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Researcher Spotlight: Dr Farid Panjwani

“Teacher development is our main mandate through research, short courses, degree courses, and direct work with the government in terms of capacity building. So far, we’ve seen nothing but positivity, enthusiasm, and commitment from the government and all our partners.”

Responding to the pedagogical needs in the province of Gilgit Baltistan (GB), the Institute of Educational Development in Pakistan (IED, P) and the GB government have signed a pilot project on developing the teacher capacity of education fellows over three years. The project will hire and train 1000 individuals through teacher preparation programs in an effort to raise the overall standard of teaching in Pakistan. The collaborators are Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Knowledge Platform (KP), Karakorum International University (KIU), and Directorate of Education (DoE), Government of GB.

“They will go through in-depth teacher education courses as well as ongoing teacher education training resulting in enhancement of their skills in pedagogy, classroom management, and use of technology in assessment. One hopes that over a period of time this will result in students learning better and more conceptually, which will show in their outcomes such as grades, their conceptual understanding, their behaviour, and their thought as human beings and as critical thinkers.”

Additionally, the project aims to adopt a holistic approach in which participants are evaluated on their ability to work with children to ensure their safety as well as their grasp of the project's content. This is done to guarantee that children receive a quality education and live fulfilling lives, which is the long-term aim of the project. A secondary objective is to increase the pool of qualified teachers for recruitment.

Like any project of this scale, this project anticipates challenges of its own. “We are aware of the challenges; we are not going into this thinking this is going to be a very smooth ride, because you are in trouble when you don’t anticipate the challenges.” says Dr Panjwani, Dean of IED. According to him, these obstacles may be solved by working together, being committed, and having better planning. In order to ensure that only qualified candidates succeed, he also emphasized the importance of retaining merit throughout the process.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the signing ceremony.



AKU Nairobi Hosts DataFest Africa 2023

The Aga Khan University Centre in Nairobi, the Data Innovation Office, and Pollicy a civic data organization, hosted the main event of DataFest Africa 2023. This annual conference honours the contribution that data science has made to Africa, and this year's theme was 'No gender equality without data equality'. The event, which lasted for two days and involved over a hundred participants in hybrid settings, sought to highlight the injustices that exist in the real world and influence the virtual one.

Farhana Alarakhia, the keynote speaker, who serves as AKU's Chief Data Innovation Officer, discussed how gender bias in technology and healthcare research impacts the daily treatment of African women as well as digital algorithms. Farhana also emphasized the serious consequences of such behaviour, which would persist with AI and prolong the existence of gender bias in a variety of channels.

"We work to simplify the path from data to insight specifically in the domains of research; to inspire bold discoveries that improve the quality of life for the communities we serve."

The event managed to encapsulate one of the aims of the Data Innovation Office, which is to establish AKU as a leading data innovator by utilizing data in novel and ground-breaking ways, keeping in view the difficulties that Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) face.

Read more about Farhana's thoughts on data and its role in research and technology [here](#).



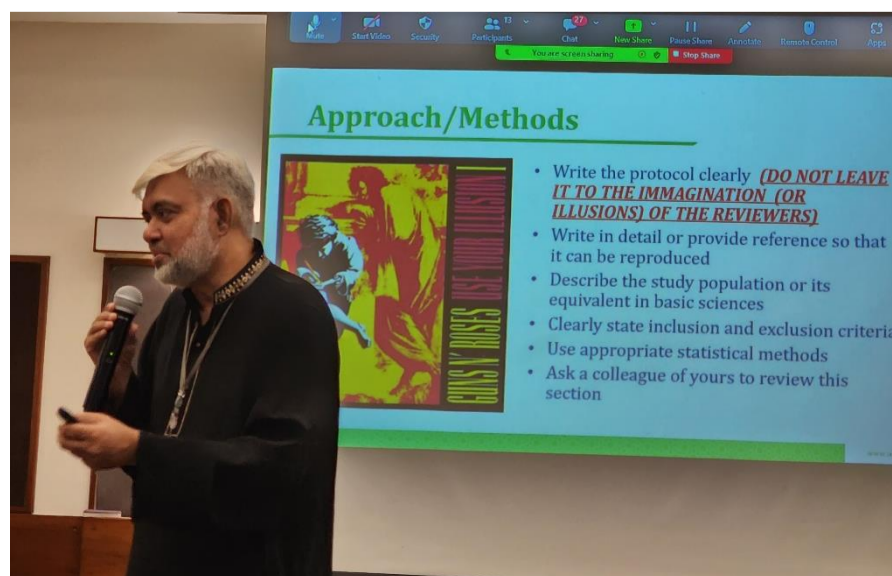
URC Funding Opportunities: When to Apply and How?

[Dr Jamshed Hasnain](#), from the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS) conducted a guest speaker session at the 46th Dean's Research Seminar of the School of Nursing and Midwifery (Pakistan). He addressed the question "*what makes a good grant application?*", aimed at researchers and students applying to the University Research Council's (URC) intramural grant funding process. During the session, Dr Hasnain provided insight into the URC's processes, highlighting what the reviewers focus on, followed by a few tips on writing a successful grant.

A para-by-para breakdown of a grant proposal revealed the important sections, delving into the details of the budget section among others which are crucial to score funding from the Council. Dr Hasnain explained that the key to writing a successful grant lies not in using complex jargon, but in making evident to the review committee what makes the applicant worthy of the grant. Another important aspect of the paper is the command over the subject of the said research project. If the paper is focusing on a specific subject, then the writer must be fully informed of that subject. He laid crucial importance on drafting the proposal in a timely manner, with ample days to review before submission. Submitting the paper without ample review will lead to an inconsistent paper, which reviewers may be able to catch on.

Proposals are invited from full-time and flexi full-time faculty, as well as graduate students for URC's third cycle of 2023. The deadline for applications is August 31, 2023.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the process of intramural grant application.



ISMC Hosts International Conference to Promote Research in Islamic Studies

The annual conference of the British Association of Islamic Studies ([BRAIS](#)) was held at AKU's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations (ISMC). The conference, which lasted two days, welcomed speakers from around the world to promote discussion on issues including Islamic architecture, law, and other related topics. BRAIS aims to advance the academic study of, and instruction in Islamic and Muslim culture to the British society.



The keynote speaker was Professor Sarah Bowen Savant, who leads the KITAB project and also founded the new Centre for Digital Humanities at the AKU-ISMC. The project team discussed the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Islamic Studies. The European and North American 'What is Islamic Studies?' panel was presided over by Professor Philip Wood, which was also attended by Professor Yasmeen Ilkahn. They are currently engaged in a study on Group Formation during the Abbasid era. A discussion-based session on how digital humanities has changed Islamic Studies, and how aspiring scholars should be prepared for it was moderated by Professor Matthew Barber. Professors Walid Ghani, Gianluca Parolin, Jonas Otterback, and Aslisho Qurboniev also presented their projects.

More details on the programme can be found [here](#).

mPareshan Scales Up in Sindh



Led by Dr Fauziah Rabbani, the mPareshan project is effectively delivering mental health services in collaboration with Lady Health Workers (LHWs).

As part of the project, a customized training manual adapted from WHO's Intervention Guide was developed to improve mental health literacy, communication, and counselling skills among the LHWs. After initial training of 72 frontline LHWs using the manual, the project has scaled up at the

provincial level in collaboration with AKU's Community Health Services (CHS), Brain & Mind Institute (BMI), Pakistan Institute of Living & Learning (PILL), and the Government of Sindh's Lady Health Worker Program working within RMNCH.

The trickle-down training of LHWs to deliver culturally relevant mental health services was conducted for 70 district master trainers in two batches in June 2023. Leadership from the local government's RMNCH also attended the training.

Read more about the project's aim [here](#).