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Punjab Universities See Sharp Drop in Admissions

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Public sector universities across Punjab are facing a steep decline in admissions in 2025, sparking concern among educationists and policymakers.

Figures from the Punjab Higher Education Department indicate that enrollment in undergraduate, MPhil, and PhD programs has fallen by 20% to 30% in many institutions. Large universities such as Punjab University Lahore, Government College University Faisalabad, and Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan report lower-than-expected intake,

while smaller universities in districts like Dera Ghazi Khan, Sahiwal, and Narowal are struggling to fill seats in their most popular courses.

Experts attribute the decline to multiple factors, including economic hardship, outdated curricula, and weak job prospects for graduates. Prof Dr Munawar Sabir, former chairman of Punjab University's Geography Department, described the situation as a "deeper crisis" in the education system.

"For many families, even public universities have become financially inaccessible due to hostel fees, travel expenses, books, and other costs," he said.

Parents from rural and low-income areas say that rising inflation has made higher education an unaffordable goal. Shamsa Bibi, a resident near Narowal, said her son, despite achieving high marks in intermediate exams, had to give up on university plans. "He is now working in a factory because we cannot afford the expenses," she said.

Another major concern is the relevance of academic programs. Prof Dr Muhammad Arshad Ali noted that many public universities are still teaching in formats unchanged for decades. "The job market has evolved, but our degree programs have not. Without skills that employers need, students see little value in spending years at university," he explained.

As a result, more students are choosing skill-based diplomas, short professional courses, and online certifications that they believe lead to quicker employment. The growth of freelancing and gig economy work has also encouraged many young people to focus on digital skills rather than traditional degrees.

Some universities have attempted to modernize by launching programs in fields such as information technology, data science, and business innovation. However, these changes remain limited and inconsistent across the province. Career counselling services are scarce, and industry linkages are weak, leaving many graduates without clear employment pathways.

The decline is most severe in MPhil and PhD programs, where tuition fees are higher and job opportunities more limited. Faculty members warn that falling postgraduate admissions could harm research output and long-term academic progress.

Education experts are urging the government to intervene. Suggested measures include free or subsidized student transport, expanded scholarships for low-income families, lower entry

test fees, simplified online admissions, and modernized curricula to align with industry needs.

Without swift action, they warn, Punjab's higher education sector could face lasting damage.