



HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Hudda Riaz^{1,*}, Professor Dr. Nasira Jabeen², Dr. Sidra Irfan²

- ¹ COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus;
huda-riaz_8@hotmail.com; huddariaz@cuilahore.edu.pk
- ² Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Article Information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Submitted: 22nd April, 2024 Accepted: 20th June, 2024 Published: 28th June, 2024</p>	<p><i>In recent years, there have been many changes and extensive research in the field of education to better understand and implement these changes (Olssen, 2021). This paper aims to present a systematic review of 102 articles (1990 to 2023) on Higher Education Reforms to understand the direction, nature, and implementation of the phenomenon from a proper perspective. It attempts to summarize, analyze, and integrate the literature on Higher Education Reforms to determine the steering drivers, patterns, processes, and major narratives of the educational reforms over time. The findings of the study present a holistic model of Higher Education Reforms. The results reveal a range of facts about challenges and ways to encourage quality oriented practices in colleges and universities, within the prevailing public management narratives. The data from the past forty years shows how the control mechanisms of neoliberal and managerial influences are affecting academic and student behavior, ultimately hindering the progress and sustainability of the education agenda. The paper provides insight to the readers to understand the phenomenon of Higher Education Reforms in the context of the prevailing narratives dominating the reform agenda. The paper makes a theoretical contribution to the subject of higher educational reform in the specific context of Pakistan and postulates on improving the proposed model by integrating structural characteristics of Political and Administrative Systems in different countries affecting decisions of reforms within their contexts.</i></p>
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Introduction

The goal of changing public education is called education reform in simple words. With time and especially due to globalization movements, the world has become a global knowledge economy. The role of higher education is growing in formulating and managing this global knowledge economy. Scholars from all over the world are recognizing this increasing role. Higher education plays an important role not only in promoting the economic development of the countries, but also in providing opportunities for education and employment for individuals, but it

goes beyond that. It also plays a role in promoting cultural awareness and diversity, trade between labor unions of various kinds as well as political democracy (Zajda, 2020).

The higher education sector not only works on the local level but also it is linked and works at the national and global levels (Ahmad, 2020). These linkages are important to manage otherwise they create much complexity which is difficult to handle. This complexity is due to many other actors and stakeholders participating and affecting the education process (Farazmand, 1999).

As per this crucial role of higher education, it is very necessary to make this sector an efficient and effective one because it is critical for not only that one particular nation but all the other nations as all are linked by the global bond. Given this role and many others lots of reform initiatives have been taken for the betterment of the higher education sector around the globe (Aasen, Proitz, & Sandberg, 2013). With time, these initiatives have increased along with their nature. This needs to study the level of implementation and the impact of these reform initiatives has also arisen as a result of the increased proposals and projects. To this end, there is a growing amount of research in the field of education change, in particular in the area of higher education, with a view to studying the effects of these reform initiatives from different perspectives (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2019).

In order to determine the scope of their research, some authors have employed policy measures while others apply internal and globalization processes. In studying the reform process in this particular country, few scholars have also used Structural Frameworks and Governance Principles. (Fitzgerald & Bradbury, 2022).

As per observing the importance of Higher Education Reforms, this paper aims to review various initiatives in this direction to understand, analyze and present the Higher Education Reforms process from 1990 to 2023.

In this study, our main submission is that Higher Education Reforms vary across nations. This submission is made based on several authors claiming that Higher Education Reforms vary because each country is different from the others based on its modes of governance, national policies, and the role of the state. We could not isolate the process of reforms from the governance patterns and role of the state because the outcomes of the reforms are closely linked with the overall governance system of countries (Olssen, 2021).

That's why it is necessary to understand and analyze the reform process along with modes of governance and the role of the state within the specific country's context.

Research Objectives:

With the above context, this study aims to achieve the following three objectives.

- To present and analyze the Higher Education Reforms in different countries.
- To investigate and understand the different steering patterns in which these reforms were initiated and experienced.
- To synthesize the Higher Education Reforms and develop a conceptual model of the reforms process in the specific context of Pakistan

Research Questions:

- Deriving from the above study objectives following are the research questions.
- What types of Higher Education Reforms have been introduced in different countries over the years 1990-2023?
 - What are the steering patterns of the Higher Education Reforms in the specific context of Pakistan?

Significance of the study:

Studying educational reform over time is a favorite area of researchers. This comprehensive overview will serve as a solid basis for future research for scholars who are interested in the topic. It also contributes to the literature on educational reform with a focus on drivers of the reform, dominant narratives, and implementation patterns as there are rare studies of such kind on the issue.

This effort will contribute towards understanding the Higher Education Reforms in general and in the context of Pakistan in particular. The outcome of the paper in the form of a comprehensive model concerning the steering narratives and role of the state will be useful for researchers, educationists, scholars, and policymakers to understand and improve the reform initiatives given the specific context of higher education in Pakistan.

Study Methodology:

This research paper adopts a qualitative method and uses thematic analysis techniques (TAT) for in-depth analysis of the systematic literature review (SLR). The reviewed literature has been categorized into central themes that offer useful reflections upon the overall Higher Education Reforms process in 39 countries of the world. The themes drawn from the literature further help in developing the steering patterns and dominant narratives to determine direction of the Higher Education Reforms in the specific context of Pakistan.

The period of 1990 to 2023 was selected to accommodate the research studies on Higher Education Reforms. Most of the studies were initiated and published at the start of the 1990s because that was the time when globalization started affecting the education sector majorly. At that time, several research movements were also started to study and understand educational reform directions and perspectives. A rigorous effort was made to intake the studies to understand the evolution of different narratives that explain the initiation and implementation of several education reforms throughout the globe.

In the study protocol, it was decided that all research having the topic of Higher Education Reforms would be selected for review. The research that included Higher Education Reforms in the title or abstract of the study was accommodated. This decision helped in identifying the studies to be included and helped in managing with time and context of the study. Since, the concept of reform is closely linked with public administration, policy-making, and governance, the search discipline of “Public Administration” was selected.

Those research studies were selected for the review which were in English. All research studies on the topic of Higher Education Reforms in the period of 1990 to 2023 were selected for review. Only research papers published in peer review journals were selected for the systematic literature review to enhance the scope and authenticity of the study. All research designs, such as surveys, case studies, descriptive, explorations, causalities and mixed methods have been accepted for both empirical and conceptual studies.

The electronic database “ISI Web of Knowledge” was searched with the term “Higher Education Reforms\$”. Every record was manually searched to screen out the relevant studies for inclusion or exclusion. The search key term was Higher Education Reforms with the \$ sign and inverted commas. The objective behind using the ISI Web of Knowledge was that all the research studies extracted from this search engine were published in peer-reviewed journals only. Maximum effort was made to keep the search sharp, clear, and to the point to include the relevant articles in the study.

In cases where the database allowed for it, advanced search options utilized Boolean operators. To narrow down and enhance relevance of search results, different filters have been applied. This study didn't include books, chapters, editorials, lists of referees, personal reports, indexes, and patents in this review. Initially, all their readings have been evaluated on the basis of study titles. If the title was ambiguous, the abstract was examined to see if it was relevant. When the search query was performed using all filters, a total of 193 items were found. In view of the fact that they were irrelevant, 91 articles have been left out. Of these 76 articles, it was found that they were of no relevance because they were mostly published because they had the keywords in their title or abstract, but also because they covered a wide range of different topics which were discovered after they had been read thoroughly and 16 articles were screened out because their full text was unavailable.

Results of Systematic Literature Review

Record Characteristics:

Research studies included in this study come from 59 journals. All of those journals were peer-reviewed. The higher number of studies were from the “Higher Education” journal.

Year-wise distribution:

Year-wise distribution of research articles is shown below in figure 1. It is clear from the figure that most of the research studies have been published after 1990 and onward. As mentioned before, it is evident from the literature that the focus on the research of educational reform has received increased attention in the years after 2000. Mostly research studies in this review have been published in 2011 and subsequent years.

Figure 1

Year-wise distribution of literature

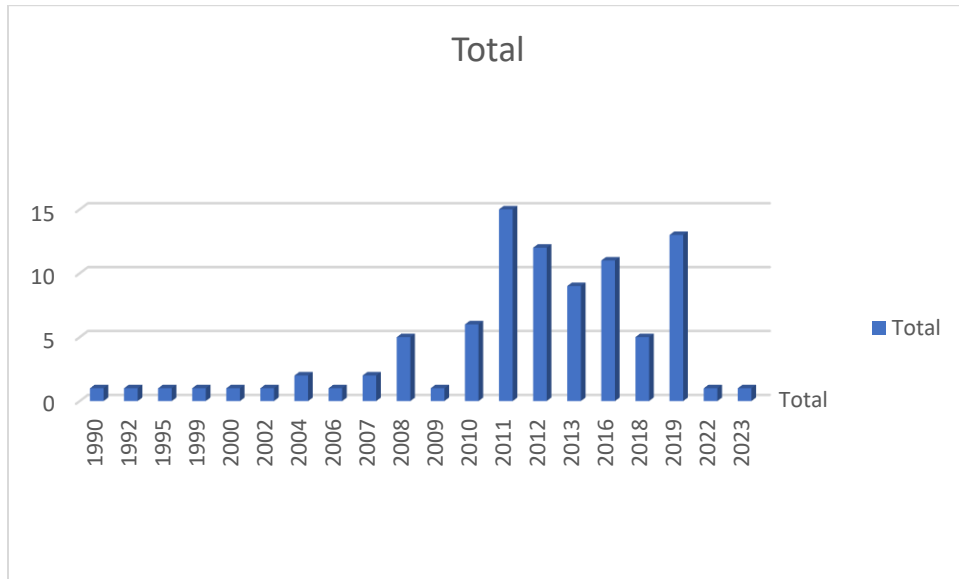


Figure I: year wise distribution of literature

Research Methods Used:

It is reflected in Figure 2 that most of the researchers (93 out of 102) included in this review have adopted qualitative methods and then quantitative and mixed methods respectively.

Figure 2

Research methods used

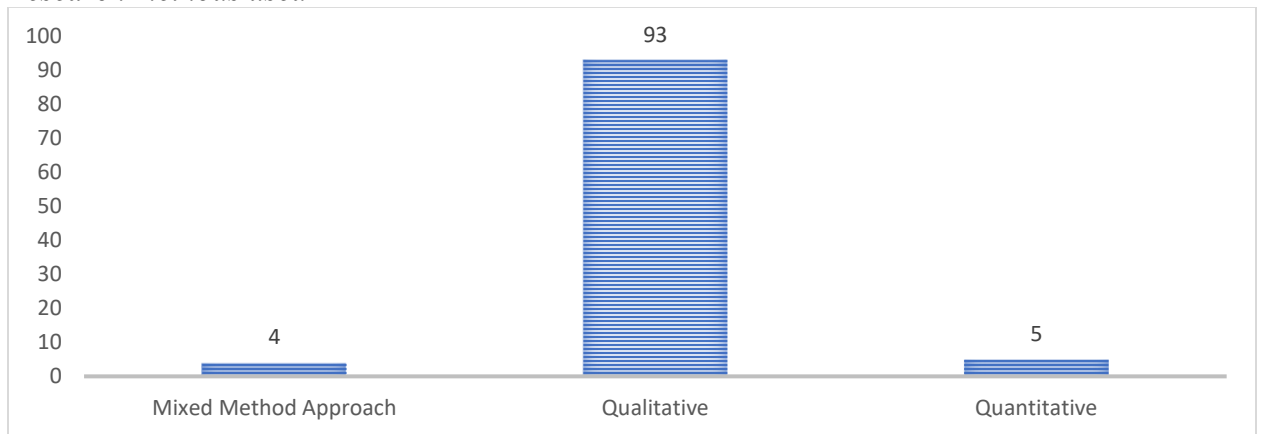


Figure II: Research methods used

Country-wise distribution of articles:

The scope of this study demands that literature from a wide time frame and different countries should be included so that a comprehensive analysis could be conducted to reach the findings. Figure 5 has illustrated those countries where Higher Education Reforms have been

studied and included in this review. It could be seen from the figure that the comparative majority of the studies have been conducted in England, America, and Germany respectively.

Figure 3

Country-wise distribution

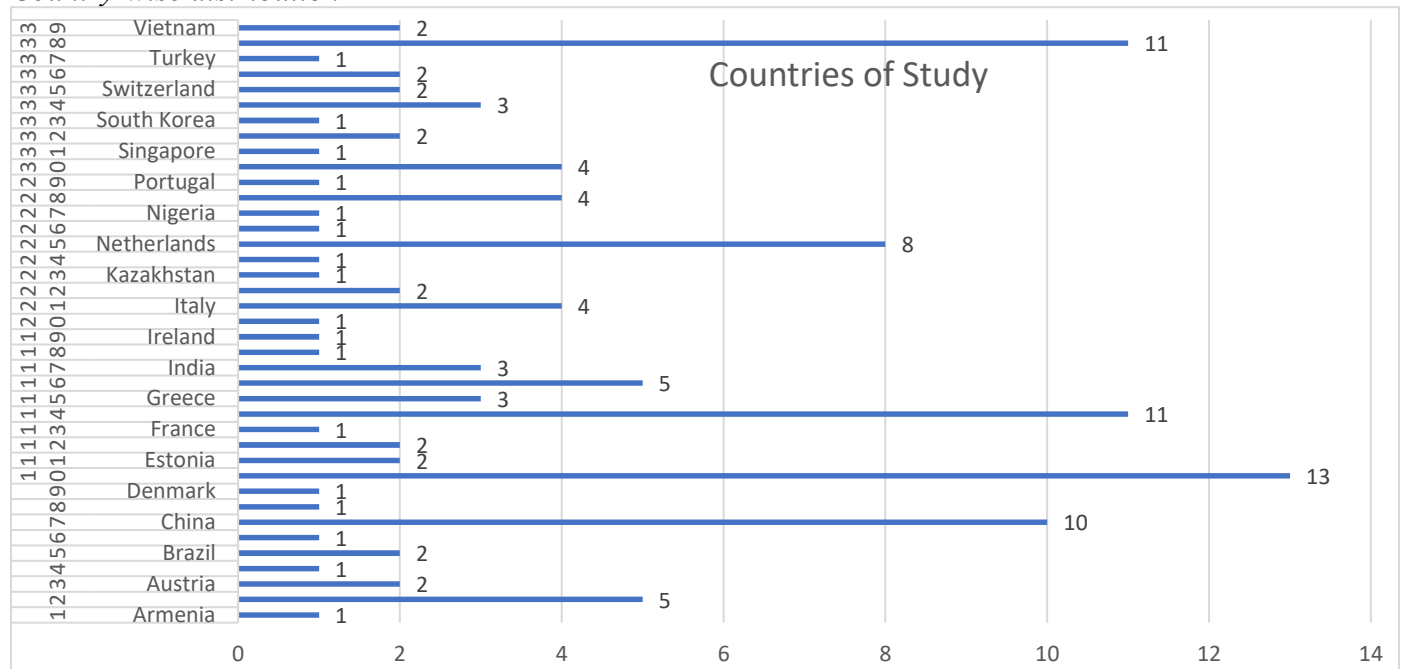


Figure III: Country-wise distribution

Underpinning Theories:

An analysis of the underlying theories that have been used to study the phenomenon of Higher Education Reforms reflected that scholars and researchers have frequently referred to the following theories in their studies.

- Contingency theory
- Loose Coupling theory
- Analytical theory of policy reform
- Normative Theory
- Pettigrew model of organizational change
- Social Movement Theory
- Theory of Massification
- Traveling Theory
- Role Theory
- Normative theory of policy reform
- Leadership theories
- Change theory

Thematic Analysis of Reform Types:

Now for analysis reform types that were found during the review of literature were categorized under major themes so that it could be more useful for further analysis and development of an augmented model.

TABLE I: Thematic analysis results of reform types

Sr. no	Reforms	Major category
1	Administration and faculty-oriented reforms Administrative reforms Curriculum and Managerial Reform Institutional Reforms Inter-university governance reforms	Institutional Reforms
2	Political Reforms Political-Administrative Reform Public sector administration reforms	Political Reforms
3	ICT reforms Policy Reforms Public sector administration reforms stakeholder approach Budgetary Reforms	Policy Reforms
4	Bologna pact Internationalization reforms	Global/International Reforms
5	ICT reforms Legal reforms Market reforms	Market Reforms
6	Leadership Reforms Focus on strategic management	Socio-culture
7	Decentralization Governance reforms Neoliberal reforms	New liberal and NPM

Thematic Analysis of Steering Narratives:

For the analysis purpose themes of different steering narratives have been developed to classify and categorize these narratives under major themes. Then these themes will be used in the development of our study augmented model of Higher Education Reforms.

TABLE II: Thematic analysis results of steering narratives

Sr. no	Steering narratives	Major category
1	Institutional Autonomy, NPM Institutional Change Institutional factors and Gender segregation Institutional government Institutional issues Institutional management Institutional pathways Institutional perspective and quality assurance Institutional perspective and quality assurance Structural Institutional Change	Network Governance
2	Political Reform Political Intervention and Human Resource Development	New Weberian +

	Political Change, university autonomy Neoliberal managerialism, Political and Economic drive, Quality Assurance History and Socio-Political Change Global political economy Globalization and the emergence of political economy Disability Policies Leadership and Strategic Management Policy entrepreneurs Employment Compensation practices Type of Education	Human Resource Development
3	NPM and Politico administrative perspective New Public Management, Political Change, and Quality Assurance New Public Management, Political Change, and Quality Assurance NPM NPM and Politico administrative perspective NPM, Competition, Leadership Stakeholder participation Privatization Public vs. Private Decentralization Decentralization, Market Reforms Market-oriented and Social market-oriented education Market Reforms Expansion, Diversification, Privatization, And Internationalization Commercialization Coalition Government Governmental Decisions Implementation issues Finance driven	NPM
4	Bologna process Reforms Internationalization Internalization, Marketization, Ethno cultural development Internationalization and the bologna process Internationalization, Europeanization, Globalization Internationalization, Massification, diversity, ICT revolutions, increased competition and collaboration, marketization, and new teaching and financing methods. Globalization Globalization and the emergence of political economy Globalization, Higher Education governance models Globalization, Marketization, Decentralization Globalization, Single-crossing property Globalization, University governance, education equity	Globalization

6	policy entrepreneurs Social origin, race, and gender sociocultural linguistic perspective Change pressure Gender and NPM	Socio-Culture perspective
7	Democratization or Bureaucratization Institutional Autonomy, NPM Neo-liberal managerialism, Quality Assurance Neoliberal managerialism, Political and Economic drive, Quality Assurance Neo-liberalism Neoliberalism, NPM, Sustainable Development Convergence practices of Quality assurance, competition Democratization or Bureaucratization Higher Education Expansion Influence of Multilateral Agencies Innovation Quality and Student facilitation Quality Assurance Quality assurance and neo-liberal managerialism in higher education	New liberal managerialism

Discussion and Developing the Conceptual Model:

The objective of this study is to present a conceptual model of Higher Education initiatives around the globe concerning structural characteristics of politico-administrative systems. It was observed during the review of the literature that each scholar presented the Higher Education Reforms initiatives on her/his terms. Two trends have been identified as being dominant in the literature review, one of which is to introduce Higher Education Reforms with a view to improving efficiency and quality at HEIs; It was also noticeable that these studies could be connected to new public management, as shown by Witt (2013), Malalgoda (2012), and Boutellier (2013). Additionally, the second trend involved a focus on educational policies, including their origins, design, and implementation. (Auld & Morris, 2014). It was felt that more focus was on the policies how these Higher education policies were designed, by whom, and how they were implemented (Broucker, Ursin, Molin, & Wit, 2022). However, it is important to take into account certain key factors, such as the structural characteristics of politico-administrative systems, in order to gain a better understanding of why the Higher Education Reforms process was largely overlooked in most studies (Auld & Morris, 2014). These structures were described in several studies, but they did not provide a comprehensive explanation. The literature is clear that the addition of these structures has a vital role to play in explaining the context of Higher Education Reforms as a whole. In multiple studies related to the implementation of Higher Education Reforms in different countries, there is also another significant factor which can be considered alongside Structural explanations. Since the state governs and manages the implementation of reform initiatives in the education sector as it does govern other sectors. Each state steers the reform initiative according to its way and each state varies with others in this aspect. This variation in steering pattern could be linked with the specific governance structure of that state. Each governance structure poses

some specific circumstances in which the state acts according to it. It is very imperative to understand the specific governance pattern of that country and how the state acts towards that reform process while understanding the overall process of Higher Education Reforms (Awwad, Anaewah, & Salameh, 2023).

This study is an endeavor to develop a conceptual model that would present a holistic and comprehensive picture of reforms initiative while keeping structural frameworks and the role of the state at hand. The proposed model has two principle axis, vertical and horizontal. On the vertical axis, there is mentioned role of state and on the horizontal axis, there are frameworks. And in the center, there are types of Higher Education Reforms. These are placed in the center to emphasize that each type of reform is implemented as a result of a specific combination of a particular role of the state on one hand and the governance structure on the other.

A brief discussion on each part of the model is presented below:

Role of state:

While going through the literature it was noted that there could be three different forms/structures in which the nation or state could act or react towards a specific reform policy i.e. 1). centralized, 2). hollowing out, and 3). democratic. A brief discussion of these structural arrangements is provided.

1. Centralized state structure:

A strictly managed or centralized mode is the first type of state role. It shows a stronger and more stringent management of the public sector. The Thatcher era has been referred to by scholars as New Right or Thatcherite reform strategy in their research, while it was the period when it took over. These trends have affected almost every European country, according to the studies. In recent years, all nations have experienced a growth in their public sector and social welfare programs. This change has also led to a widespread expansion of higher education, with many students now having access to free education. (Boer & File, 2009). With the support of public taxes, this was achieved. However, in order to reduce the burden of taxation, governments began to revise their tax policies in the 1970s, with a view to reducing the public sector, in particular the education sector. Political organizations have attempted to decrease the influence and scope of the government sector, but interest groups within the government sector, like unions and professional associations, have strongly resisted this. This opposition has resulted in a rigid top-down management approach. As such, a strict hierarchy and command system had been established as the way of governance. Research indicates that, like other public services, university officials and policymakers are focused on improving state efficiency, maximizing value for money, and implementing strong management practices in their roles. Reforms in this area are expected to enhance efficiency, establish new objectives, and particularly, take a leading position in technology transfer and innovation. Additionally, these reforms aim to reduce operational costs, enhance student retention rates, align with labor market demands, address societal needs, and strengthen the executive leadership of universities while diminishing the influence of deliberative bodies and collegial governance (Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2009).

2. The hollowing out of the nation-state:

The state's authority diminishes, its power weakens, and it starts to function differently as other actors enter and take on roles within the state. Multinational companies are the main players in this form of state role. The emphasis is on the regions and decentralization has been completed. There are various stakeholders involved in the process of interaction. They have an influence on

the higher education system, which is why their concerns and decisions are important in the implementation of any reform initiative. (Aasen, Proitz, & Sandberg, 2013). In such a case, the State is not alone in initiating and implementing reform initiatives. All interested parties have to be taken into account. Stakeholders have an interest in all types of reform, whether it is the curriculum, budget or quality aspects.

3. *The democratic revitalization:*

The focus of this position is on recognizing the state and individuals as citizens, rather than objects, and working for their well-being. Cause there are a number of other factors that occupy the functions of state, and they take advantage of them for their own interests and benefits in the former hollowing out function. In fact, the education sector becomes a business of making money. The Democratic environment is improving and encouraging other stakeholders to take part in a number of projects aimed at the improvement of every sector including education. (Awwad, Anaewah, & Salameh, 2023).

When discussing the revival of democracy in the field of education, it involves collaboration among various parties in universities. These include committees and boards that consist of students, faculty, and administrative staff.

Major Narratives:

An analysis of the articles has pointed to the following major narratives of governance in this respect. Different scholars have linked the reform initiatives with different structural frameworks or narratives. This section discusses the steering narratives found and categorized after the systematic literature review. This review and analysis contribute to the comprehensive model proposed at the end of the analysis section.

1. *New Public Management (NPM):*

A wave of new movements, which some scholars called a "reform," commonly referred to as New Public Management, was launched by Thatcher's government in the 1980s. It had no effect on the United Kingdom, but it did affect a number of countries in Europe such as the Netherlands, Sweden and New Zealand (Hood 1991, 1995; Ferlie et al 1996. There were certain specific characteristics of this movement, such as privatization, contracting out, and the transfer of foreign agencies to many other countries by the United Kingdom. It showed that NPM was not only confined to the United Kingdom, but also did not appear to be a general trend. At the same time, the phenomenon has been called "reinventing governments" in parts of the world, such as the United States and North America. The NPM is equipped with the following features; 1. First, it's relying on the markets and not just planning.

2. Strengthening performance management systems with a key emphasis on monitoring and evaluation systems shall be the focus of its attention.

3. Typical management style of the public sector. In order to improve the efficiency, flexibility and overall quality of public administration, NPM aims at reducing government's size by as much as possible, Brody & Wit, 2015. Some of the theories that support this movement include Equity theory, Path Goal Theory, and Principle Agent Theory. These theories emphasize the importance of participation, fairness, competition, and reward structures in order to improve performance.

The Prime Minister/President's office and Ministry of Finance have the decision-making authority in NPM, not spending departments like Education. NPM operates under various assumptions and principles as its subcategories (Bouckaert, 2022). Institutional factors and issues

are addressed in some of its categories. In order to assess whether or not the reform of education in countries falls within the category of NPM, the authors have provided us with a number of particular signs and symptoms.

The signs and symptoms are presented in the following sequence:

1. Prioritizing the needs and desires of the market
2. Emphasizing the concepts of trade and financial gain, including charging fees, etc.
3. Establishing a connection between the budget and effectiveness and performance
4. Treating students as customers
5. Granting more authority to managerial positions (Jarrett 1985; Reed 2002)

These signs and symptoms have shown that the impact of NPM goes beyond the UK territory and even many other countries both developed and developing countries including Pakistani Higher Education Reforms have these signs and symptoms (Ashraf, 2017).

2. Network Governance:

Many political scientists in the 1990s observed a shift in the role of the nation-state, as external actors began taking over functions that were previously handled by the states. (Rhodes, 1997). Multinational companies, MNCs, were a dominant group in these State actors. The paper's SLR has indicated that this story influenced the type of projects that used a top-down approach. If you need any further details, feel free to ask. In the state, however, this phenomenon has created a hollow effect, leading to governance related issues (Klijn, 2005).

The State has to deal with partners, suppliers and other stakeholders in the management of these contracts, as a result of the outsourcing practice adopted, which has affected the hierarchical system of government. In the network governance system, this new setup was referred to as "governance" and it wasn't that much different from the earlier concept of government.

3. The Neo-Weberian:

In this narrative, the principles of democratic renewal are proposed to be implemented in a real way within the governance system. The concept of democracy is being implemented by the reform initiatives that have taken place in this era. According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), they mention a specific type of classification known as the Weberian system, which is characterized by a well-organized civil service sector with increased autonomy, legal status, and adherence to administrative law. These variations are leading to an increased bureaucratization in the state (Ferlie, Musselin and Andresani, 2009). In fact, the bureaucracy of this public sector has become more and more procedural. The Weberian narrative is based on some fundamental principles, which are given below;

1. Assure that the State plays a major facilitator role.
2. Defining the role of representative democracy as a legitimate authority within the state structure.
3. More focus on procedural work

The following principles should be applied to the concept of neo:

1. Transition to bureaucratic rules and regulations.
2. Establishment of a representative democracy.
3. To ensure fairness and healthy competition in reward systems, priority should be given to administrative law.
4. Encouragement of professionalism in bureaucrats to transform them into efficient managers and legal experts.

4. Human Resource Development:

The narrative shares similarities with the neo-Weberian approach as it takes into account human-related factors. Globalization has linked all countries, but not all organizations are equally developed economically and financially, leading to some lagging behind while others move forward. This has created a highly competitive environment. NPM and similar initiatives have driven nations towards competition, but in doing so, the concerns of students, teachers, and society as a whole have been overlooked. A human resource perspective has emerged in response to these concerns, aiming to address human needs and considerations (Filho, et al., 2020). All the reform initiatives with such objectives fall under the Human Resource Development narrative.

5. Socio-Cultural Perspectives:

Many scholars have been studying the reform process from a sociologist's perspective, which is reflected in our Systematic Literature Review. Such mechanisms have been initiated by this narrative, which has led to a movement in which reform initiatives are geared towards the different needs of the society. In this area, a number of issues are discussed by many scholars, including gender, race, ethnicity, social origin, culture, etc.

6. Neo liberal Managerialism:

The economic policies of the 1980s governments of Reagan and Thatcher were based on neoliberal ideology, which promoted economic liberalization, free trade, privatization, and decreased state welfare intervention. Neoliberalism has become the dominant political and economic paradigm, adopted by parties across the political spectrum. The coherence of neoliberal doctrine continues to be a subject of academic debate, particularly in how governments implement neoliberal strategies and balance state intervention and decentralization. This has led to the emergence of "roll-back" and "roll-out" neoliberalism, where the state is noninterventionist and decentralized in some areas, and highly interventionist and centralized in others. These debates highlight the complex role of the state in neoliberal governance.

Reform types:

Several reforms have been studied and analyzed by different scholars in their studies, those reforms were compiled and major categories were extracted as presented in the analysis. The section below has listed the major categories of reforms in which most of the SLR studies can be traced keeping in view the role of the state and specific type of narrative as discussed earlier.

Major Reforms Categories:

After the analysis of the reforms presented in the research studies, the major categories of reforms that emerged are as follows:

- Institutional Reforms

Institutional reforms fall under the narrative of network governance and these were mostly initiated after the impact of hollowing out of state.

- Political Reforms

These reforms come under NPM and they were mostly initiated by the result of democratic revitalization states.

- Policy Reforms

According to the literature these reforms fall under the narrative of New Weberian and New Public Management. Studies have shown that in most reforms the state's role is varying in the above modes of governance.

- Global/International Reforms

These reforms are steered by the globalization narrative and studies have shown that there could be seen all three types of state roles in these reforms.

- Market Reforms

Market reforms are the core feature of NPM and they can be located when there was hollowing out of state and MNC's plays an important role in market reforms.

- Socio-culture Reforms

These reforms were initiated when the state's focus is on democracy and steered by the socio-cultural narrative.

- New liberal and NPM reforms

They are the governance and government-oriented reforms having particular signs and symptoms. The state roles could be seen varying but mostly there is centralized and hollow state role

The figure below illustrates how these perspectives are integrated to offer a comprehensive view of the global Higher Education Reforms process.

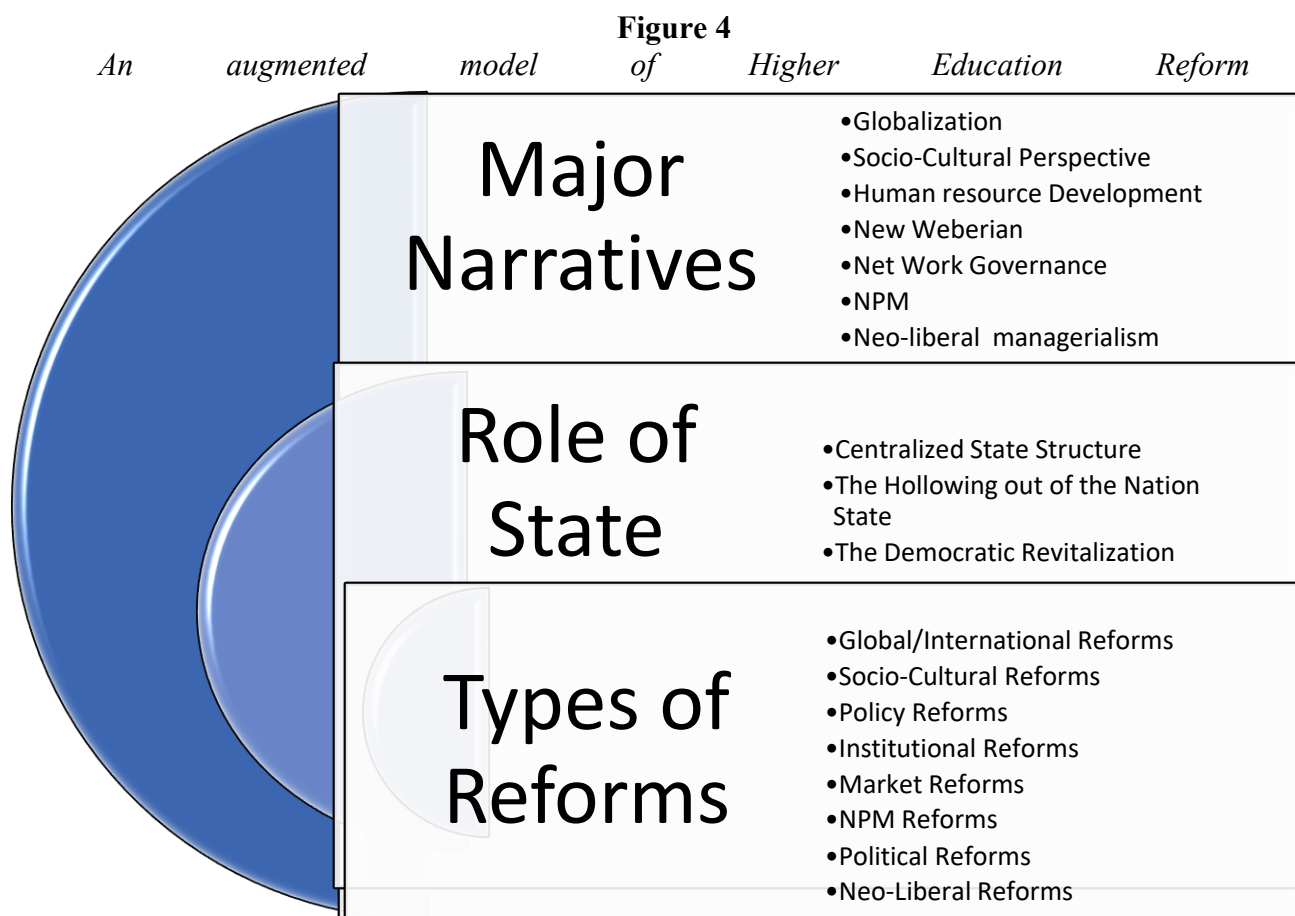


FIGURE IV: An augmented model of Higher Education Reforms

*Many authors have claimed that policy reforms have come under the new Weberian or its similar Human resource development narrative and also in the NPM narrative, so they can fall before both narratives

Conclusion:

The augmented/comprehensive model shown above is the conclusion of this study. It shows that throughout the years how the functions of the state and major paradigms of public administration has steered several reform types throughout the world and specifically in Pakistan (Ayaz & Sharjeel, 2020). Specifically looking at the context of Pakistan, recent research has shown that three main narratives of public management are steering the Higher Education Reforms in Pakistan; New Public Management, New Weberian, and Network Governance currently a matrix of these three narratives is steering and governing the Higher Education Reforms in Pakistan. But

Some more reflections can be shared in this section. As has been mentioned in the introduction of the study this study is based on the systematic literature review (SLR) of 102 studies from 1990 to 2023. After all the review and analysis, we can conclude that Higher Education Reforms initiatives and reform processes over time could be classified into three main movements in terms of periods.

1. Optimism and Innovation (Start 1990s)
2. Complexity and Contradiction (late 1990s-2000s)
3. Standardization and Marketization (To date)

1. Optimism and Innovation (Start 1990s)

The first movement could be called Optimism and Innovation because this was the era when education got promoted, student population increased which led to the promotion of optimism about individual emancipation and technological advancements (Carnoy, 1999). The reforms which were initiated in that period (Start 1990s) were related to innovation in schools and universities. Furthermore, the objectives of these reform initiatives were to enhance teachers' professional autonomy. The purpose was to inculcate more innovative ideas from the teachers as they were the important stakeholders of the reform process.

2. Complexity and Contradiction (Late 1990s)

The second movement could be located up to the time frame around 1990s and 2000s. In the first movement, new ideas and initiatives flourished but with time when these ideas flourished many contradictions arose that caused complexity and contradiction in this era. The educational reforms in the first phase started many quality and assessment-oriented programs but this initiative stressed the inspection and checking of academic activities but they affected the teachers' autonomy and caused many new issues and contradictions (Capano, 2011). There was a need for such programs where collaboration between external actors and teachers could be streamlined. It was realized that the participatory approach could solve the myth of complexity and contradiction in many newly started programs. The increased level of diversity among the student population also contributed to complexities and contradictions.

3. Standardization and Marketization (To date)

This stage could be pointed out in the era from the 2000s to date. Many new internal standards and initiatives stressed upon the centrality of curriculum and other academic systems. The focus of this era is on standardization and quality assurance (Ayaz & Sharjeel, 2020). Focus was on new criteria for testing and assessment. In this era, competition increased as the number of academic institutions increased immensely. Now more institutions are competing based on quality standards as per international criteria. The focus on research was more emphasized. One other major focus in the era is upon the industry-academia linkages which is very important and needs to be emphasized.

Limitations and research suggestions:

Although the above SLR has reviewed all the studies carefully considering the criteria outlined for selection and inclusion there could be some error on the part of the researchers in understanding or recording any study. Furthermore, political and structure-related aspects could be added to the model to make it more comprehensive.

A meta-analysis can also be conducted to combine findings from various studies and use statistical methods to generate more universally applicable results. If the underrepresentation of studies with negative or insignificant results in publications creates a bias, meta-analysis has the ability to identify this (Aristovnik, Murko, & Ravšelj, 2022).

The current model derived from the SLR can be used as the basis of the useful discussion on reforms, steering drivers, mechanisms, dominant paradigms, and systems of governance. The model can be further refined through testing and expert opinion. Afterwards, further research can validate the model using statistical techniques to improve its generalizability.

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