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Analysis of Higher Education Reforms in Pakistan: A Public Management Perspective

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Abstract

The current study aimed to analyze higher education reforms in Pakistan from the perspective of public management approaches, traditional public administration, NPM, network governance, and new Weberian. Moreover, the study analyzed higher education reforms to situate and locate them in the context of wider international public management imperatives that have given rise to them. Additionally, the current study argued that higher education reforms in Pakistan have been intricately linked with the increasing globalization of the world which is also a cause of decrease in state autonomy. Multiple case study approach was employed to conduct the current study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with designated stakeholders of the reform process. Six universities and HEC head office were selected to collect the data. Document analysis and member checks were also used to triangulate the data collected through semi-structured interviews. After the data analysis, findings revealed the complexity of higher education reform process in Pakistan due to the presence of a hybrid structure of public administration paradigms. In a nutshell, the current research employed a public management investigative approach to study higher education reforms pertaining to their goals, design, instruments, implementation, evaluation, and outcomes in terms of strength and weaknesses in higher education in Pakistan.

Keywords: higher education, new public management, Pakistan, public administration, reforms

Introduction

The successes and failures of higher education reforms have received considerable scholarly attention over the past few decades. Studies have primarily focused on certain aspects including the structure and

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implementation of these reforms (Awwad et al., [2023](#)). There have been considerable challenges while implementing sustainable higher education reforms due to specific institutional structure, culture, environment, complexity, traditions, and context (Broucker et al., [2017](#)). Combined literature on public administration and higher education reforms suggests to develop and implement a successful reform initiative. Therefore, there is a surging need to understand and explore the multidimensionality of higher education reforms (Muyters et al., [2021](#)). Many scholars have highlighted the massive failure of higher education reforms. Moreover, they also argued that these reforms should not be designed and implemented as a single product or event, rather they must be understood as a multivariate process. There is a need to have better knowledge and comprehension of higher education reform process in terms of paradigms and approaches that guide and drive them, how they work, and how certain factors affect the implementation of higher education reforms. These types of studies are holistic in nature and profoundly beached in the major and tributary environment. These specific holistic studies have not been conducted earlier in the context of South Asia, particularly Pakistan.

If the education system of Pakistan is observed, it would be revealed that over 76 years since independence, many efforts have been made to increase the enrollment and literacy rates. Starting from national education conference in 1947, seven national education policies, eight 5 year plans, and half a dozen other schemes, such as Iqra Pilot Project and Nai Roshni Schools 1986-90 have been prepared and launched. The policy and plan documents were written in a very idealistic language but it became more heroic and unrealistic over time. This language was an emblem of sincerity towards purpose but all in vain since this sincerity of purpose did not produce required results. The common feature of these plans was philosophical importance of education which was described in every policy and plan, however, nothing much came out of these words (Ashraf, [2017](#)). The history of education planning in Pakistan comprises setting targets, blaming the failure upon other irrelevant factors, again setting the targets without any research and optimism, and this process continues (Bennett, [2018](#)).

Pakistan could have two possible futures depending upon its educational situation. As the population of Pakistan is increasing day by day and unlike India and China it will continue to rise (Broucker et al., [2022](#)). With respect

to life expectancy, growth rate, and gender dynamics, Pakistan is a developing country as compared to many others and the development of such a country is only possible by educating people rightly. Otherwise, its opportunity will be seized. Proper education is the key to starting the development process of the youth (Dimmock, [2020](#)). Among the other factors, education is the one which would unfold the future of Pakistan. A good education system is necessary for the well-being of Pakistan (Terpstra & Schaap, [2021](#)).

The current study attempted to contextualize, understand, analyze, and investigate the process of higher education reforms in Pakistan from the perspective of public management. To properly understand the higher education reforms, it is necessary to process the whole phenomenon. It is necessary to take into account the concept of public management. The study explored the approaches and paradigms of public management involved in the steering process.

History of Higher Education Reforms in Pakistan

To describe and highlight the process and steering paradigms of higher education reforms, the current study has to be situated in a particular context to define its scope. Policymakers in the higher education sector of scholars, academicians, politicians, and representatives of the corporate sector have always emphasized the role and importance of education in the socioeconomic development of Pakistan. This acknowledgment has always been highlighted in the educational policies of Pakistan in the form of flowery and fancy statements. However, these statements were not backed by any significant action. Many policies and five-year programs were initiated by the Government of Pakistan but, to dismay. For the revival of higher education in Pakistan, University Grants Commission (UGC) was established but due to insufficient funding and other issues, it remained inefficient. At last, a task force was formulated to analyze the situation of higher education in Pakistan and to recommend solutions for multiple problems prevailing in this sector. Boston group report was a big contribution at this step. After the recommendations of task force, Higher Education Commission (HEC) was formulated in 2002.

HEC initiated many higher education reform projects. These projects uplifted the higher education sector of Pakistan. However, after many reforms and projects, this education sector is still the victim of many challenges (Amir et al., [2020](#)).

Due to political instability, the history of Pakistan is full of disturbing incidents involving different governments; some were elected while others were militarily imposed, some were socialists and others were Islamic, however, all of these differences made little impact on higher education planning. This condition would remain the same until people understand that education has a critical role in the survival and development of any nation in this global world and we have to work together regardless of political and religious differences (Khan et al., [2018](#)).

Literature shows that the education system of Pakistan is embedded with many issues and dilemmas. Higher education figures, as compared to other countries, are alarming and shocking.

Research Objective

The current study aims to analyze and present the context and content of higher education reforms from a public management perspective in Pakistan.

Research Question

Based on the research objectives of the current study, following research questions were formed:

How state and public management paradigms are responsible to steer and govern the higher education reforms in Pakistan?

Literature Review

The subject of educational reforms is quite comprehensive and has received considerable attention in recent decades (Hazelkorn & Gibson, [2019](#)). One focus of the scholars was to study the unique organizational culture, administrative complexity, behaviors, structures, and unique contexts regarding the impact of change while implementing sustainable reforms because many of these reforms have been resistant to change in the past (Hargreaves, [2003](#)). In order to have a holistic view of educational reforms, it is necessary to review the eastern and western literature completely.

The literature review in this regard suggests that scholars have presented various initiatives of higher education reforms in their own ways. While reviewing the literature, two trends remained dominant. Firstly, to present the higher education reforms in the context of enhancing efficiency and quality in higher education sector which is somehow linked with new public

management (Muyters et al., [2021](#)). Whereas, the second trend is that most of the studies have focused on educational policies, their origin, design, and implementation (Morozumi, [2019](#)). It has been observed that higher education policies have been prioritized the most, how these policies were designed, and by whom they were designed and implemented (Gornitzka et al., [2005](#)). However, other important variables, such as structural characteristics of politico-administrative systems, which better explain the higher education reform process, are not included in most of the studies (Fuller & Stevenson, [2019](#)). A few studies have explained these structures, however, not in a comprehensive way. It is evident from the literature that the addition of these structures is important while explaining the overall status of higher education reforms. Along with structural explanations, there is one important factor that is noticeable in many studies. This factor affects the implementation of higher education reforms in different countries which is lack of socio-cultural context. Although, it was claimed that the majority of reforms were initiated on a similar pattern in many countries' extent, degree of implementation, and ultimate outcomes vary from country to country mainly due to its unique context and culture (Marginson, [2022](#)).

Public Administration and Higher Education Reforms

The discipline of public administration is based on the formulation and implementation of public policies in organizations (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, [2019](#)). These public policies are also termed as government policies and are concerned with the welfare of people (Nhema, [2015](#)).

In modern society, public administration has become an essential fragment. An “administrative state” has emerged from administrative thinkers. State agencies control and regulate every activity in this administrative state, hence making contributions to national development (Farazmand, [1999](#)). One of the prime aspects of national development is higher education. Higher education is the dominant source of building an information and knowledge-based society in current times where all countries in the world are experiencing an unparalleled change due to globalization. This change has brought a paradigm shift in higher education, changing the national perspective into a global perspective. In the current era, the higher education system is facing new demands and challenges due to this change (Haque, [2019](#)). For better establishment and functioning of higher education institutions, public administration has to play several roles. It must frame rules and regulations of higher education. Additionally, in the

developing countries, public administration must act as an instrument to establish and execute policies, procedures, and programs of higher education according to international standards (Sabharwal & Berman, [2013](#)). To ensure the process of nation-building through higher education, it must play an influential role to promote social and economic development. Apart from this, public administration is an effective tool for higher education curriculum development along with other functions. Its most crucial role is to become a change agent to bring positive changes in higher education to meet global criteria (Farazmand, [2023](#)).

There are three main approaches/theories of public administration. These approaches offer different perspectives on the practice of administrators and managers and are helpful in understanding the main functions and importance of public administration (Onder & Zengin, [2022](#)). These key types are described as follows:

Classical Public Administration

The classical public administration approach is also referred to as the ‘structural theory of public administration’ because it relies on major variables. This approach highlights the management of government institutions through bureaucratic policies (Aristovnik et al., [2022](#)). Classical public administration is an approach where political leadership makes decisions about policies and controls the implementation and administration of these policies in a strict bureaucratic hierarchical model employing civil employees. These employees are permanent, neutral, and anonymous and only work in public’s interest (Roberts, [2018](#)).

The classical model for public administration worked well for a long time and it was regarded as the successful model of public sector management. The theoretical basis of classical approach lies in the research conducted by Woodrow Wilson, Fredrick Taylor, and Max Weber (Katsamunska, [2012](#)). It was the most famous and acceptable model in 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Its distinguished feature was that professional bureaucrats were separated from political setup while executing the tasks of public administration. The pre-modern approaches were based on personal relationships instead of being neutral, such as the example of King and his loyal ministers and statesman. Max Weber’s findings were related to social and historical context of public administration and bureaucracy. He analyzed and highlighted the

characteristics, criteria, and terms of employment in the most ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber, [2023](#)). Woodrow Wilson introduced an important dimension of classical approach to public administration, that is, a politics-administration dichotomy. It means that there is a strict separation between politics and administration, as administration lies outside the political sphere (Nicotera, [2019](#)). Fredrick Taylor incorporated the principles and methods of scientific management in the classical approach of public administration. Taylor presented the idea of standardization which means finding the best way of working and maintaining the standard of work introducing intensive and extensive controlling. Three points were highlighted by him, that is, standardization of work, systematic control, and hierarchal organization and these points made scientific management theory the most influential public sector theory until 1940 (Shields, [2008](#)).

The classical approach confronted multiple challenges both in theory and practice after World War II. One highlighted criticism was the lack of an explicit theoretical framework in classical approach (Meier, [2015](#)). The work of Weber and Wilson was questioned by Nobel Award winner Herbert Simon. After 1940, different theoretical approaches and practical experiences started dominating the public administration. Resultantly, classical approach was completely denied, however, it still serves as a research theoretical foundation of several studies in public administration.

Modern Public Administration/New Public Management

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a wave of reforms at a very large scale. These reforms moved the roots of administration from classical to modern administration approach. This large-scale rethinking of governance gave birth to a new model of administration called ‘new public management’ (Broucker & Wit, [2015](#)). Initially, this model was assigned different names, such as managerialism, market-based public administration, entrepreneurial government, and post-bureaucratic government. Later on, scholars and practitioners coined the term “new public management” for this new approach to public administration. This approach was result-oriented as it focused on outcomes, outputs, and clients. It emphasized to make public organizations business-like because they were competing with the private sector. Therefore, there was a need to adopt a business model (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, [2000](#)).

New public management is an ideological perspective which aims to improve the overall performance of the organization. It emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness, economy, efficient instruments and programs of government organizations, and higher quality service delivery (Dougherty & Natow, [2020](#)). New public management emerged in both, developed and developing countries as a transformation of public sector since it focused and strengthened the relationship of public sector with government and people. Moreover, it also focused on the use of markets, market-type mechanisms, performance management, and management by objectives. In contrast to classical control and command mechanism which was centralized and strictly hierarchal, new public management promotes a better evaluation system that incorporates matching authority, responsibility, and accountability (Capano, [2011](#)).

It also brought a major cultural shift by replacing the rule and process-driven classical paradigm and implementing efficiency and effectiveness-based programs in public sector while retaining the fundamental public service values. New public management attempted to make public sector more efficient, responsive, and transparent. The UK, USA, Australia, and New Zealand have implemented policies of privatization and marketization following the ideologies of core new public management (Boer & File, [2009](#)).

There was another group of European countries called ‘modernizers’ that did not follow the ideal type of new public management, rather they implemented a distinctive type of model known as ‘Neo-Weberian model’ (Bouckaert, [2023](#)). Neo-Weberian is a normative reform model which, in contrast, to the ideal new public management puts great emphasis on state and its role in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector.

Neoliberal ideology, most famously associated with the 1980s’ governments of Reagan and Thatcher, is based on the principles of economic liberalization and decentralization including free trade, open markets, privatization, deregulation, and a decrease in welfare role played by the state (Giroux, [2002](#); Harvey, [2007](#)). Neoliberalism has been described as ‘the defining political-economic paradigm of our time’ and has been adopted by political parties of the center, the traditional left, and the right. Ideologically, the coherence of neoliberal doctrine continues to stimulate the academic debate. Key debates center on how governments that employ neoliberal tactics, that is, marketization and decentralization, often

also rely heavily upon measures of state dirigisme. These governments, therefore, portray seemingly paradoxical elements, as the state is simultaneously noninterventionist and decentralized in some realms, and highly interventionist and centralized in others, described as ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism.

Post-Modern Public Administration

The theory of post-modern public administration was presented by Hugh Miller and Charles Fox in 1995. This theory proposes the enhancement of policy-making procedures and structures to improve the model of public administration. To manage the complexity of administration process, this approach created a new discipline focusing on administrative discourse, policy analysis, and empirical research (Miller & Fox, [2007](#)).

Postmodernism establishes the role of public administration as a public interest-oriented approach in the structure of governance system. This approach widens the sphere of public administration principles and processes by generating major empirical discoveries (Wamsley & Wolf, [2007](#)).

Public administration scientists have been preoccupied with the characteristics of society reflecting modernity. However, now many emerging situations and characteristics of society lead towards post-modernism. Some facets of life are completely modern and along with them, many different situations point towards post-modernity. Therefore, recent comparative studies on public administration have suggested the co-existence of modernity and post-modernity (Schwarz et al., [2022](#)).

Post-modern public administration is characterized by fragmentation; a predominant vision is replaced by reasoning, trends towards individualism, internationalization, and decentralization. The focus of culture has shifted from national to international due to the blurring of boundaries of countries. Post-modern public administration is characterized by matrix organizations, the usage of outsourcing, and user-run public organizations (Bouckaert, [2023](#)).

Classical public administration to modern and post-modern public administration, led to changes in government style, management styles in organizations, and the relationships between state and citizens (Bouckaert & Jann, [2020](#)). Due to these changes, different paradigms of public

administration emerged in the public sector. Due to the emergence of a new paradigm, a wave of reforms initiated which affected both developing and developed countries. Several nations adopted distinctive reform models characterized by unique elements and instruments (Pollit, [2009](#)).

The following section reviews several types of higher education reform initiatives at global level.

Higher Education Reforms in Pakistan

The badly-off situation of higher education system in developing countries was discussed and presented by World Development Report on the topic 'Knowledge for Development' and UNESCO World Conference on higher education in 1998. This report also recommended several measures to achieve economic and social stability (UNESCO, [2000](#)). World Bank-UNESCO task force highlighted major challenges faced by developing countries. It also recommended many guidelines for policymakers, governments, and education institutes of developing countries (UNESCO, [2000](#)). The objective of this report was to advocate these countries to invest in higher education in order to prepare their graduates for nation-building, life-long capabilities, and versatility. Pakistan started to follow these recommendations according to its local context (Ali & Tahir, [2009](#)). A review of the higher education system was stimulated by the report of task force. Two seminars were conducted subsequently at LUMS and Agha Khan University where policymakers, heads of leading institutions, international development agencies' representatives, and senior faculty members of several universities participated. After a great deal of discussions on structure, implementation, and results of higher education system of Pakistan, several recommendations were presented to the Ministry of Education. Resultantly, the Federal Minister of Education established a Task Force on Higher Education (TFHE) to analyze the higher education system in Pakistan and present recommendations for its development (Altbach et al., [2004](#)). The members of this task force comprised ministry officials, bureaucrats, and deans and directors of reputed universities. This task force took one year to review all the findings and recommendations of previous education policies, five-year plans, and leading universities. This report presented several issues which destroyed the higher education commissions. The most prominent issues included ineffective management and governance structure, lack of funding, proper regulation of funds, insufficient

development programs for faculty and staff, poor recruitment process, absence of research culture, politicization of staff, and strong skepticism (Editors, [2004](#)).

Higher Education Commission (HEC)

HEC was established in 2002. The establishment of HEC has had a positive influence on the higher education system of Pakistan. Since its beginning, many new universities have been established. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in the enrollment of students and salaries of employees. Pakistan has won many prestigious awards due to the achievements of HEC in higher education under the leadership of Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman. Pakistan has also been praised for its achievements in the higher education system by World Bank reports and leading science journals (Khan et al., [2021](#)).

Many stakeholders of education system have some reservations and debates about the achievements and projects of HEC. However, facts have proven that HEC has brought tremendous growth in the higher education system of Pakistan.

Following areas have been the focus of HEC for higher education reforms.

Governance and Management of Universities

The management and governance of universities were under the control of ruling political parties and provincial governors traditionally. Following the recommendations of task force and establishment of HEC, many changes have been brought into the structure of universities. Universities should be independent and should have more autonomy, moreover they need to be more accountable as well. There should only be only one affiliation between university management, ministry, government, and direct control should be discouraged. The task force recommended that the governing board comprising a chairman, a participant from academic facility of concerned province, participants from other provinces, participants from society, members from alumni, the chief executive officer of the concerned institution, and senior faculty members should act to monitor and regularize the functioning of the university (Usman, [2014](#)).

Apart from the governing board, two more structures were recommended by the task force. These structures include an executive

council and an academic council to coordinate the academic and non-academic functions of universities.

Criteria for Faculty and Staff Appointments and Conditions of Service

The hiring criteria of faculty and staff was not clear as most people were appointed on referrals and promoted based on seniority without proper performance appraisal. The establishment of the governing board, executive council, and academic council was a starting point to set the proper criteria for recruitment, promotions, and transfers of faculty and staff. There was no proper performance management system established in the universities which plays quite an important role for motivation, development, and retention of employees in the institution. Therefore, HEC took an initiative to start a proper performance evaluation system in the universities (Ashraf, [2017](#)).

Focus on Research and Creativity

Before HEC, universities lacked suitable administrative structures to motivate and reward the faculty members towards conducting research. There were no proper mechanisms and offices designated to manage research initiatives and grants. HEC started National Research Program for universities to overcome all these challenges. Since its establishment, HEC has been playing a pivotal role in the promotion of research culture in universities till date. Through this research culture, HEC is identifying significant issues of society and boosting the country towards sustainable, progressive, and internationally compatible research (Noor, [2020](#)).

Efficient Financial Management

Universities continuously kept failing to manage their funds properly as the tuition fee was declining and cost of education was rising. HEC, together with the federal government and provincial government, tried to streamline the funding and financial issues of universities. However still, this is an area where many challenges still exist. Due to political instability and staggering economy, financial management is a weak area for universities (Qutoshi, [2015](#)).

Teaching Approaches

A prime concern in Pakistan was teaching approaches employed by teachers in universities. Teaching strategies, assessment models, and learning activities were based on traditional models. The assessment and

examination system encouraged the students to rely on rote memory and cramming. Non-relevant discussions and activities consumed plenty of time of students and teachers used outdated course materials and techniques to teach. Due to this, majority of the students were not satisfied with the overall education system (Ahmad, [2020](#)). To overcome these challenges, HEC started a series of programs targeting faculty development through training, offering indigenous and foreign Ph.D. programs, and faculty exchange programs. These initiatives aimed to induce new thinking styles, creative teaching methodologies, meaningful assessment methods, and skill-oriented teaching and learning methods (Borodina et al., [2019](#)).

Curriculum

The task force took the curriculum problems very seriously. There were many issues in curriculum development and its implementation as it was outdated, unreliable, and non-specialized. The task force recommended several solutions to eradicate false dichotomies between humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The task force also suggested a general curriculum for secondary, higher secondary, and bachelor-level education to prepare the students with lifelong learning skills, such as communication skills, moral reasoning, and self-confidence (Hussain, [2017](#)).

Methodology

The current study employed multiple case study approach. Six universities were targeted including three public sector universities and three private/semi-government universities. The University of Punjab, Bahauddin Zakarya University, and Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) represented the public sector. Whereas, University of Central Punjab (UCP), University of Lahore (UOL), and COMSATS University Islamabad Lahore campus represented the private/semi-government sector. Data was also collected from HEC. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to select candidates for interviews. In a nutshell, thirty-five interviews were conducted with the key stakeholders. After the qualitative analysis with the help of within case and cross case analysis and qualitative data analysis spiral technique and Nvivo, major themes were generated that helped to answer the research questions.

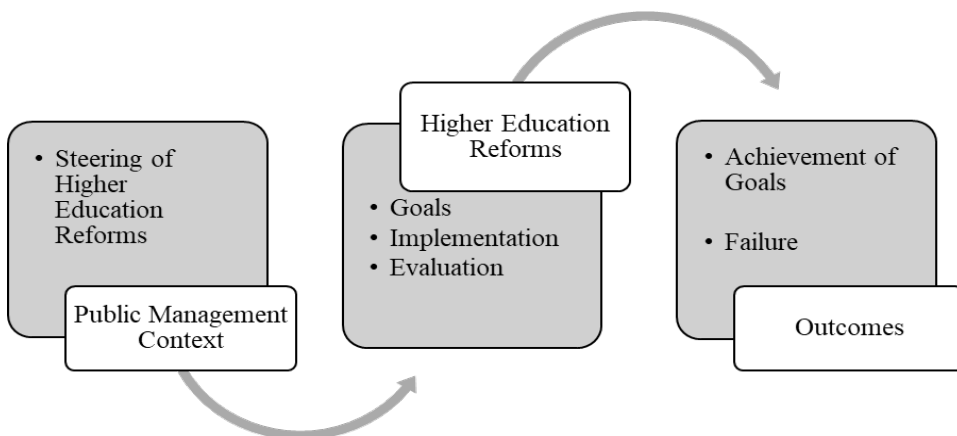
Conceptual Framework

A review of literature on higher education reforms emphasized several concepts that may be used to understand the complexity of higher education reform process. These highlighted concepts are rich in approaches to implement reform initiatives (Krücken, [2014](#)).

Moreover, to gain a better understanding of reforms, it is very important to study the context in which they were initiated. Therefore, this study focused on steering paradigms of public management along with the state role. After establishing the context, it analyzed the process of higher education reforms in terms of its goals, instruments, design, implementation, and evaluation with respect to change management and strategic management approaches. Finally, the outcomes of such reforms were highlighted in terms of its achievements and failures.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Analysis

The findings were viewed and presented through the lenses of social institutionalism and three public administrative paradigms, that is, new public management, network governance, and Neo-Weberian which were used to present higher education reforms. It has already been mentioned in research methodology and case description section that all research sites were selected under specific objectives. One of the objectives behind the selection of these sites was to achieve diverse yet relevant experiences of respondents in various institutions.

The participant's experiences are very complex as the phenomenon of reforms is also very complex due to the presence of several players. Many themes emerged after the analysis of interviews. These themes comprise key higher education reforms, factors behind their initiation, stakeholders' involvement, involvement of public administrative paradigms, and outcomes related to the reactions of stakeholders towards reforms.

Findings and Discussion

The higher education sector is usually seen as a stand-alone sector and cannot be compared with other organizations due to several structural and institutional differences even within the public sector. This ideology arises due to the differences between academic and institutional autonomy of higher education institutions as explored by several researchers in earlier eras (Calhoun, [2010](#)). The findings support these differences, however, it's the similarities that are more important to be examined. There are several fundamental similarities between higher education institutions and other public sector organizations, such as healthcare (Farrukh et al., [2019](#)). Due to these similarities, they fit more precisely in the general category of organizations having professional bureaucracy in the organizational analysis. This organizational analysis approach helps to relate and connect the micro world of higher education sector with the macro world of state.

Different themes occurred during the data analysis which highlighted the involvement of different public administrative paradigms in the educational reform process as also supported by the literature review (Wit & Altbach, [2021](#)). As one senior professor from PU said; "The state is now actively shaping higher education institutions". In the current study, this specific research question presented the analysis of system-level steering of higher education reforms. Consistent with the literature (Aristovnik et al., [2022](#)), the qualitative analysis of interviews also supported the presence of three distinctive paradigms of public management reforms. All of these three paradigms could be associated with the modern public administration. One senior professor from BZU defined steering patterns as; "The instruments and institutional arrangements are externally derived through administrative paradigms and seek to manage academic and organizational behaviors (BZU R3)".

During the data analysis, one major theme which occurred was role of state, as many participants highlighted the role of state as a strategic higher

education system shaper. The state is continuously steering and governing the higher education sector as it does the other public sectors. Higher education and other public sectors are like sub-systems and these steering patterns of state are linked with the paradigms of public management. The most important thing is to focus on policy network and policy regimes producing public policies rather than just focusing on the content of public policies. A long-standing normative and dominant analytical framework is academic freedom and strong faculty control in both domains of academics and research. Academic freedom receives a certain type of monopoly to exercise their functions from the state (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, [2019](#)). The state protects academics from external influencers in return to assure of the implementation of certain norms, values, and practices that avoid the misuse of knowledge. Moreover, the state also considers and mediates the interests of society by positioning the development of higher education.

Three possible roles of state have been identified. These three roles include stronger management of public sector, the hollowing out of nation-state, and democratic revitalization. These roles are linked with three major paradigms of public management reforms to better understand the development and transformations experienced by higher education sector in any country. Researchers have presented some signs associated with each narrative that could be explored and analyzed in each country (Zajda, [2020](#)). The current study focused on those signs and symptoms provided by researchers and then analyzed which narrative is responsible for the education reforms in Pakistan. These three forms of paradigms are very important in the transformation of higher education system, as they provide insights into the overall higher education governance and steering of higher education reforms in Pakistan. The researchers highlighted that no country is the index case for any narrative. Some signs and symptoms may be present in any country. The signs and symptoms of each narrative have been discussed in detail in the literature review (Jones & Ball, [2023](#)).

According to the findings, the first narrative is new public management which started in the UK in 1980s. It not only remained in the UK, however, it also spread to other countries, such as Sweden, France, New Zealand, and Pakistan also. Privatization and developed executive agencies are among the new public management reform instruments. Few highlighted features of new public management have been mentioned. Rather than planning, new public management relies on markets, strong performance

measurements, and monitoring systems which gave birth to extensive audit programs and empowered and innovative management rather than typical public sector professionals and administrators. The goal of new public management is to produce a relatively smaller, efficient, and result-oriented public sector. The drivers of new public management include ideas, such as participant agent theory from organizational economics which highly stress an efficient reward system for employees in the organization.

In Pakistan, new public management is more highlighted in the Ministry of Finance rather than the Ministry of Education. Moreover, it could also be seen as a top-down approach of management. Like many countries, Pakistan also followed the principles and instruments of new public management and even labeled them differently. These signs and symptoms include market-based nature of reforms focusing on competition and diversity rather than planning and integration, tight control over budgetary issues, encouragement of private institutes to enter the market, student fee, and several other initiatives to give rights to students as true consumers. Additionally, these signs and symptoms also include the introduction of strict audits and performance evaluation systems to improve and sustain quality standards, Ministry and HEC trying to steer the system vertically through setting explicit targets and performance contracts, growth of performance-related pay and private sector style management of employees, development of more clear managerial roles of senior academics at the positions of vice-chancellors, chairman and head of departments.

The qualitative data analysis highlighted the second narrative of public management which is responsible for steering the higher education reforms all around the world. The political scientists around 1990s highlighted the movement of functions away from central government either upwards or downwards and also the involvement of several actors either in planning or in implementation of state affairs and both these reasons caused the hollowing out of nation-state (Bevir, [2022](#)). Deliberative democracy and reconceptualization of implementation deficits were conducted with the help of more bottom-up emergent models. Many governance issues also arise with the hollowing of the state. The state has to use alliances, contracts, persuasions, and partnerships rather than a hierarchy to regulate privatization, outsourcing, and agencification. To meet these new challenges, multilevel governance emerges to allow the involvement of

multiple stakeholders, democracy, and the coproduction of public policies (Wyborn et al., [2019](#)). Some researchers also linked it with post new public management organizational form which is formulated to resolve the complexities involved in new public management governance style. Same as new public management, researchers also stated some signs and symptoms of network governance from where it can be identified if this narrative prevails in any country or not. After the data analysis, findings revealed the signs of network governance in Pakistan. The findings also highlighted that the emergence of networks among higher education institutions and other social actors, rather than focusing on pure market reforms and tight price regulations, pointed towards network governance narrative. Other signs of network governance in Pakistan include reformed performance management and evaluation system, complex multi-level governance due to the involvement of ministry, agencies, regional and local government, and international funding organizations, such as UNICEF, increased relationships and networks with non-governmental stakeholders from civil and commercial sector, Ministry of Education and its higher education agencies acting as the guardian of higher education institutes through several policies and programs, Development of collaborations, alliances, partnerships between the Ministry, Foreign agencies and several other social and business firms, Softer Leadership styles promoting the vision and network-based approaches rather than an individualistic managerial style of NPM, last but not the least Promoting Team and group performances by the reward system.

The third narrative that occurred as a major theme in the data analysis was New Weberian. It is a popular narrative of public management as it is responsible for steering higher education reforms not only in Pakistan but in several other countries. New Weberian is the operationalization of principles of democratic revitalization. This narrative is a combination of reassertion of fundamental Weberian principles and Neo elements (Bouckaert & Jann, [2020](#)). The signs and symptoms of New Weberian that could be seen in Pakistan include reaffirmation of state's role as the main facilitator in the higher education system, reaffirmation of the role of central, regional, and local democracy. Moreover, these signs also include reaffirmation of the role of administrative law and modernization of law, idea of public service, and professionalization of public service.

The analysis of public management paradigms prevailing in Pakistan highlighted that signs and symptoms are present from all three paradigms, that is, new public management, network governance, and New Weberian. Hence, it presents the example of a hybrid form. Some more evidence proves that such type of hybrid structures can prevail (Drechsler, [2020](#)).

During the exploration of steering paradigms of public management, an interesting pattern in the analysis was the association of normative assumptions of political sponsors and sponsoring reformers with each prevailing steering narrative of public management. There is an international industry of public management reforms in which there are buyers and sellers of reforms. There are some reasons associated with the quick diffusion of some reforms internationally. For a developing country, such as Pakistan, these reasons are also linked with some key international diffusing agents, such as OECD, World Bank, and IMF. Many scholarships and student development programs are running in Pakistan with the help of UNICEF and, in return, it can demand certain approved public management higher education policies. For instance, many respondents claimed that certain changes in curriculum have been demanded in this way by certain stakeholders. Management consultancy firms, think tanks, high-profile politicians, and civil servants can act as international diffusing agents and bring their favored certain narrative contextualized higher education reforms. This is an important and interesting theme for further research.

Conclusion

If higher education system needs to be transformed, then the compatibility of governance structure, culture, technology, and education must be considered while designing the reforms. In a traditional society, such as Pakistan, reforms must be compatible and appropriate according to their culture and traditions. As it has been established in the previous chapters of introduction and literature review that the education system of Pakistan is rooted in a very typical and traditional structure. The main reason for such type of structure is bureaucratic administration, political instability, and old-rooted values of society that have been defined by Pak-India subcontinent traditions (Khan et al., [2018](#)). One of the main problems with the HEC-initiated reforms is their compatibility with traditions and norms of society (Amir et al., [2020](#)). People of such society are embedded in traditional norms and have a typical perception about their identity. This is the reason that they resist and hold negative opinions about such reforms.

Another major problem is policy formulation as it involves foreign experts, not local ones. Due to this problem, most of the faculty and staff members don't own these reform initiatives since they were not involved in the process of designing these reforms. Lack of participation in the decision-making process leads to resistance and favors the status quo. The current study highlighted participants' distrust in the policymaking and implementation process after listening to the remarks and responses during interviews. Based on the research analysis, this study observed that pride and cultural differences can create hindrances and cause friction when people from foreign countries participate in such types of reform projects in developing countries.

The current study is expected to encourage the concerned representatives to consider all the highlighted concerns of our stakeholders in order to prioritize a comprehensive agenda of higher education reforms that addresses these apprehensions and elevates the marginalized.

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