pakistan-China relations, Soft power, Student exchange, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of Pakistan-China Relations

Pakistan-China relations have been characterized by strategic cooperation, mutual political confidence, and diplomatic support. The two countries have been connected since they established diplomatic relations in 1951, and this connection has included political, economic, military, and cultural dimensions. The collaboration, which has been described as an “Iron Brotherhood” by both policymakers and scholars, has been characterized by high levels of strategic trust and cooperation between the two countries. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the new chapter in the long history of Pakistan-China relations. Within the scope of this project, the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been prioritized, which connects the Xinjiang region of China to Gwadar Port in Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is characterized by issues of infrastructure, trade, and energy. In recent years, the educational and cultural aspects of the corridor have been gaining importance. (Ullah, Kainaat, Wajid, & Sarwar, 2024).



Figure 1 CPEC Success Story

Educational cooperation involves collaborative activities while transitioning from economic engagement to a comprehensive strategic partnership. This integrated cooperation includes mobility of students, academic exchange and language programs, and collaborative research. This is a core component of Pakistan–China diplomatic relations (Butt, Mir, & Munir, 2024).

## 1.2 Concept of Educational Diplomacy

Educational diplomacy is the application of educational cooperation, educational exchange, and the sharing of knowledge as means of foreign policy and international cooperation. As a result, in modern international relations, education has increasingly emerged as a tool for ‘soft power’ in an attempt to foster cultural understanding and to establish long-term partnerships between states. Soft power is a term coined by Joseph Nye that highlights the influence that a state can achieve through attraction as opposed to coercion (Nye Jr, 2008). In this context, higher education institutions, scholarships, exchange programs, and cultural initiatives provide strategies for improving a nation’s global image and expanding its diplomatic reach. Also, education plays a significant role in public diplomacy because international students become cultural diplomats and can forge future social, academic, and professional relationships. Therefore, educational mobility is a great advantage to the student, the education system, and the country, and it promotes educational confidence and interpersonal relationships. Educational cooperation is the first pillar of CPEC. The formation of CPEC was the first time huge educational cooperation took place between Pakistan and China (Zheng, Y. A. N. Q. I. U., Yang, G. U. A. N. G. S. H. U. O., & Elserif, A. 2022). STEM (science and technology, engineering, and mathematics) scholarships for Pakistani students were massively increased in Chinese universities. Simultaneously, cooperative partnerships between the universities of the two countries promote collaborative research, the exchange of faculty,

and joint academic programs.

In addition to Scholarships and language programs, digital collaboration and technical training have gained prominence. There is considerable backing from Chinese establishments in Pakistan for technology-oriented education and vocational training in support of improving human capital development (Wallenborn, 2010).

#### 1.4 Research Problem

Although the importance of educational cooperation under CPEC is increasing, so far, the research conducted in the field of education has been limited to infrastructure development, economic cooperation, and geopolitical implications. Educational diplomacy and higher education mobility have been given comparatively limited attention as the strategic aspects of Pakistan-China relations. Moreover, there is still a lack of empirical evaluation of academic, socio-cultural, and diplomatic impacts of educational exchange under CPEC (Hussain, Siddiqa, & Warraich, 2024). This is a clear indication of the need that needs to be explored in a comprehensive study on the role of educational mobility in bilateral cooperation, soft power, and long-term cooperation.

**Table 1**

*Research Questions, Research Objectives*

<i>Level</i>	<i>objective</i>	<i>Research Question</i>
<i>Main level</i>	Identify the research question. Main Question: To study the educational diplomacy in CPEC context and its impact on movement of higher education in Pakistan - China.	What impact has CPEC had on the mobility of Higher Education in Pakistan-China relations?
<i>Sub Question 1</i>	To study the academic, socio-cultural, economic and diplomatic impacts of higher education mobility under CPEC.	What is the learning, social and political consequences of the mobility of higher education?
<i>Sub Question 2</i>	To evaluate the effect of educational mobility on bilateral relations and soft power of China in Pakistan.	What is the impact of the higher education mobility on soft

**The study was significant because of the following reasons:**

It is a study with great academic and policy implications. Academically, it enriches the body of knowledge about the theme of educational diplomacy and soft power in the framework of international cooperation in higher education in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (Knight, 2022). The study also contributes to the knowledge concerning the role of education as a strategy in international relations. Policy-wise, the study offers cues to policymakers, HEIs, and diplomatic actors on the significance of higher education mobility for the enhancement of bilateral cooperation. The results can help both institutions in Pakistan and China to create a sustainable education partnership and design a student exchange program. Furthermore, the study adds to the general discussion on educational diplomacy as an important component of Pakistan-China relations through its findings and evidence that higher education cooperation under CPEC has become a significant part of the Pakistan-China relations (Butt, Rizwan, & Akhtar, 2023).

**2. Literature Review****2.1. Theoretical Knowledge about Educational Diplomacy**

Educational diplomacy has become an important component of international relations, public diplomacy, and higher education research. It is linked to the utilization of cooperation, exchange of know-how, scholarships, and institutional cooperation as instruments of foreign policy and international engagement (Farias, 2014). In today's world of globalization, the state has a growing interest in the role of education in cultural awareness, fostering diplomatic ties, and building international influence. Educational diplomacy is seen as a non-coercive tool that enables countries to establish long-range strategic relationships between them. Educational diplomacy is different from traditional

diplomacy, where the emphasis is primarily placed on political negotiations and economic agreements, since education focuses on the connection between people, intercultural communication, and intellectual collaboration. It is therefore not surprising that the universities, research institutions, exchange programs, or language centers can be seen as important diplomatic players in international politics (Heitor, 2015). The concept of soft power is one of the most influential theories related to educational diplomacy, which was brought by Joseph Nye. Soft power, as defined by Nye, is when a state can "influence the preferences and perceptions of others through its capacity to attract them rather than coerce them, or to threaten them with military force. Culture, political values, and foreign policy are considered to be the three major sources of soft power. For this reason, soft power is divided into three key components: Culture, Political\ Values, and Foreign Policy. In this case, higher education positively influences how foreign students perceive and interact with the political system, institutions, and culture of the host country (Askari, 2021). Intellectual and emotional ties created by educational exchange can shape future diplomacy and our economic and strategic relations. Besides soft power theory, there are other theories that lay the foundation for the understanding of educational diplomacy, such as cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. One of the definitions for cultural diplomacy is the promotion of culture, cultural values, cultural traditions, and cultural language to strengthen relationships between different countries. The process is crucial, and schools are central to this as they enable cultural contact and intercultural learning. But, like public diplomacy, it is about the influence of foreign publics, not governments, and educational exchange programs are a useful lever for image and public diplomacy. China's international educational strategy is increasingly discernible within China's foreign policy, especially within the Belt and Road Initiative, (Nye Jr, 2008). Confucius Institutes and advanced educational opportunities for Chinese nationals, coupled with

China's growing international connectivity with educational institutions, have positioned education at the center of expanding China's international footprint and serve as its outreach to developing countries.

## 2.2 China's Global Educational Diplomacy under BRI

China's educational involvement in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East has been greatly broadened by the Belt and Road Initiative (Kamel, 2018). Since the establishment of the BRI in 2013, China has always emphasized education cooperation in the process of regional connectivity and international cooperation. Educational diplomacy under BRI covers such areas as scholarships, joint research programs, student mobility, faculty exchanges, vocational training, and institutional partnerships. Chinese universities have been more and more international in their curricula to recruit students from countries in the BRI (Wen & Wang, 2022). The government scholarships are an important means to expand the international students' enrollment, such as the Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC). These scholarships are special ones that are provided for students from developing countries, and are concentrated on fields that are linked to engineering, technology, infrastructure, and scientific research



*Figure 2 Relationship Between the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and International Student Mobility to China*

China's education diplomacy policy is designed to facilitate academic cooperation, but also enhance the image of China and its political power, researchers note. Educational programs serve to make China appear to be a development partner and responsible global actor (Renwick, N. 2016). China builds long-term relationships with future policy makers, scholars, and professionals of participating countries through scholarships and academic exchanges. One major aspect of China's educational diplomacy is the worldwide expansion of Confucius Institutes. While these institutes promote the study of the Chinese language and international interest in Chinese culture, some people criticize that they promote the spread of Chinese political influence and ideology. The growing number of international Chinese universities has also strengthened China's role in international education. Many Chinese universities have partnerships with foreign universities to provide joint degrees and collaborative research and innovation within a short period. This has established China as an emerging educational hub (Qu & Dai, 2024).

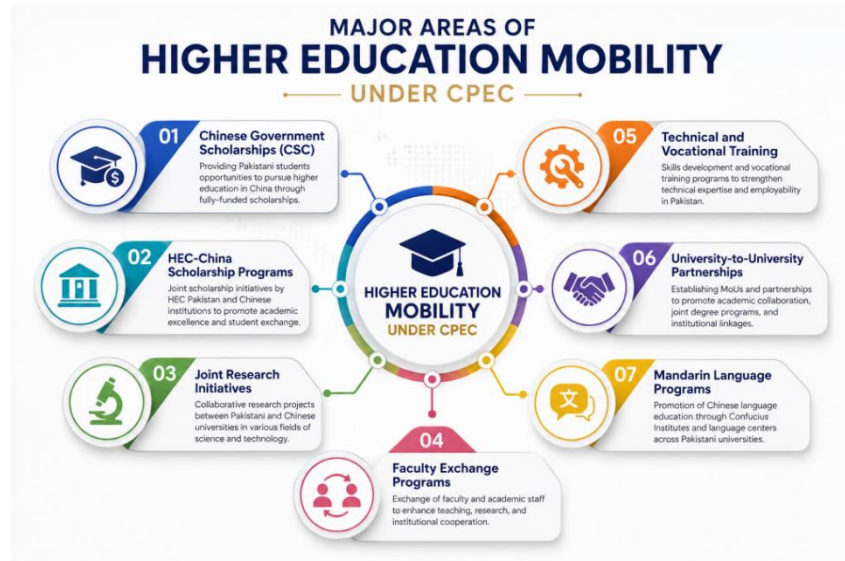
### **2.3 Pakistan-China Educational Relations**

Educational relations between Pakistan and China have progressed slowly since 1951. During the first twenty years of relations, most of the exchanges focused on political and cultural relations (Sterelny, 2016). The 21st century has been important for bilateral relations within the field of education, particularly after the establishment of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). Pakistan and China have signed a number of agreements, including Memoranda of Understanding, on the advancement of higher education, research, and the provision of technical training. There is also a growing partnership among Pakistani and Chinese universities in engineering, agriculture, medicine, IT (Information Technology), and social sciences (Malik, Bashir, & Ali, 2021).

Pakistani Higher Education Commission (HEC) registered the most significant advancement in educational ties by signing agreements on scholarships and establishing faculty mobility programs. Pakistan's increasing Chinese student population evidences why China is a preferred study destination for Pakistanis. This trend is even more pronounced with the increasing collaborative research among educational institutions in both countries (Li, 2020). Cooperative educational projects reflect the strategic importance of Pakistan-China relations in science and technology, energy, and infrastructure studies.

#### **2.4 Higher Education Mobility under CPEC**

The establishment of CPEC was a milestone in Pakistan-China educational relations. Following the advent of CPEC, the number of educational exchanges rose considerably, from scholarships, language courses, research collaboration, and institutional ties. Student mobility to China greatly increased in the past decade in Pakistan. Thousands of students from Pakistan are studying in the universities of China on government scholarships and the university exchange program. The majority of students were studying engineering, medicine, computer sciences, AI, and technology-related courses pertinent to CPEC development (National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, Division on Engineering, Physical Sciences, Computer Science, Telecommunications Board, ... & Committee on the Growth of Computer Science Undergraduate Enrollments. 2018).



*Figure 3 Major Areas of Higher Education Mobility Under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)*

Post-CPEC, there was also some growth in faculty exchange programs and collaborative research projects. Both countries' universities collaborated in scientific research, technology transfer, and innovation. Human capital development and increasing the professional capacity in Pakistan were also enhanced by the technical and vocational training programs. Another key result of the mobility of higher education under CPEC is the increasing demand for Mandarin language training. Confucius Institutes and Chinese language departments grew in universities throughout Pakistan in the wake of growing economic relations and job opportunities with Chinese companies in Pakistan (Asif, 2022). The scholars say that CPEC makes the cooperation in the field of education also an important dimension of strategic connectivity between Pakistan and China. Today, education is not only considered a form of cooperation in learning but also an investment in bilateral relations and regional integration.

## 2.5 Educational Diplomacy as Soft Power

Educational diplomacy has been playing a significant role in the soft power diplomacy of China in Pakistan. China has tried to make its presence more noticeable in Pakistan

through scholarships, academic exchanges, Confucius Institutes, and joint educational programs in order to enhance its cultural presence and boost its image among the students and the academic world of Pakistan. Educational diplomacy is not like regular diplomacy, which is based on political bargaining or economic bargains, but is based on attraction, cultural work, and building up a long-term association. Research on soft power has focused on the fact that the foreign student acquires a positive image of the host country's society, culture, education, and politics (Ramsay, 2011). In Pakistan-China relations, the mobility in higher education has been a catalyst for intercultural understanding and people-to-people connectivity. The students from Pakistan studying in Chinese universities obtain first-hand information about the Chinese culture, technological progress, academic structure, and social development, which affect their attitudes towards the role of China in the world.

The other significant part of China's educational diplomacy in Pakistan is the Confucius Institute. These institutes carry out the promotion of learning the Mandarin language, cultural awareness, and academic cooperation with universities of both countries. The scholars point out that Confucius Institutes serve as educational institutions and as a tool for cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy (Ying, 2016). China is projecting a positive image of its nation and enhancing the Pakistani society through the language program, cultural program, academic program, and exchange program. Imagery building efforts are also contributing to the work of education cooperation through CPEC by offering a development partner image of development that's dedicated to human capital development and knowledge sharing. Scholarship opportunities and research collaborations are also looked at positively by the Pakistani students as they give them the chance to get a good education, excel in the use of high technology, and expose them to international academic circles. But there are some important critical views on the

possible generation of ideological influence and strategic dependency through educational diplomacy. Critics say that educational programs under BRI and CPEC are very closely related to China's overall geopolitical goals. Despite these concerns, most of the studies have shown that educational exchanges generally have contributed to building trust between Pakistan and China and improving bilateral cooperation.

## **2.6 Research Gap**

While a lot is being said about the economic, political, and strategic aspects of CPEC, educational diplomacy and mobility of higher education have not been extensively written about. Most of the existing research is based on infrastructure projects, trade connectivity, and geopolitical impact, and the educational aspect of CPEC is hardly explored. Moreover, there is little empirical study on the experience of Pakistani students in China, as well as the socio-cultural effects of the exchange programs. Past research tends to focus on the number of scholars and institutional contracts and lacks attention to the issue of academic achievement, cultural integration, knowledge transfer, and diplomatic results of higher education mobility ([Goldfarb, 2008](#)).

The other notable gap concerns the measurement of the soft power strategy of educational diplomacy. Although the importance and function of education in China's global engagement is recognized by scholars, there is not much in-depth research done on the contribution of educational mobility to the image-building and public diplomacy of China in Pakistan. Likewise, the implications of the long-term educational cooperation for bilateral trust and strategic partnership and for regional integration have received little attention.

**Table 2*****Research Gaps and Future Directions in CPEC Educational Diplomacy Studies***

<b><i>Identified Research Gaps</i></b>	<b><i>Explanation</i></b>
<i>A weak focus on educational diplomacy within CPEC.</i>	Most of the research done so far focuses on economic and geopolitical aspects.
<i>Lack of empirical assessment</i>	There are limited studies that involve the analysis of experience and outcomes of student mobility.
<i>Insufficient socio-cultural analysis</i>	Minimal discussion of intercultural adaptation, people-to-people connections
<i>Lack of focus on soft power outcomes</i>	Educational diplomacy has been very little studied as a strategic soft power tool
<i>The need for research to address policy questions.</i>	The available literature offers only a few suggestions for sustainable cooperation in education.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to fill these gaps by comprehensively analyzing the Pakistan-China higher education mobility under CPEC and its academic, socio-cultural, diplomatic, and soft power outcomes. The study also offers lessons for the policy discourse on the future of educational diplomacy and sustainable academic cooperation between the two countries.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study has adopted the theoretical approach of Soft Power Theory by Joseph Nye and the concept of educational diplomacy in international relations as a theoretical framework. These approaches offer analytical insights into the role of higher education mobility as a strategic tool of Pakistan-China cooperation, diplomacy, and bilateral relations, through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Soft Power Theory is the theory that relates to the process of influencing by attracting, as opposed to coercing, and by not using military force. Nye believes that countries can improve their image in the eyes of other societies by their cultural, political values, and foreign policy practices (Nye Jr, 2004). The modern globalized society has made education one of the most significant elements in soft power, as educational institutions, scholarships, and academic exchanges can project the image of a nation and create social and intellectual links for the

future. This view considers educational diplomacy non-coercive diplomacy, encouraging strengthening strategic partnerships and the international standing of states. When foreign students study abroad, they harbor favorable sentiments about the host nation's culture, systems, technology, and politics. Positive sentiment plays an important role in the development of intercultural communication and professional relationships. It also builds academic and diplomatic relationships and is therefore useful in public diplomacy and foreign policy. It is hence believed that the strategic planning of higher education would increase the mobility of students and be the most effective foreign policy.

China's education engagement under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) follows the suggestion of the soft power theory. China has spread its educational influence in developing countries by means of scholarship programs, Confucius Institutes, academic exchange and collaboration, and research programs. Since the initiation of CPEC, educational diplomacy has become an important aspect in Pakistan, as the number of scholarships offered, Mandarin language courses, university collaborations, and technical training programs has increased. The developments illustrate China's strategy on education cooperation to enhance bilateral ties and its image among the educational community and students of Pakistan (Khan<sup>1</sup>, Siddique, & Qureshi, H. I. A. [Trend of Chinese Language Learning in Punjab](#)). This strategy is further supported by the concept of educational diplomacy, which emphasizes the strategic significance of education in international relations. Using educational institutions, exchange trips, and educational collaboration for diplomatic reasons and to promote international relations is known as educational diplomacy. In contrast to traditional diplomacy, which focuses mostly on political interactions between states, educational diplomacy emphasizes interpersonal relationships, cultural exchange, and intellectual collaboration. Because of their contribution to intercultural communication, innovation, and information exchange,

universities play a crucial role in foreign relations. In Pakistan-China relations, higher education mobility is a mechanism to strengthen regional collaboration and strategic partnership. Studying at Chinese universities gives Pakistani students access to knowledge, technical skills, cultural awareness, and social networks, all of which contribute to long-term trust. Similarly, enhanced scientific collaboration and institutional involvement between the two nations are fostered through collaborative research initiatives and faculty exchange programs. As a result, educational mobility in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is seen as a complex phenomenon with implications for academia, society, diplomacy, and soft power. Socio-cultural exchanges promote intercultural understanding and interpersonal relationships, while academic exchanges contribute to the development of human capital and scientific collaboration. A long-term strategic collaboration between China and Pakistan is facilitated and confidence is strengthened through diplomatic-level educational cooperation. Additionally, from the perspective of soft power, educational diplomacy helps Pakistan engage in cultural diplomacy and enhances China's image as a desirable force. In the context of CPEC, the theoretical framework provides an appropriate means of comprehending educational collaboration, which must transcend academic interchange and be employed as a diplomatic and foreign policy tactic. It also clarifies the significance of greater mobility for higher education and its current position in Pakistan-China ties.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature to explore the concept of educational diplomacy and mobility of higher education between Pakistan and China in the context of CPEC. The qualitative approach is deemed suitable as the study is on experiences, perceptions, and interpretative meanings of educational exchanges instead of numerical relationships. It provides an opportunity to discuss in detail the academic, socio-cultural, and diplomatic

implications of higher education mobility. Descriptive and analytical research design. It explains the current cooperation in the field of education along CPEC and the implications of these in terms of soft power, bilateral relations, and educational diplomacy. This study is a combination of primary and secondary sources of knowledge to gain a complete understanding of the subject. The data is collected via semi-structured interviews with Pakistani students studying at Chinese universities, faculty members working in collaboration with Pakistani universities, and selected policy experts from HEIs. These interviews aim to reflect lived experiences, challenges, and outcomes of educational mobility. The secondary data comprises journal articles, official reports of the Government of Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC), reports of scholarship programs in China, and publications related to the CPEC. Such a mix ensures reliability and depth of the analysis. In this study, purposive sampling is used since the respondents are those who are directly involved in educational cooperation between Pakistan and China. Only people who have experience in higher education mobility and/or policy engagement have been included to enable meaningful insights. Thematic Analysis is used to analyze the data. This approach is to: Identify, analyze, and interpret themes in answers to interview questions and documents. Academic growth, cultural adjustment, research collaboration, and diplomatic influence are each methodically classified to come to significant conclusions (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005).

The following ethical considerations are made in this research. All individuals who participated in this research provided informed consent before interviews. Identities of participants are kept confidential. All secondary sources are acknowledged in this research to uphold academic integrity. Plagiarism has been avoided. Even with the positive attributes included in this research, some factors limit this research. Based on

geographical position, accessibility of participants and at times, the distance, there could be limited access to the potential participants. Based on differences in participants' language, communication could be altered. Furthermore, qualitative analysis is generally limited to education mobility trends at a micro level, and may not represent trends at a statistical level. Nonetheless, with some limitations in the methodology, the general aim is to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the scope and impact of educational diplomacy through CPEC on the academic, socio-cultural, and diplomatic realms of Pakistan-China relations.

## **5. Pakistan-China Higher Education Mobility under CPEC**

### **Growth of Student Mobility**

CPEC has profoundly changed the scenario of higher education mobility between Pakistan and China. In recent years, the number of Pakistani students has significantly increased at Chinese universities, most of which have been sponsored by the government and bilateral academic exchange programs. This is part of China's overall plan to boost educational diplomacy and establish longer-term 'people-to-people' connections. The majority of Pakistani students studying in China are studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which are the development priority paraded by the CPEC (Riaz & Riaz,2024). These academic programs serve not only to build up technical skills but also human capital in Pakistan. An ever-growing mobility of students indicates that education is not seen as a distinct academic program anymore but has become part of bilateral cooperation

### **Collaboration with academia and linkages with institutions.**

The other key aspect of educational mobility, under CPEC, is the enhanced academic collaboration between universities of both nations. There are already a large number of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between various institutions in Pakistan and

China to encourage joint degree programs, research activities, and faculty exchange programs. These collaborations have created institutional connections and promoted research cooperation among these institutions in areas like engineering, energy, agriculture, information technology, and medical sciences. Academic quality and knowledge sharing among institutions have also been improved by faculty exchange programs.

### **Role of Chinese Scholarships**

Scholarship programs are a key contributor to increased mobility in higher education under CPEC. Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC) has facilitated thousands of Pakistani students to study in China, and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has also helped many students to study in China. These scholarships are mostly concentrated on strategic and development areas like engineering, AI, infrastructure development, and health sciences. Through investing in student education, China wants to build academic and professional connections in the long term, for mutual cooperation and co-development

### **The Chinese Language Education was developed.**

Another important development has been the inclusion of the Chinese language in Pakistan's education system due to the cooperation in the field of education under CPEC. The interest and awareness of the Mandarinians among Pakistani students have grown manifold due to the presence of Chinese language institutes and Confucius institutes at various universities. Since the establishment of Chinese language institutes and Confucius institutes in different universities, the interest and awareness in learning Mandarin have grown to a great extent among students in Pakistan. This linguistic prophetic change is strongly related to the jobs of the Chinese business organizations in Pakistan and also outside Pakistan. This makes Mandarin a valuable language for students who are

interested in a career in trade, technology, and international business.

### **The digital area and the technical area. Digital and technical cooperation.**

Educational cooperation under CPEC has also grown over the last few years into digital learning platforms, technical training programs, and research innovation programs. An increasing number of universities in both countries are embarking on collaborative research focused on emerging technologies such as AI, clean energy, and intelligent infrastructure. This engagement in digital and technological collaboration is part of a broader phenomenon of knowledge-based partnerships. In this regard, the role of teaching and education is the foundation of innovation and economic and technological growth.

The Educational Mobility under CPEC is expected to yield a number of outcomes, including:

CPEC presents a multileveled impact across educational, socio-cultural, economic, political, and soft-power domains, contributing to the higher education mobility within Pakistan-China relations. This is a result of establishing educational diplomacy as a framework of bilateral cooperation, extending beyond scholarly exchanges.

### **Satisfies Academic and Knowledge Outcomes**

Education's mobility effects are most notably increased capacities and knowledge production. The students of Pakistan who are studying in Chinese universities get access to advanced laboratories, research, and a technology-oriented educational environment. This exposure not only improves their technical skills, research, and problem-solving abilities, but also, especially in STEM subjects. Joint research between the two countries has also been carried out, leading to the sharing of science. Research productivity has been boosted, and long-term academic relationships have been established through joint publications, academic conferences, and innovation projects. The developments suggest that educational mobility is not just generating graduates, but helping to create a

knowledge economy as well.

### **Socio-Cultural Outcomes**

The mobility has contributed a lot to improving interculturality between the students and the academic communities of both countries. Chinese culture, tradition, social structures, and academic norms are the things Pakistani students get to witness in China, which helps them to gain a wider outlook. Likewise, Chinese institutions where international students are studying become more diverse and international. This interaction is a part of the people-to-people connection that is one of the important elements of bilateral relations. It also helps to minimize cultural distance and fosters tolerance, respect, and cross-cultural communication. After their return to their home country, many students will become informal cultural ambassadors, thereby helping to improve bilateral understanding.

### **Economic and Human Capital Outcomes includes the following elements:**

The economic viewpoint of the CPEC and educational mobility is to develop human capital in Pakistan. Students coming back from Chinese universities are usually equipped with high-level technical expertise in various areas such as infrastructure, energy, IT, and industrial development. This will help in the development of Pakistan's workforce and the modernization of industries. Furthermore, by virtue of China's fast-developing economy and technological development, students get hands-on insights that can be utilized in the development of Pakistan. Economic cooperation between the two countries is also enhanced, with some of its graduates working with Chinese companies under the CPEC projects

### **Diplomatic Outcomes**

One of the important aspects that has contributed to Pakistan-China ties is the aspect of Educational mobility. Student exchanges, academic cooperation, and institutional relationships establish the foundation for diplomatic trust and stability in the long term

through interpersonal relationships. Such networks help develop a greater appreciation for others' political and social systems. Academic connections are also a means of strengthening strategic cooperation by establishing common interests between future professionals, policymakers, and researchers. This makes education an indirect yet influential diplomatic means that helps to further enhance bilateral relations outside the scope of official government initiatives.

### **Soft Power Outcomes**

Education diplomacy has helped China to build its soft power image in Pakistan to a great extent. The Chinese Government's policy of providing scholarships, academic opportunities, and cultural exchanges helps to build a positive image of China as a development partner. A large number of Pakistani students form a positive perception about the Chinese society, governance, and technological advancements upon studying in China. This is a soft power influence that has a special role in the formation of public opinion in Pakistan in the long term and the perceptions of the elites. Educational mobility is therefore a strategic resource to boost the image and international influence, as a part of China's global engagement policy under the Belt and Road policy.

### **8. Themes from the Week 7 Activities**

Although educational mobility between Pakistan and China under CPEC offers promising opportunities, it also presents challenges and issues that limit the efficacy and comprehensiveness of educational diplomacy. The problems highlighted focus on the intricacy of higher education mobility and that it is not a uniform phenomenon for all.

#### **Address cultural and language barriers. Recognize cultural and language barriers.**

Mainly, the Pakistani students in China face cultural and language challenges. Many universities have English programs, but Mandarin may be required outside the classroom

and in social situations. This cultural and language gap may result in difficulties in the classroom, research, and social situations. This will also have an impact on cultural teaching methods, classroom behavior, and performance standards. Additionally, the informal, unstructured, and traditional methods will be replaced by formal, structured, and student-centered methods. This method, driven by technology, may be difficult for students adjusting to the Chinese education system.

### **Unequal Academic Benefits**

The inequitable distribution of academic advantages among learners is another worry. For some students, access to quality education and research facilities is available to them, but others may have some issues in terms of limited academic supervision or mismatched research opportunities. This is a concern over the uniformity of quality in education provided in participating institutions with exchange programs. The issue of dependency on Chinese scholarships is also in debate, as students in Pakistan heavily depend on Chinese scholarships, and it is questioned whether students are able to be self-sustaining without depending on such **external** sources, or if the education system can sustain itself in the long term

### **Political and security issues. Political and security problems.**

The educational cooperation under the CPEC also takes place in a wider geopolitical and security environment. Mobility programs, institutional relationships, and perceptions of foreigners regarding Pakistan are sometimes impacted by regional stability and security issues. All of these can have an impact on the successful implementation of long-term academic partnerships. Secondly, educational diplomacy sometimes has a political dimension: the cooperation between schools is seen as a part of the larger strategy. This understanding can lead to a discussion of the neutrality of educational exchange programs

### **CPEC Diplomacy is under fire for its shortcomings.**

Concerns around economic influence and dependency that have been raised in both academic and policy related discussions on CPEC are also applicable in the case of

educational collaboration. For some, the role of academia in the field of educational collaboration is an example of an attempt to achieve geostrategic objectives. The general public's opinion on CPEC is also ambiguous. For some, CPEC is a portal to achieve objectives of mutual benefit and for some, CPEC is a cause of an asymmetry of influence. However, these criticisms are not found in isolation and there is a plethora of positive impacts of academia and socio-culture.

### **Institutional Challenges**

The coordination between universities and governing bodies is still another challenge. Administrative problems like degree recognition, credit transfer systems, and academic standardization may be barriers to students who wish to take part in exchange programs. Additionally, the lack of research infrastructure in some institutions and the differences in evaluation systems for academic programs can have an impact on the efficiency of joint academic programs. It is thus crucial to further enhance the coordination between the different higher education authorities and between higher education institutions to boost the effectiveness of educational diplomacy.

## **8. Policy Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, there is great potential that higher education mobility under CPEC will further contribute to the enhancement of education diplomacy in Pakistan-China relations, but it needs greater institutional coordination, policy support, and strategic planning in the long run. Several policy directions are suggested to make the most of the gains from educational exchanges

### **Strengthening Academic Partnerships**

The university-to-university partnership needs to be strengthened and expanded at the institutional level by long-term agreement and not project-based partnerships. Academic integration could be improved through joint research centers, dual degree programs, and

joint innovation hubs. These would contribute to the enhancement of the productivity of research and foster long-term cooperation in knowledge-sharing between both nations.

### **Making improvements to Student Support Systems**

Considering the increase in scholarships, supportive measures need to be improved to better assist students. Pre-departure orientation, cultural awareness training, and language training programs need upgrading to aid students in adjusting to China's academic and cultural environments. In the same way, institutions need to upgrade their academic and psychological support systems for international students (Bradley, 2000).

### **Expanding Educational Opportunities**

Presently, educational cooperation focused on CPEC is mainly centered around the STEM field. Opportunities should be broadened to include social sciences, humanities, and studies in the business and public policy areas. This diversification will enhance the flow of ideas and enhance the understanding of governance, society, and culture between the two countries

### **Enhancing Research Collaboration**

Joint research programs should be further encouraged in new areas like AI, renewable energy technologies, climate change, agriculture, and digital technologies. Setting up innovation clusters and research funding will support both countries in obtaining mutual scientific development. There will also be greater partnership interaction to enhance the academic competitiveness of partner institutes internationally.

### **Strengthening Policy Coordination**

It is important that the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is more coordinated with the Chinese education authorities in order to facilitate the smooth running of exchange programs. Consolidate the long-term education policy to make the transfer of credits, awarding of degrees, and quality assurance measures uniform. Moreover, there

needs to be a continuous monitoring and evaluation system in place to monitor the effects of the education mobility programs. This will make sure policies are consistent with changing academic and diplomatic needs.

## **9. Conclusion**

The academic, sociocultural, diplomatic, and soft power aspects of CPEC were highlighted in this research paper, which concentrated on the topic of educational diplomacy and higher education mobility between Pakistan and China. The findings imply that educational collaboration has grown to be a significant component of bilateral relations, which extend beyond infrastructural and economic cooperation to include knowledge sharing, human resource training, and enduring institutional links. According to the report, there has been a significant increase in a variety of educational mobility initiatives, including joint study programs, scholarships, lecturer exchanges, and language training programs. These advancements have improved Pakistani students' academic performance, research capabilities, and professional skills in China. In the meantime, intercultural communication, people-to-people relationships, and mutual understanding have all improved thanks to sociocultural exchanges, all of which are essential for long-term bilateral relations. Stable interpersonal and institutional ties have grown as a result of diplomatic educational exchanges, strengthening mutual trust and collaboration between the two nations. Strategic cooperation and understanding are strengthened by these networks, which are a type of unofficial diplomatic relationship. Through a number of initiatives, including educational activities, technical developments, and cultural exchanges, education under the CPEC has also improved Pakistan's soft power by promoting a favorable image of the nation. The report also identifies other potential obstacles, such as language barriers, institutional limitations, unequal educational opportunities, and problems with policy coordination. These difficulties highlight the

necessity of creating more inclusive and organized educational policies that can provide equitable advantages to all parties involved in higher education mobility. According to the research, CPEC educational diplomacy has evolved into a vehicle for bilateral cooperation and foreign policy. In addition to having an impact on academic performance, it has also contributed to regional integration and the long-term stability of diplomatic ties. To learn more about the impact of educational diplomacy globally, future research can focus on the quantitative aspects of student mobility and compare it with other Belt and Road partner nations.

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