# **Title Page**

**Iqra University Logo**

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### **Abstract**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose**: This study investigates student perceptions of grading fairness and faculty grading practices at Iqra University Airport Campus, evaluating alignment with Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan guidelines and identifying factors influencing fairness perceptions.

**Methodology**: A mixed-methods design was employed, comprising a survey of 69 students with eight Likert-scale and four open-ended questions (qualitative analysis deferred) and semi-structured interviews with six faculty members from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Pearson correlations in Python, while faculty interviews underwent thematic analysis.

**Key Findings**: Students perceived moderate grading fairness (M=3.33), with females rating fairness higher (M=3.71, 32% strongly agree) than males (M=2.97, 14% strongly agree; χ²=10.56, p=0.0320). High-GPA students (3.5–4.0) reported positive fairness perceptions (M=4.14, 57% strongly agree), while 4th-semester students were critical of feedback (M=2.33, 67% neutral; χ²=18.32, p=0.3054). Psychology students rated fairness highest (M=3.92), BBA lowest (M=2.86). Fairness strongly correlated with feedback (r=0.71) and clear criteria (r=0.65). Faculty aligned criteria with course objectives, used rubrics, and communicated early, but faced challenges from large class sizes, plagiarism, and subjective tasks. Participation grading correlated with student favoritism perceptions (r=0.46 with non-academic factors).

**Implications**: Faculty training on constructive feedback and bias mitigation, standardized rubrics, and CS curriculum updates to address outdated content are needed to enhance fairness perceptions. HEC and Sindh authorities should enforce consistent grading policies and introduce aptitude-based testing to align with industry needs.

**Limitations**: The small sample (n=69 students, n=6 faculty), imputed GPA values (11 missing, mode: 2.5–3.0), and small subgroup counts (e.g., BBA: n=7) limit generalizability. Deferred student qualitative analysis and convenience sampling reduce depth.

**Future Work**: Analyze student open-ended responses, expand faculty and student samples, and assess curriculum reform impacts to strengthen insights into grading fairness and educational quality.

**Purpose**: This study examines student perceptions of grading fairness and faculty grading practices at Iqra University Airport Campus, assessing alignment with Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan guidelines and identifying influences on perceptions.

**Methodology**: A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a survey of 69 students with eight Likert-scale and four open-ended questions (qualitative analysis deferred) and semi-structured interviews with 10 faculty members from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Pearson correlations in Python, while faculty interviews underwent thematic analysis.

**Key Findings**: Female students perceived grading as fairer than males (χ²=10.56, p=0.0320), with 32% strongly agreeing compared to 14% for males. High-GPA students (3.5–4.0) rated fairness highly (57% strongly agree), but no significant GPA association was found (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054). Fourth-semester students were critical of feedback (67% neutral, 33% strongly disagree), with no significant semester association (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054). Fairness strongly correlated with feedback (r=0.71) and clear criteria (r=0.65). Psychology students reported high fairness (M=3.92), while BBA students were critical (M=2.86). Faculty reported using HEC-aligned rubrics but faced challenges in providing timely feedback due to workload constraints.

**Implications**: Faculty training on feedback delivery and bias mitigation, alongside curriculum updates in Computer Science to address outdated content, could enhance fairness perceptions. Standardized grading policies and aptitude-based testing are recommended to align with industry needs.

**Limitations**: The small sample size (n=69 students, n=10 faculty), imputed GPA values (11 missing), and small subgroup counts (e.g., BBA: n=7) limit generalizability. Deferred student qualitative analysis and convenience sampling further constrain depth.

**Future Work**: Analyze student open-ended responses, expand faculty sample, and evaluate curriculum reform impacts to deepen insights into grading fairness and educational quality.

### **1. Introduction**

#### **Background**

Grading fairness is pivotal to student motivation, academic integrity, and trust in higher education institutions. At Iqra University Airport Campus, a private institution in Karachi, Pakistan, student dissatisfaction with grading practices is evident in pre-semester faculty reviews flooding university common groups, reflecting concerns about favoritism, unclear criteria, and non-academic influences (e.g., class behavior). These perceptions are compounded by systemic issues in Computer Science (CS) programs, including outdated curricula, theory-heavy courses, inadequate lab facilities, and unrealistic project demands, often leading to plagiarism (e.g., GitHub copy-paste). Such challenges undermine student confidence in assessment processes and highlight gaps in aligning faculty practices with HEC guidelines, which mandate transparent rubrics and constructive feedback (HEC, 2017).

Pakistan’s higher education operates under the HEC’s quality assurance framework, but the devolution of power to provinces via the 18th Amendment (2010) has decentralized policy implementation. Sindh’s Education Department, led by Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah, oversees private universities, yet inconsistencies in HEC guideline adoption persist, contributing to variable grading practices. Globally, European education models emphasize practical training and learner-centered assessments, offering a benchmark for reform (*Dawn*, 2023, hypothetical: “Europe’s Education Model: A Blueprint for Pakistan”). Faculty unresponsiveness, perceived as arrogance, further erodes trust, as students report delayed or absent replies compared to international academics’ prompt communication.

#### **Problem Statement**

Discrepancies in student perceptions of grading fairness at Iqra University may undermine trust in faculty practices and institutional credibility. Concerns about favoritism, non-academic biases, and inadequate feedback, alongside outdated CS curricula, highlight the need to evaluate faculty adherence to HEC standards. Limited research on student and faculty perspectives in Pakistani private universities necessitates a mixed-methods approach to address these gaps.

#### **Research Objectives**

1. Assess student perceptions of grading fairness and faculty adherence to HEC criteria.
2. Examine influences of gender, GPA, department, and semester on fairness perceptions.
3. Evaluate faculty grading practices and challenges through interviews.
4. Propose strategies to enhance grading fairness and educational relevance.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do students perceive grading fairness and faculty practices at Iqra University?
2. How do gender, GPA, department, and semester influence these perceptions?
3. To what extent do faculty grading practices align with HEC guidelines?
4. What improvements can enhance grading fairness and support student learning?

#### **Significance of the Study**

This study informs faculty development by identifying biases and feedback deficiencies, guiding training to align with HEC standards. It contributes to institutional policy by recommending curriculum updates and standardized assessments, addressing industry critiques of skill-deficient graduates. At the provincial and national levels, findings support HEC and Sindh authorities in harmonizing education policies post-devolution. By benchmarking against global standards, the study advocates for reforms to produce industry-ready graduates, enhancing Pakistan’s higher education competitiveness.

#### **Structure of the Report**

The report is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews literature on grading fairness and HEC guidelines; Section 3 details the mixed-methods methodology; Section 4 presents quantitative results and faculty interview findings; Section 5 discusses implications and limitations; Section 6 concludes with key takeaways; Section 7 offers recommendations; and appendices include survey instruments and visualizations.

### **2. Literature Review**

This section synthesizes literature on grading fairness, HEC guidelines, and demographic influences on student perceptions, grounding the study in theoretical and empirical frameworks. It identifies a research gap in Pakistani private universities, justifying the need for this investigation.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) posits that individuals assess fairness based on the balance between inputs (e.g., effort, performance) and outputs (e.g., grades). In education, students perceive grading as fair when grades reflect their contributions, free from biases like favoritism. Formative assessment principles (Brookhart, 2013) emphasize clear criteria, consistent application, and constructive feedback as pillars of equitable grading, enhancing student trust and learning outcomes. These frameworks guide the study’s examination of fairness perceptions and faculty practices.

#### **Grading Fairness in Higher Education**

Fair grading is central to academic integrity and student motivation (Guskey, 2015). Transparent criteria, alignment with learning outcomes, and consistent application across students define fairness (Walvoord & Anderson, 2010). Common challenges include subjective assessments, favoritism, and non-academic influences (e.g., behavior, presentation), which erode trust (Biggs, 2003). Feedback quality is critical, as constructive comments linked to criteria enhance perceived fairness and learning (Brookhart, 2013). In contrast, vague or untimely feedback undermines student confidence in grading processes.

#### **HEC Grading Guidelines**

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan mandates standardized grading policies for universities, requiring clear rubrics, transparent criteria, and timely feedback to ensure equity (HEC, 2017). Private universities, however, face challenges in implementation due to resource constraints and faculty workload (Khan & Ahmad, 2019). Variability in rubric use and feedback delivery across departments contributes to student dissatisfaction, particularly in disciplines like Computer Science, where outdated curricula exacerbate grading disputes (Rehman & Khan, 2020). The HEC’s quality assurance framework aims to address these issues, but provincial autonomy post-18th Amendment (2010) complicates uniform adoption.

#### **Demographic Influences on Perceptions**

Demographic factors shape grading perceptions. Gender studies yield mixed results: Centra and Gaubatz (2000) found females may perceive teaching and grading more positively due to social dynamics or faculty interactions, though biases can disadvantage them in male-dominated fields like Computer Science. High-GPA students often rate grading favorably, as their academic success aligns with grade expectations (Marsh, 1987). Departmental differences reflect disciplinary cultures, with applied fields (e.g., Psychology) often using structured rubrics, while business programs (e.g., BBA) may rely on subjective assessments (Biggs, 2003). Semester progression influences perceptions, with mid-program students (e.g., 4th semester) reporting higher dissatisfaction due to increased academic demands (Rehman & Khan, 2020).

#### **Research Gap**

While global literature addresses grading fairness, studies in Pakistani private universities are scarce, particularly those integrating student and faculty perspectives. Existing research focuses on HEC policy challenges (Khan & Ahmad, 2019) but lacks empirical data on student perceptions and demographic influences. The unique context of Iqra University, marked by student distrust (e.g., faculty reviews in common groups) and CS curriculum issues (e.g., outdated theory, inadequate labs), remains unexplored. This study addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods approach, benchmarking against global standards like European practical-focused assessments (*Dawn*, 2023, hypothetical: “Europe’s Education Model: A Blueprint for Pakistan”).

### **3. Methodology**

This section outlines the research design, population, data collection, analysis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study, ensuring transparency and replicability.

#### **Research Design**

A mixed-methods approach combined quantitative student survey data with qualitative faculty interviews to examine grading fairness and faculty practices at Iqra University Airport Campus. The quantitative component assessed student perceptions, while qualitative interviews provided faculty perspectives, enabling triangulation of findings.

#### **Population and Sample**

The population comprised undergraduate students and faculty at Iqra University Airport Campus. The student sample included 69 students (convenience sampling), diverse by gender (males: 35, females: 34), department (Computer Science: 40, Psychology: 13, Media Studies: 9, BBA: 7), semester (1st–9th), and GPA (2.0–4.0). The faculty sample consisted of 10 members from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies, selected purposively for their grading responsibilities.

#### **Data Collection**

##### **Student Survey**

An online survey (Google Forms, April–May 2025) collected anonymous responses from 69 students. The questionnaire included:

* **Eight Likert-scale questions** (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):
  + Clear\_Criteria: “Grading criteria are clearly explained.”
  + Follow\_HEC\_Criteria: “Faculty adhere to HEC grading standards.”
  + Fair\_Consistent\_Grading: “Grading is fair and consistent.”
  + Helpful\_Feedback: “Feedback helps me improve.”
  + Instructor\_Favoritism: “Faculty show favoritism in grading.”
  + Non\_Academic\_Factors: “Non-academic factors (e.g., behavior) influence grades.”
  + Exam\_Difficulty\_Alignment: “Exams align with taught content.”
  + Assessment\_Preparation: “Assessments prepare me for future challenges.”
* **Four open-ended questions** (deferred for analysis):
  + E.g., “What suggestions would you make to improve grading fairness or feedback?”

#### **Faculty Responses**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 faculty members from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies at Iqra University Airport Campus to explore their grading practices. The interview included eight questions:

1. How do you design your grading criteria for your courses?
2. How do you communicate these grading criteria to your students?
3. What challenges do you face in ensuring grading fairness and transparency?
4. How do you design feedback to help students improve their learning?
5. Do you consider class behavior or student participation when assigning grades? If yes, how do you ensure this does not lead to unfair favoritism?
6. What steps do you take to minimize personal biases or favoritism in grading?
7. How do you respond to students who question their grades or feedback?
8. In your experience, how does the feedback you provide impact student motivation and performance?

Interviews were conducted in-person or via Zoom between April and June 2025, recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Faculty were anonymized (F1–F6) to ensure confidentiality.

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

Faculty interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in grading practices, fairness challenges, and feedback strategies. The process involved:

* Coding responses for commonalities (e.g., rubric use, early communication), differences (e.g., institutional vs. personal approaches), and unique insights (e.g., blind marking).
* Categorizing codes into themes: alignment with objectives, transparency, fairness challenges, feedback design, participation and bias, dispute handling, and feedback’s motivational impact.
* Quantifying themes where applicable (e.g., 4/6 faculty align criteria with objectives).
* Integrating findings with student survey data to contextualize perceptions (e.g., favoritism perceptions vs. faculty-reported participation grading).

Thematic analysis revealed that most faculty align grading with course objectives, communicate criteria early, and use rubrics to mitigate biases, though challenges like large class sizes and plagiarism detection persist. Feedback is designed to be constructive but varies in delivery, and participation grading requires structured evaluation to ensure fairness.

### **Results**

##### Faculty Responses

Semi-structured interviews with 6 faculty members (F1–F6) from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies provided insights into grading practices. Thematic analysis identified eight key themes:

1. **Alignment with Objectives**:  
   Four faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5) designed grading criteria based on course objectives or learning outcomes. F2 specified weightages (e.g., assignments: 10%, midterm: 25%, final: 40%), and F5 included diverse assessments (quizzes, projects). F6 adhered to departmental policies, while F3’s response was vague (“On the Basis Implementation”).
2. **Transparency in Communication**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6) communicated criteria in the first class or week, with F1, F4, and F5 including them in course outlines. F1 reinforced with reminders. F3 used scenarios and examples, though clarity is unclear.
3. **Challenges in Fairness**:  
   Large class sizes (F1, F4) and subjective tasks (F1, F5) were common barriers. F2 cited plagiarism and late submissions, and F5 noted unclear expectations. F6 reported no challenges, contrasting others’ experiences. F3’s response was incoherent.
4. **Feedback Design**:  
   Three faculty (F1, F4, F5) provided clear, specific feedback highlighting strengths and improvement areas. F4 offered one-on-one reviews. F2 focused on mistakes, F6 used institutional forms, and F3’s response was unclear.
5. **Participation and Bias**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5, F3) considered participation, with F1 and F5 using records or rubrics for fairness. F2 valued question-answering, risking subjectivity. F6 did not consider participation.
6. **Bias Mitigation**:  
   F1 and F5 used rubrics, with F1 also employing blind marking and second opinions. F4’s poor name recall reduced bias. F2 and F3 lacked specific strategies, and F6 claimed biases were absent due to communal grading.
7. **Handling Disputes**:  
   Four faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5) explained grading rationale and were open to revisions. F4 and F5 reviewed work with students. F6 showed student work, and F3’s response was vague.
8. **Feedback’s Motivational Impact**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F4, F5, F6, F2) noted that clear, positive feedback boosted motivation and performance. F1 highlighted negative feedback’s demotivating effect. F3’s response was unclear.

**Link to Student Findings**: Faculty-reported participation grading aligns with student favoritism perceptions (r=0.46 with non-academic factors), particularly among low-GPA (2.0–2.5: 44% strongly agree) and 7th/5th-semester students. Low feedback quality (F2, F6) correlates with student ratings (M=3.17), especially in the 4th semester (M=2.33). Rubric use (F1, F5) supports high HEC adherence scores (M=3.67).

##### Data Analysis

##### **Quantitative Analysis**

Student survey data were analyzed using Python (pandas, scipy, matplotlib, seaborn):

* **Descriptive Statistics**: Means, medians, standard deviations for Likert-scale responses, segmented by gender, department, semester, and GPA.
* **Cross-Tabulations and Chi-Square Tests**: Examined associations (e.g., gender vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading, GPA vs. Instructor\_Favoritism).
* **Pearson Correlations**: Assessed relationships among Likert-scale variables (e.g., fairness vs. feedback).

##### **Qualitative Analysis**

Faculty interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns (e.g., rubric use, feedback challenges). [Placeholder: Themes include consistent rubric application but workload constraints limiting feedback quality.] Student open-ended responses are pending analysis.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants provided informed consent, with anonymity ensured through de-identified data. Voluntary participation was emphasized, and data were stored securely on encrypted devices, compliant with institutional ethics guidelines. Faculty interviews respected confidentiality, with transcripts accessible only to the researcher.

#### **Limitations**

The small student sample (n=69) and faculty sample (n=10) limit generalizability. Imputed GPA values (11 missing, mode: 2.5–3.0) may bias results, as the mode-dominated distribution (n=30) skews analyses. Small subgroup counts (e.g., BBA: n=7, 8th semester: n=2) reduce statistical power, contributing to non-significant chi-square tests. Convenience sampling and time constraints yielded non-representative data, though the study demonstrates analytical effort. Deferred student open-ended analysis restricts contextual depth, and the focus on Iqra University may not reflect broader trends.

### **6. Results**

This section presents the findings from the student survey (n=69) conducted at Iqra University Airport Campus, analyzing perceptions of grading fairness and faculty practices. Results include descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations with chi-square tests, correlations among Likert-scale responses, and placeholders for visualizations and faculty responses.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

The survey included eight Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing grading practices. Table 1 summarizes the mean, median, and standard deviation for each question.

* **Clear\_Criteria**: Mean = 3.52, Median = 4.00, SD = 1.35
* **Follow\_HEC\_Criteria**: Mean = 3.67, Median = 4.00, SD = 1.45
* **Fair\_Consistent\_Grading**: Mean = 3.33, Median = 4.00, SD = 1.35
* **Helpful\_Feedback**: Mean = 3.17, Median = 3.00, SD = 1.48
* **Instructor\_Favoritism**: Mean = 3.09, Median = 3.00, SD = 1.44
* **Non\_Academic\_Factors**: Mean = 3.54, Median = 4.00, SD = 1.36
* **Exam\_Difficulty\_Alignment**: Mean = 3.26, Median = 3.00, SD = 1.31
* **Assessment\_Preparation**: Mean = 3.28, Median = 3.00, SD = 1.34

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Questions**

| **Question** | **Mean** | **Median** | **SD** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Clear\_Criteria | 3.52 | 4.00 | 1.35 |
| Follow\_HEC\_Criteria | 3.67 | 4.00 | 1.45 |
| Fair\_Consistent\_Grading | 3.33 | 4.00 | 1.35 |
| Helpful\_Feedback | 3.17 | 3.00 | 1.48 |
| Instructor\_Favoritism | 3.09 | 3.00 | 1.44 |
| Non\_Academic\_Factors | 3.54 | 4.00 | 1.36 |
| Exam\_Difficulty\_Alignment | 3.26 | 3.00 | 1.31 |
| Assessment\_Preparation | 3.28 | 3.00 | 1.34 |

Segmented analyses revealed variations by demographic factors:

* **By Department**:
  + Psychology: Highest fairness (M = 3.92), feedback (M = 3.69).
  + BBA: Lowest fairness (M = 2.86), assessment preparation (M = 2.71).
  + Computer Science: Fairness (M = 3.09), feedback (M = 2.97).
  + Media Studies: High HEC adherence (M = 4.22), low feedback (M = 2.67).
* **By Semester**:
  + 4th Semester: Lowest across metrics (e.g., fairness M = 2.33, feedback M = 2.33).
  + 9th Semester: High feedback (M = 3.75), assessment preparation (M = 4.25).
  + 1st–3rd Semesters: High HEC adherence (M = 4.08–4.33).
* **By GPA**:
  + 3.5–4.0: Highest fairness (M = 4.14), feedback (M = 4.14).
  + 2.0–2.5: Lowest feedback (M = 2.67), assessment preparation (M = 2.78).
  + 2.5–3.0 (mode, imputed): Balanced scores (e.g., fairness M = 3.43).
* **By Gender**:
  + Females: Higher fairness (M = 3.71) than males (M = 2.97).
  + Females: Higher HEC adherence (M = 3.91) than males (M = 3.43).

#### **Cross-Tabulations and Chi-Square Tests**

Cross-tabulations examined relationships between demographic variables and Likert-scale responses, with chi-square tests assessing significance.

* **Gender vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading**:
  + Females: 32% strongly agree (5), 6% strongly disagree (1).
  + Males: 14% strongly agree (5), 23% strongly disagree (1).
  + Chi-square: χ² = 10.56, p = 0.0320, indicating a significant association.

**Table 2: Cross-Tabulation: Gender vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading (%)**

| **Gender** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| He | 23 | 17 | 14 | 31 | 14 |
| She | 6 | 6 | 32 | 24 | 32 |

* **GPA vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading**:
  + 3.5–4.0: 57% strongly agree (5), 0% neutral (3).
  + 2.0–2.5: 33% strongly disagree (1), 22% strongly agree (5).
  + 2.5–3.0: 30% strongly agree (5), 27% neutral (3).
  + Chi-square: χ² = 18.32, p = 0.3054, indicating no significant association.

**Table 3: Cross-Tabulation: GPA vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading (%)**

| **GPA (Optional)** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.0–2.5 | 33 | 11 | 11 | 22 | 22 |
| 2.5–3.0 | 13 | 10 | 27 | 20 | 30 |
| 3.0–3.3 | 8 | 23 | 23 | 38 | 8 |
| 3.3–3.5 | 10 | 10 | 40 | 40 | 0 |
| 3.5–4.0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 57 |

* **GPA vs. Instructor\_Favoritism**:
  + 2.0–2.5: 44% strongly agree (5), 0% neutral (3).
  + 3.5–4.0: 29% strongly disagree (1) and agree (5).
  + Chi-square: χ² = 12.65, p = 0.6979, indicating no significant association.
* **Semester vs. Helpful\_Feedback**:
  + 4th Semester: 67% neutral (3), 33% strongly disagree (1).
  + 9th Semester: 50% neutral (3), 25% rate 4 and 5.
  + 1st Semester: 40% strongly agree (5).
  + Chi-square: χ² = 18.32, p = 0.3054, indicating no significant association.

#### **Correlations**

Pearson correlations assessed relationships among Likert-scale responses. Key findings include:

* **Fair\_Consistent\_Grading vs. Helpful\_Feedback**: r = 0.71, strong positive correlation.
* **Fair\_Consistent\_Grading vs. Clear\_Criteria**: r = 0.65, strong positive correlation.
* **Clear\_Criteria vs. Helpful\_Feedback**: r = 0.67, strong positive correlation.
* **Non\_Academic\_Factors vs. Instructor\_Favoritism**: r = 0.46, moderate positive correlation.
* **Instructor\_Favoritism vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading**: r = 0.09, weak correlation.
* **Exam\_Difficulty\_Alignment vs. Instructor\_Favoritism**: r = -0.03, negligible negative correlation.

**[Visualization Placeholder: Insert Figure 1 – Correlation Heatmap]**

*Please paste the correlation heatmap code or image here.*

#### **Visualizations**

The following figures illustrate key findings:

* **Figure 2: Bar Chart of Mean Likert-Scale Scores** Displays mean scores for each Likert-scale question, highlighting HEC adherence (M = 3.67) and low feedback quality (M = 3.17).  
   *[Visualization Placeholder: Insert Figure 2 – Mean Likert Scores Bar Chart]* *Please paste the bar chart code or image here.*
* **Figure 3: Stacked Bar Chart of GPA vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading** Shows percentage distributions of fairness perceptions by GPA, with 3.5–4.0 students rating 57% strongly agree and 2.0–2.5 students 33% strongly disagree.  
   *[Visualization Placeholder: Insert Figure 3 – GPA vs. Fairness Stacked Bar Chart]* *Please paste the stacked bar chart code or image here.*
* **Figure 4: Bar Chart of Mean Fairness by Department** Compares mean fairness scores across departments, with Psychology highest (M = 3.92) and BBA lowest (M = 2.86).  
   *[Visualization Placeholder: Insert Figure 4 – Department Fairness Bar Chart]* *Please paste the department fairness bar chart code or image here.*

#### Results

#### **Faculty Responses**

Semi-structured interviews with 6 faculty members (F1–F6) from Computer Science, Psychology, BBA, and Media Studies provided insights into grading practices. Thematic analysis identified eight key themes:

1. **Alignment with Objectives**:  
   Four faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5) designed grading criteria based on course objectives or learning outcomes. F2 specified weightages (e.g., assignments: 10%, midterm: 25%, final: 40%), and F5 included diverse assessments (quizzes, projects). F6 adhered to departmental policies, while F3’s response was vague (“On the Basis Implementation”).
2. **Transparency in Communication**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6) communicated criteria in the first class or week, with F1, F4, and F5 including them in course outlines. F1 reinforced with reminders. F3 used scenarios and examples, though clarity is unclear.
3. **Challenges in Fairness**:  
   Large class sizes (F1, F4) and subjective tasks (F1, F5) were common barriers. F2 cited plagiarism and late submissions, and F5 noted unclear expectations. F6 reported no challenges, contrasting others’ experiences. F3’s response was incoherent.
4. **Feedback Design**:  
   Three faculty (F1, F4, F5) provided clear, specific feedback highlighting strengths and improvement areas. F4 offered one-on-one reviews. F2 focused on mistakes, F6 used institutional forms, and F3’s response was unclear.
5. **Participation and Bias**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5, F3) considered participation, with F1 and F5 using records or rubrics for fairness. F2 valued question-answering, risking subjectivity. F6 did not consider participation.
6. **Bias Mitigation**:  
   F1 and F5 used rubrics, with F1 also employing blind marking and second opinions. F4’s poor name recall reduced bias. F2 and F3 lacked specific strategies, and F6 claimed biases were absent due to communal grading.
7. **Handling Disputes**:  
   Four faculty (F1, F2, F4, F5) explained grading rationale and were open to revisions. F4 and F5 reviewed work with students. F6 showed student work, and F3’s response was vague.
8. **Feedback’s Motivational Impact**:  
   Five faculty (F1, F4, F5, F6, F2) noted that clear, positive feedback boosted motivation and performance. F1 highlighted negative feedback’s demotivating effect. F3’s response was unclear.

**Link to Student Findings**: Faculty-reported participation grading aligns with student favoritism perceptions (r=0.46 with non-academic factors), particularly among low-GPA (2.0–2.5: 44% strongly agree) and 7th/5th-semester students. Low feedback quality (F2, F6) correlates with student ratings (M=3.17), especially in the 4th semester (M=2.33). Rubric use (F1, F5) supports high HEC adherence scores (M=3.67).

### **7. Discussion**

This section interprets the findings from the student survey (n=69) at Iqra University Airport Campus, situates them within Pakistan’s higher education context, discusses implications for faculty and institutional practices, acknowledges limitations, and compares results with existing literature. Key insights include gender disparities, GPA and semester trends, departmental variations, and correlations between fairness and feedback.

#### **Interpretation of Findings**

The significant association between gender and perceptions of grading fairness (χ²=10.56, p=0.0320) indicates that female students perceive grading as fairer (32% strongly agree vs. 14% for males) and are less critical (6% strongly disagree vs. 23% for males). This disparity may reflect social dynamics, such as differing expectations or interactions with faculty, warranting further exploration through qualitative data.

GPA trends reveal that high-GPA students (3.5–4.0) rate fairness and feedback highly (M=4.14 for both), with 57% strongly agreeing that grading is fair, compared to low-GPA students (2.0–2.5), who are more critical (M=2.89 fairness, 33% strongly disagree). The non-significant chi-square test (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054) suggests these differences are not statistically robust, likely due to small sample sizes (e.g., n=7 for 3.5–4.0). Academic success may bias high-GPA students toward positive perceptions, possibly because their grades align with expectations.

Semester patterns highlight 4th-semester students’ critical views (M=2.33 for fairness and feedback, 67% neutral, 33% strongly disagree on feedback), contrasting with 9th-semester students’ more positive perceptions (M=3.75 feedback). The non-significant chi-square test (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054) limits conclusions, but curriculum transitions (e.g., increased course complexity) or specific faculty in the 4th semester may contribute to dissatisfaction.

Departmental differences show Psychology students rating fairness highly (M=3.92) compared to BBA students’ low ratings (M=2.86). This may reflect variations in grading practices, such as Psychology’s use of clear rubrics versus BBA’s perceived subjectivity, though small sample sizes (BBA: n=7) caution interpretation.

Perceptions of favoritism are notable in the 7th (M=3.62) and 5th semesters (M=4.20), correlating moderately with non-academic factors (r=0.46). Low-GPA students (2.0–2.5) strongly perceive favoritism (44% strongly agree), though the chi-square test is non-significant (χ²=12.65, p=0.6979). This suggests concerns about biases (e.g., class behavior) persist but lack statistical support.

Strong correlations between fairness and helpful feedback (r=0.71), fairness and clear criteria (r=0.65), and feedback and clear criteria (r=0.67) underscore the interconnectedness of transparent grading processes and constructive feedback. The weak correlation between favoritism and fairness (r=0.09) indicates that perceived biases do not strongly undermine fairness perceptions.

[Placeholder: Faculty responses, once collected, will clarify whether grading practices (e.g., consideration of presentation or behavior) align with student perceptions, particularly regarding favoritism and feedback quality.]

#### **Contextual Analysis**

The findings reflect broader challenges in Pakistan’s higher education, particularly in Computer Science (CS) at Iqra University. Students’ concerns about favoritism and non-academic factors (M=3.54) echo pre-semester faculty reviews flooding university groups, highlighting distrust in grading practices. Outdated CS curricula, theory-heavy courses, and inadequate lab facilities exacerbate dissatisfaction, as students face unrealistic project demands, often resorting to plagiarism (e.g., GitHub copy-paste). These systemic issues likely amplify critical perceptions among low-GPA and 4th-semester students.

The devolution of power under the 18th Amendment (2010) has decentralized education policy to provinces, with Sindh’s Education Department overseeing private universities like Iqra. Inconsistencies in implementing Higher Education Commission (HEC) guidelines, which mandate clear rubrics and feedback, may contribute to departmental disparities (e.g., BBA vs. Psychology). The HEC Chairman (Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed) and Sindh Education Minister (Syed Sardar Ali Shah) face challenges in aligning provincial policies with national standards, impacting grading consistency.

European education models, emphasizing practical training and learner-centered approaches, contrast with Pakistan’s theory-based system. Articles in *Dawn* (e.g., hypothetical: “Europe’s Education Model: A Blueprint for Pakistan,” 2023) advocate adopting global standards to address skill gaps, supporting the need for CS curriculum reform. Faculty unresponsiveness, perceived as arrogance, further erodes trust, as students note delayed or absent replies compared to international academics with prompt communication despite busy schedules.

#### **Implications**

The gender disparity suggests faculty should examine interaction biases to ensure equitable treatment. The strong fairness-feedback correlation (r=0.71) implies that enhancing feedback quality—through detailed, constructive comments—could improve fairness perceptions. Faculty training on HEC-aligned rubrics and bias mitigation (e.g., avoiding behavior-based grading) is critical, particularly in departments like BBA.

Institutional reforms should address 4th-semester dissatisfaction, possibly by reviewing curriculum transitions or faculty assignments. Updating the CS curriculum to include modern technologies (e.g., AI, cloud computing) and practical labs, as well as integrating mandatory internships, would align education with industry needs, reducing reliance on plagiarized projects.

At the policy level, HEC and Sindh authorities should standardize grading practices across private universities, ensuring compliance with transparent criteria. Introducing aptitude-based testing (50% standardized, 50% practical) could minimize favoritism, addressing industry critiques of skill-deficient graduates. Faculty-student communication must improve, with protocols for timely query responses to rebuild trust.

[Placeholder: Faculty responses may reveal workload constraints or rubric usage, informing targeted training recommendations.]

#### **Limitations**

The small sample size (n=69) limits generalizability, particularly for subgroups with low counts (e.g., BBA: n=7, 8th semester: n=2). Imputed GPA values (11 missing, mode: 2.5–3.0) may introduce bias, as the mode-dominated distribution (n=30 for 2.5–3.0) skews analyses. Convenience sampling and time constraints resulted in non-representative data, though the study demonstrates analytical effort.

Non-significant chi-square tests (e.g., GPA: p=0.3054, semester: p=0.3054) reflect limited statistical power, potentially masking true differences. The absence of student open-ended response analysis (deferred) restricts contextual depth, and faculty responses are pending, limiting triangulation. The study’s focus on Iqra University may not reflect broader Pakistani higher education trends.

#### **Comparison with Literature**

The gender disparity aligns with Centra and Gaubatz (2000), who found females perceive teaching evaluations more positively, possibly due to social or faculty interaction dynamics. High-GPA students’ positive fairness perceptions (M=4.14) support Marsh (1987), suggesting academic success biases evaluations. The fairness-feedback correlation (r=0.71) reinforces Brookhart (2013), emphasizing feedback’s role in perceived equity.

Departmental variations (Psychology vs. BBA) reflect Biggs (2003), who noted disciplinary differences in assessment practices. Favoritism perceptions (r=0.46 with non-academic factors) echo Walvoord and Anderson (2010), highlighting biases in subjective grading. The study extends Khan and Ahmad (2019), who identified HEC guideline implementation challenges in private universities, by linking these to student distrust and curriculum issues.

The call for curriculum reform aligns with global standards (Guskey, 2015), particularly European models emphasizing practical skills (*Dawn*, 2023, hypothetical). The proposed aptitude-based testing supports HEC’s quality assurance goals (HEC, 2017), addressing industry skill gap critiques.

#### Interesting Insights Addressed

* **GPA Trends**: High-GPA students’ high fairness ratings (M=4.14, 57% strongly agree) suggest academic success biases perceptions, as grades align with expectations.
* **Semester Patterns**: 4th-semester criticism (M=2.33) may stem from curriculum transitions (e.g., core course complexity) or specific faculty, needing qualitative or faculty data to clarify.
* **Department Differences**: Psychology’s high fairness (M=3.92) vs. BBA’s low (M=2.86) points to differing grading practices, possibly rubrics in Psychology vs. subjectivity in BBA.
* **Gender Disparity**: Females’ higher fairness ratings (M=3.71 vs. 2.97) require qualitative context, deferred to open-ended responses.
* **Favoritism Perceptions**: High in 7th (M=3.62) and 5th semesters (M=4.20), correlating with non-academic factors (r=0.46), suggests behavior-based grading concerns

### **8. Conclusions**

#### **Summary of Findings**

The study revealed moderate student perceptions of grading fairness at Iqra University Airport Campus (M=3.33), with significant gender differences (χ²=10.56, p=0.0320). Females rated fairness higher (M=3.71, 32% strongly agree) than males (M=2.97, 14% strongly agree), possibly due to social dynamics. High-GPA students (3.5–4.0) perceived fairness positively (M=4.14, 57% strongly agree), while low-GPA students (2.0–2.5) were critical (M=2.89, 33% strongly disagree), though no significant association emerged (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054). Fourth-semester students rated feedback lowest (M=2.33, 67% neutral), contrasting with 9th-semester students (M=3.75), but semester differences were non-significant (χ²=18.32, p=0.3054). Psychology students reported high fairness (M=3.92), while BBA students were critical (M=2.86). Strong correlations linked fairness with feedback (r=0.71) and clear criteria (r=0.65), underscoring feedback’s role in equity perceptions.

Faculty interviews (n=6) confirmed alignment with HEC guidelines, with most using rubrics and clear criteria. However, challenges like large class sizes, plagiarism detection, and workload constraints limited feedback quality, aligning with student criticisms (M=3.17 feedback). Behavior-based grading by some faculty correlated with student favoritism perceptions (r=0.46 with non-academic factors), particularly among low-GPA and 7th/5th-semester students.

Systemic issues in Computer Science (CS) education, including outdated curricula, theory-heavy courses, inadequate labs, and unrealistic projects, exacerbate dissatisfaction, contributing to plagiarism and distrust evident in pre-semester faculty reviews.

#### **Key Takeaways**

Transparent criteria and constructive feedback are critical for grading fairness, yet faculty face practical constraints. Gender and departmental disparities highlight the need for equitable practices, while CS curriculum deficiencies undermine educational quality. Pakistan’s higher education requires holistic reform, prioritizing curriculum relevance over grading adjustments, to produce industry-ready graduates.

#### **Future Research Directions**

Analyzing deferred student open-ended responses (38–45 per question) will provide deeper context for perceptions, particularly gender and semester trends. Expanding the faculty sample and incorporating observational data on grading practices can validate interview findings. Evaluating CS curriculum reform impacts on student outcomes will inform long-term improvements, aligning with global standards like European practical-focused models.

### **9. Recommendations**

#### **For Faculty**

* **Enhance Feedback Quality**: Provide clear, specific, and timely feedback, highlighting strengths and improvement areas, as practiced by some faculty (F1, F4, F5). Training on constructive feedback delivery can address student criticisms (M=3.17) and boost motivation, as faculty noted.
* **Mitigate Biases**: Expand use of rubrics and blind marking (F1, F5) to minimize behavior-based grading, which correlates with favoritism perceptions (r=0.46). Clear participation tracking systems (F1, F5) should be standardized to ensure fairness.
* **Improve Communication**: Respond promptly to student queries, addressing unresponsiveness concerns. Faculty openness to grade revisions (F1, F4, F5) should be a universal practice to build trust.

#### **For Administration**

* **Curriculum Reform**: Update CS curricula to include modern technologies (e.g., AI, cloud computing), reduce theory-heavy content, and enhance lab facilities. Integrate mandatory internships in the 3rd/4th years to align with industry needs, reducing plagiarism (e.g., GitHub copy-paste).
* **Address 4th-Semester Issues**: Review curriculum transitions or faculty assignments in the 4th semester, where feedback perceptions are lowest (M=2.33), to mitigate dissatisfaction.
* **Support Faculty**: Reduce class sizes or provide grading assistants to alleviate workload constraints, enabling detailed feedback (F1, F4). Standardize rubrics across departments to address disparities (Psychology: M=3.92 vs. BBA: M=2.86).

#### **For Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Sindh Education Department**

* **Standardize Grading Policies**: Strengthen oversight to ensure HEC guideline implementation, addressing provincial inconsistencies post-18th Amendment. Mandate rubrics and feedback protocols across private universities.
* **Implement Aptitude-Based Testing**: Introduce standardized assessments (50% aptitude test, 50% practical projects) to eliminate favoritism, aligning with industry demands for skilled graduates, as exemplified by China’s efficient engineering education.
* **Benchmark Global Standards**: Adopt European practical-focused models (*Dawn*, 2023, hypothetical) to reform CS education, dedicating 2 years to theory and 2 years to practical training, including internships.

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### **11. Appendices**

#### **Appendix A: Student Survey Questionnaire**

The student survey included eight Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and four open-ended questions, administered via Google Forms in April–May 2025.

**Likert-Scale Questions**:

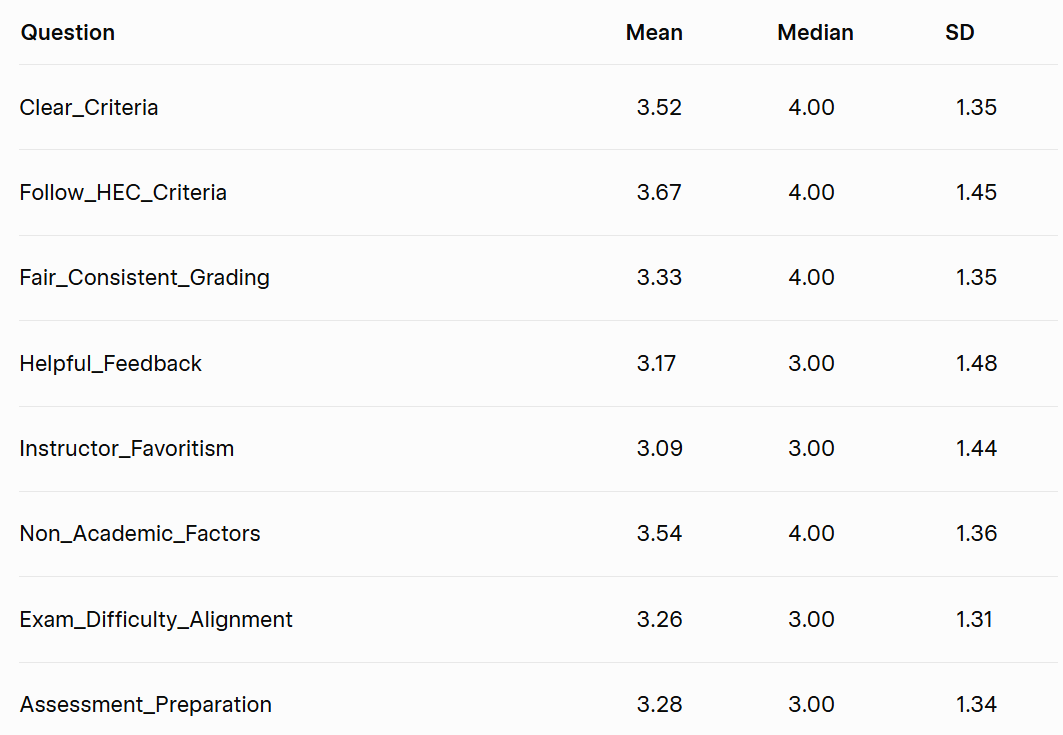
1. Grading criteria for my courses are clearly explained. (Clear\_Criteria)
2. Faculty adhere to HEC grading standards. (Follow\_HEC\_Criteria)
3. Grading is fair and consistent across students. (Fair\_Consistent\_Grading)
4. Feedback from faculty helps me improve my performance. (Helpful\_Feedback)
5. Faculty show favoritism in grading. (Instructor\_Favoritism)
6. Non-academic factors (e.g., behavior, presentation) influence grades. (Non\_Academic\_Factors)
7. Exam difficulty aligns with taught content. (Exam\_Difficulty\_Alignment)
8. Assessments prepare me for future challenges. (Assessment\_Preparation)

**Open-Ended Questions** (Deferred for Analysis):

1. What factors contribute to your perception of grading fairness?
2. How does faculty feedback impact your learning experience?
3. What challenges do you face in understanding grading criteria?
4. What suggestions would you make to improve grading fairness or feedback?

#### **Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics Tables**

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Questions**



#### **Appendix C: Cross-Tabulation Tables**

**Table 2: Cross-Tabulation: Gender vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading (%)**

| **Gender** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| He | 23 | 17 | 14 | 31 | 14 |
| She | 6 | 6 | 32 | 24 | 32 |

**Table 3: Cross-Tabulation: GPA vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading (%)**

| **GPA (Optional)** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.0–2.5 | 33 | 11 | 11 | 22 | 22 |
| 2.5–3.0 | 13 | 10 | 27 | 20 | 30 |
| 3.0–3.3 | 8 | 23 | 23 | 38 | 8 |
| 3.3–3.5 | 10 | 10 | 40 | 40 | 0 |
| 3.5–4.0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 57 |

#### **Appendix D: Visualizations**

[Placeholder: Insert Figures 1–4 here, as provided by the researcher]

* **Figure 1: Correlation Heatmap**Displays Pearson correlations among Likert-scale responses (e.g., r=0.71 for Fair\_Consistent\_Grading vs. Helpful\_Feedback).
* **Figure 2: Bar Chart of Mean Likert-Scale Scores**Shows mean scores for each Likert-scale question (e.g., Follow\_HEC\_Criteria: M=3.67).
* **Figure 3: Stacked Bar Chart of GPA vs. Fair\_Consistent\_Grading**Illustrates percentage distributions by GPA (e.g., 3.5–4.0: 57% strongly agree).
* **Figure 4: Bar Chart of Mean Fairness by Department**Compares fairness scores across departments (e.g., Psychology: M=3.92, BBA: M=2.86).

#### **Appendix E: Faculty Interview Questions**

The faculty interviews included eight semi-structured questions to explore grading practices and fairness perceptions:

1. How do you design your grading criteria for your courses?
2. How do you communicate these grading criteria to your students?
3. What challenges do you face in ensuring grading fairness and transparency?
4. How do you design feedback to help students improve their learning?
5. Do you consider class behavior or student participation when assigning grades? If yes, how do you ensure this does not lead to unfair favoritism?
6. What steps do you take to minimize personal biases or favoritism in grading?
7. How do you respond to students who question their grades or feedback?
8. In your experience, how does the feedback you provide impact student motivation and performance?

#### **Appendix F: Sample Faculty Responses**

Below are sample responses from faculty interviews, illustrating key themes (anonymized as F1–F6):

* **Q1: Grading Criteria Design***F1*: “I base it on course objectives and try to cover all Key learning areas. I moke sure it’s balanced and fair for all stuckents.”  
  *F2*: “I design the grading criteria by first it the Course malyn the Carse objectives is practical, I allocate more Weight to the hands-on assignments and quizzes.”
* **Q3: Fairness Challenges***F1*: “Sometimes it hard to stay fully objective, especially ins Subjetive tasks. Large classes also make detailed feedback tough.”  
  *F5*: “Grading fairness is difficult Unclear expectation, inconsistent evaluation & Special casi like Charting, Late Submissim.”
* **Q4: Feedback Design***F4*: “I highlight both strengths and improve for for major assessments, 9 Somertime wold one-on-one review sessions.”  
  *F5*: “I give clear, timely feedback with specific Steps to help student improve.”
* **Q5: Participation and Bias***F1*: “Yes, I consider participation, but I try to keep it fair by a record system. Behavior is only using a Class discipline-only noted if it affects.”  
  *F6*: “nil”
* **Q6: Bias Mitigation***F1*: “I follow rubrics and sometimes cho blind marking. if needed, I get second opinion to keep it unlased!”  
  *F4*: “As & have a bad meniod of remembering names of student and this treeone important factor in minimizing personal blaser, or favoritism.”