

Higher Education in Pakistan: A Comparative Study of the Neo-Marxist and Neo-liberal Stance on Higher Education

Dr. Khalid Jamil Rawat*

ABSTRACT

The present article compares the neo-liberal response towards higher education needs and realities in the present times and the neo-marxist reaction to this neo-liberal response. In the present study these two positions are compared and an attempt is made to understand the implications of the proposed higher education reforms in the context of Pakistan. This analysis is done in the background of the major articles written by the thinkers belonging to these two rival schools of thought. The article, in the light of the relevant literature tries to arrive at a realistic position regarding the higher education status in Pakistan.

The Context of Reforms

With the ascendance of market economy and neo-liberal principles, the need to reform the higher education set up became a priority for the policy makers. The establishment of a free market allowed the neo-liberal thinkers and supporters to conceive human existence either as a consumer or a producer of goods and services in the market. The society, in the eyes of these intellectuals has taken the

* Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan

shape of a big market and world has become a global market place. Thus, most of the services provided in the society including health and education, become amenable to the market laws of demand and supply and enter into a competition with each other as far as their subsidizing through public finance is concerned.

Though the basic health facilities and elementary education are still receiving funding from the government, the sectors like higher education are shifting towards a status where, in future, the higher education, due to its competition with the basic education and health and other necessities of life, is likely to receive a lesser chunk of the budgets. The very anticipation of this situation requires steps to be taken on the part of the governments to establish the structure of higher education on a self sustainability model.

Moreover, the growing needs of the neo-liberal market economy and the suggestions made by the WTO, require a drastic alignment of higher education programs with the economic structures of the countries. Thus the need for those higher education programs that support the economic production and the welfare of society in its own context are required to be instituted.

Because of these issues worldbank has suggested a reform agenda for higher education. According to a World Bank report, higher education, during the 90's has seen a remarkably consistent worldwide reform agenda for the finance and management of universities and other higher education institutes (Johnston, 1998). The agenda can be viewed under five themes.

1. Increase in the Demand for Higher Education
2. Fiscal pressure
3. Market –Orientation
4. The demand for the great accountability
5. The demand for greater quality and efficiency

Let us discuss these themes briefly.

Increase in the Demand for Higher Education

By the year 2010, it is estimated that Pakistan will need to accommodate 1.3 million students at the tertiary level (Sedgwick, 2005). Though there are other numerous factors involved in the increase of the demand for higher education, the major findings of the research work done on this topic shows that because of the incentives offered by the governments for higher education all over the world, the possibility of gaining more robust economic reward and an unprecedented

increase in the growth in the enrollment rate at lower educational levels, people are opting for higher education in an increased number. Enrollments in the higher education are increasing world wide, causing an almost uncontrollable situation to the universities and higher education institutions(Johnstone, 1998). The statistics available shows a significant improvements with the gross enrolment at the primary level increasing from 72 percent to 87 percent - a 15 percentage points increase (An Overview of Pakistan Economy, 2005). And in the years to come, the public sector will not be able to keep up with the demand for higher education.

World Bank has recommended that the countries should adopt institutional diversification strategy to manage the social demand for higher education . This means the development of a variety of alternative cost effective institutions with different missions, functions and modes of delivery. These measures are already reflected in policies of Pakistan Government (Sedgwick, 2005). To fill the education gap, the government has already made it relatively easy for the private sector to establish colleges and universities. As a result, more than 60 new universities and other degree awarding institutes (most of them private) have been established since 1999 (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan)

Fiscal Pressure

World bank 1994 declaration pointed out the fact that due to financial pressure during the decade of 90's higher education remained under crisis all over the world. The reasons for this global crisis had its roots in:

- Enrollment pressure
- Increase in unit cost in higher education sector
- Decrease in public sector funding due to competition with other basic needs like , health ,basic education and other basic facilities
- The inefficiency of public sector
- Fiscal draw backs including a low-paid faculty
- Low per-student expenditure

In the view of the analysts these factors have largely contributed in the deterioration in the quality of higher education and harmed its missions and goals (Johnstone, 1998) .

Market –Orientation

Neo-liberal thinkers like Bruce D. Johnstone contend that higher education should be reorientated to make up with the needs of market capitalism. Thus the reform package suggested by them is mainly oriented towards market . The reason which they cite for this market orientation is the world wide ascendancy of market capitalism and the principles of new liberal economy. Thus , in this scenario, higher education should also be treated as a market good amenable to market forces .

Moreover, since it will no longer remain possible for the states to subsidize the cost of higher education , therefore universities are asked to take certain steps. Universities , in their changed role should become a sale point for instruction instruction and research . The universities have to become more functional to establish viable partnerships with the industries and should seek grants to conduct researches that can be sold. Unviversities should also provide entrepreneurial and professional development training. These steps also require a restructuring of the universities. This kind of set up can only operate with a devolved setup in which departments have more financial authority. Thus a kind of deregulations and decentralization has to be implemented (Johnstone,1999).

The Demand for the Great Accountability

In order to enhance the quality of education the universities should be accountable to all stake holders in various forms. Universities are asked to lay down transparent guidelines and to install better measures of out-puts on performance. Moreover, the universities are also asked to better align both individual and institutional rewards with these performance indicators.

The notion of accountability actually corosponds with involvement of all stakeholders in the process of evaluation. The major stakeholders are recognized as the administration, the faculty and the students. Thus the performance of the department or the faculty has to evaluated through the outcomes of the performance in the form of researches and achievement of the learning aims.

In the universities a tenure track system is instituted to motivate the faculty to adopt this new culture. In this system , the performance of a faculty member has to be judged on the basis of the quality and impact of the research-work. Student performance is also a major indicator of the teaching departments performance (Johnstone,1998).

The Demand for Greater Quality and Efficiency

According to the the World Bank's Lessons of Experience Report severe quality problems in the higher education sectors all over the world have been observed . These problems have ushered from overcrowding, insufficient control over the quality and behavior of the teaching staff and in-appropriate curricula unrelated to market needs. Thus, the issue of quality and in-efficiency demands reforms in the admission process, in management and in determining a curriculum that relates to the service industry (Johnstone, 2006).

The most significant among these issues is the change in curriculum. Robert Reich in his famous book, *The Work of Nations* says that, there are three job categories emerging internationally. These jobs include routine production services, in person services, and symbolic analytic services. According to Reich, among these three kinds of jobs, in the developed country, due to the free transfer of capital, the assembly line production is likely to be reduced considerably. The personal services category is likely to maintain its position. The only job category that is more likely to be flourished is the symbolic analytic category.

Symbolic analytic category includes those experts who interpreter and practice the specialized cultures. These include doctors, engineers, advocates, University faculty and other high level specialists. According to Reich, in the globalize world, these specialists are likely to gain importance. Thus the demand for higher education, specially in the sectors that are necessary and effective in a particular society are likely to be increased (Kellogg, 1993). In Pakistan, the out lines of these reforms are reflected in one of the speeches of Dr. David Bloom, a Worldbank delegate at a conference on higher education at Aga Khan university back in 2001. David Bloom described the growth of economy as a function of :

- What a country has by way of resources and accumulated capital,
- What a country does to add value to what it has
- How a country markets what it has

The above criterions describe the guidelines for the reforms in higher education. Thus, an orientation towards the market requirements appears to be a necessary thing (Bloom, 2001)

The Neo-Marxist Criticism

World Bank report suggests three basic areas of reforms, including supplementation of public revenue, reform of public sector financing, and radical restructuring of universities. According to Levidow the supplementation of public finances will be carried out through transferring their burden to students and parents (Levidow, 2000). That is why fee will become necessary and student will bear the total expenditure of his education. Although Levidow has severely criticized the supplementation of revenue through , for, he thinks that it can increase the gap between the availability of the opportunities, it does not appear to be the case in Pakistan. But , the assertion that fee issue is not creating a gap between poor and rich in terms of the opportunities of higher education is true only in the case of public sector universities. For, according to HEC reports , private sector universities are offering education at a very high cost and yet , many among them are not meeting the required standards. Thus, Levidow's criticism on supplementing the public revenue seems appropriate to some extent.

Levidow , in his article, mentioned a few points in the reform of public finance through budget reforms and organizational reforms. According to Levidow the efficient use of public revenue is sought through the devolution of spending authority from the central government ministry to the higher educational institutions .Budget reforms are to be introduced through the introduction of performance and other forms of more incentive-sensitive budgeting. Incentive-sensitive budgeting means that a faculty member who is more capable of earning through research projects and entrepreneurial partnerships will receive more funds. Those who will not be able to compete, despite what they have in the form of cultural understanding and knowledge, will be left behind. This approach is termed as 'academic capitalism'. Through academic capitalism university staff will be driven into entrepreneurial competition for external funds (Levidow, 2000).

Levidow's apprehension may be true for the western countries. However, in Pakistan , where faculty previously did not have sufficient opportunities to receive funds, could excell through this kind of planning. If taken properly , can enhance the quality of education in Pakistan.

Levidow has also criticized the restructuring of the universities. For him restructuring will be done through, closing non-productive departments, mergers, and downsizing in faculty and staff (Levidow, 2000). This kind of planning has the potential of eliciting resistance from the effected parties. Moreover , closing of

the humanities and other departments that are not able to produce tangible capital , is not appropriate, for, humanities and social sciences play a vital role in maintaining the balance on a society. In Pakistan, HEC has not taken any such step and these things are out of question.

According to Levidow, the problem of the quality of classroom teaching has to be addressed through the introduction of educational technology and replacement of actual classroom by the virtual classroom. World Bank has also demanded a quality assurance in higher education. This will be achieved through tests and higher selection criterion, through standardized learning material and curricula, through the intervention of education technology. The concepts of surveillance and inspection are also strengthened and teachers, faculties and students will be given incentives to increase competition (Levidow, 2000).

Levidow contends that the replacement of brick and wall classroom with a virtual classroom can reduce the job opportunities for the teacher. In Pakistan , however , the situation is quite contrary to Levidow's assertion. Here the establishment of virtual university by HEC has contributed a lot. It is providing a low cost high quality education. The initiatives taken by the HEC have also increased the job opportunities in the tertiary education. However Levidow's apprehension about the tests seems quite in place. For, in Pakistan there is a huge disparity in the quality of education received by the people of different areas, cultures and economic background. At the elementary level there are schools that enable the students to use English as a second language. But majority of the schools in Pakistan do not give any opportunity to enhance English language skills.

According to Levidow the reforms in higher education are meant to change human society in to a free market and man in to a producer and consumer. The essence and meaning of human existence is construed anew and now they are defining man as essentially a consumer and producer. Human freedom has been given a new name and now it is being said that man is free to act in a competitive free market both as a consumer and producer (Levidow, 2000).

According to Lvidow Marketization of higher education is justified as self-defense by dealing with all relevant constituencies as business relationships. Educational efficiency, accountability and quality are redefined in market terms. Courses are recast as instructional commodities. Student-teacher relations are mediated by the consumption and production of learning material including

software (Levidow,2000). Although Levidow appears quite right in his apprehensions that the actual academic environment can be replaced by a market oriented environment, in the context of Pakistan where technological advancement is far behind, such steps can bring advancement. The enhancement of quality through introducing text books is not at all a bad idea, but if it has the potential of replacing the actual thirst for knowledge , then it should be reconsidered.

The impacts of this policy , according to Levidow ,will be vivid in a short time and we will see that academy is changed in to a perfect market place. Faculty will become a production unit and students will become the consumers of the product thus produced. The concept of competition, divided labor, compartmentalization of knowledge and expertise and specialization will receive unprecedented importance. The university rules will be changed to permit profit-making activities and commodification of research. Resources will be shifted from teaching to research activities which are expected to result in income from the patents and royalties. With less staff time devoted to teaching an inefficiency problem will emerge as it is vivid in many universities in America. In American Universities student numbers have increased, while teaching has been under-resourced and so appears as an 'inefficiency' problem, to be solved by standardizing curricula. Knowledge will be packaged in textbook-type formats, so that students become customers for products. Universities will be urged to adopt commercial models of knowledge, skills, curriculum, finance, accounting, and management organization. They will do so in order to deserve state funding and to protect themselves from competitive threats. These measures will create a threat to what many people value in universities, e.g. the scope for critical analysis and broad social access, and thus such reforms are likely to provoke new forms of resistance (Levidow, 2000).

It is likely that teachers in the universities will be asked to follow text books written by other experts containing tests and exercises .Success in test will replace the actual thirst for knowledge and students will work to secure marks in tests alone. The main task of these texts will be to prepare students for the test. In America, such steps are being harshly criticized by the intellectuals, for, education administration in U.S. has brought changes in K-12 education and now they are paying more emphasis on tests. The ideas of surveillance and inspection are gaining values and the test results of a teacher are hanged outside his room to asses his competency (Kevin & Ross, 2000).

On the other hand researches conducted on the results of such tests have shown that the results of students have a direct relationship to their economic background. That a student who has a stronger financial background scores more marks in a test as compared to those students who belong to a relatively lower economic background. This means that tests are measuring class difference among people and are establishing and enhancing status -quo among the various classes. All these steps will establish class difference on more strong grounds than ever. Emphasis on tests will divide students into three classes according to their results .If we see this in the light of research results indicating that test results approve class distinction than we come to realize that these steps will make our society painfully conservative. Competition, especially such an enhanced competition will result in lack of humanism .For competition affirms the law of survival of the fittest and in capitalist societies fittest means the one who possesses more capital (Kohn, 2000).

Under the current scenario, it appears that the sciences will undermine the role of humanities. In case this happens the culture of behaviorism will prevail. Behaviorism attempts to cultivate desired responses in human beings towards certain social stimuli and rejects subjectiv approaches towards the reality. Since free market does not allow man to have feelings other than those that are being approved by the market forces ,therefore, it can reduce human abilities. That is why faculties of humanities should work, for, humanities subjects try to reduce differences and try to synthesize the dichotomy between feelings and reason, between subject and object. In many countries the resistance offered to the changes came from the faculties of humanities.Faculty, in many countries, where the reforms faced resistance, is considered as a hindrance in the path of change . According to the Marxist point of view market forces are regulated by the privileged classes, which as a role are more conservative. That is why class boundaries and differentiations are maintained and reproduced through education.

According to Levidow, under the neo-liberal economy, universities are compelled to substitute new staff, standardized pedagogical materials, and marginalize local knowledge. Meanwhile governments are asked to repress any resistance to such reforms. This step has been taken by the governments in many countries .In Africa, the nations facing a balance of payment deficit were forced to adopt these new reforms and the resistance was suppressed. In Mexico students agitated against such reforms, for, they were asking them to bear the full cost of

their studies. It is likely that these changes will create customers for global educational commodities and the growth promised will not be observed. However, in Pakistan, no such step has been taken and there is no resistance shown by the faculty. This relative calm in Pakistan shows that HEC has not implemented any downsizing policy, though foreign faculty is encouraged to join local universities. However, one point in Levidow's criticism is worth noticing and that point is about the marginalizing the local knowledge. In Pakistan HEC has announced grants for writing and this step actually ensures that no marginalization of local knowledge is taking place.

Levidow contends that the reforms will change the faculty into a production unit therefore, online education is likely to gain currency in current scenario. Online education requires self learning material. That is why faculty will be asked to produce such material. This will bring a great change in the classroom. Since online education will reduce human interaction in classroom therefore, humanity will be at a risk in such atmosphere. In other parts of the world people are agitating against such changes, e.g, in Canada students and faculty agitated against such interventions. Many universities have already developed on-line educational technology, i.e. electronic forms of course materials. Columbia University is a prime example of this development. It is true that this medium could be used to enhance access to quality education, and to supplement face-to-face contact, as some European universities have been doing for a long time. In Pakistan and in other third world countries, however, the aims could be different -- namely, to make these countries a selling point for commodified and standardized education. The efficiency and quality theme has certain root motives. For the logical solution of the inefficiency and quality problem is to increase efficiency by standardizing course materials. Universities and students will be compelled to purchase standardized curricula and course material. Once lectures are submitted to administrators and posted on webpage, as it is the case with many online universities in America, these materials can be merchandised to other universities and to other countries. This approach changes the role of universities and students in third world countries, who will become consumers of instructional commodities. Even if they give us a chance to produce our own course material, the implications of such reforms on student teacher relationship are not so desirable. Student-teacher relationships will be reified as relationships between

consumers and providers of things. This marginalizes any learning partnership between them as people. In Pakistan, however, no such thing has taken place yet.

The new policy will approve a class room model according to which knowledge is nothing but a specialized product and a commodity. Knowledge, according to the new perspective should satisfy the absolute standard. So we are likely to have a classroom in which teacher will be of a lesser utility and technology will replace teacher, at times through intervention of online education and at times through the self learning material, prepared by various experts on the basis of divided labor.

Divided labor is a successful idea in production units, for, it assures a high level of production and an enhanced level of quality. However there is a yet another dimension of divided labor. It alienates worker from his work and develops a feeling of depravity in workers. To introduce this idea of division of labor in education requires debate, for, it is not worth while to operate with divided labor in academy. In many school chains in Karachi they are providing pre-structured lesson plans to the teacher. This means that teacher is not to follow his own plan in his classroom. This will result in great job dissatisfaction. In western countries such feelings among the workers are compensated through higher wages, but, in our country teachers are not likely to get enough payments and not even the job satisfaction. However, at higher education level, we are hearing the news about an enhancement in salaries, which is quite necessary in such circumstances. For, if labor is divided, it will necessarily result in dissatisfaction from job. Moreover the competition which is likely to be enhanced in academy will create more tension and stress among the teachers. Therefore, it becomes imperative to give them a great raise in salaries.

According to Levidow, class differences are enhanced through advocating the concept that only those who can carry on their studies on self finance basis will be allowed to receive higher education. Already the private sector universities through their heavy fee packages have denied lower classes the right to enter the academy.²⁷ This simply means that education has become instrumental in establishing class difference, the major value of capitalist society. At basic education level the difference is established through the distinction of medium of education. Poor as a rule, in Pakistan, do not know English. Neither their schools are capable to make them aware of this important language. On the other hand those schools, which are responsible for teaching children from upper class, do not

allow conversation in urdu in their class rooms. Since a person who does not know English and a person who knows it well do not have same opportunities of getting economic well being in our society, therefore, poor can never increase their economic worth. Hence government has to reduce this difference and children should not be discriminated on financial grounds.

References

- An Overview of Pakistan Economy. Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan. Retrieved February 18, 2008, from <http://www.yespakistan.com/economy/overview-pak.asp>
- Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) website: http://www.hec.gov.pk/htmls/hei/details_uni.htm
- Johnstone, D., (1998). *The Financing and Management of Higher Education: A Status Report on Worldwide Reforms*. Paper presented at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Paris, France, October 5-9, 1998.
- Johnstone, D., B., (1999). "Higher Education under Conditions of Transition to a Market Economy". Available from his SUNY-Buffalo website
- Kellog, N. R., (1993). Review of "The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st-Century Capitalism" by Robert B. Reich. *Technology and Culture*, 34(2). (Apr., 1993), pp. 469-471
- Kevin, D.V., & Ross, E. W., (2000). *Education and the New Disciplinarity: Surveillance, Spectacles and the Case of standards-based educational reform SBER*. Paper presented at Roundtable discussion for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 2001. Retrieved from <http://clogic.eserver.org/4-1/vinson&ross.htm>
- Kohn, A. (2000). Fighting the Tests: A Practical Guide to Rescuing Our Schools. *Cultural Logic*, 4(1) , Fall, 2000. Retrieved January 14, 2008, from <http://clogic.eserver.org/4-1/kohn.html>
- Levidow, L., (2000). Marketization of Higher Education: Neo-liberal Strategies and Counter Strategies. *Marxism and Education*, vol. 2, April 2000. Retrieved from <http://clogic.eserver.org/4-1/levidow.html>

-
- Sedgwick, R., (2005). Private Universities in Pakistan. *World Education News & Review WENR, January-February 2005*. Retrieved from <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/05jan/feature.htm>
- Levidow, L. (2001) Marketizing Higher Education: Neo-Liberal Strategies and Counter-. Strategies. *Education and Social Justice* 3(2):12-23. ...
- Bloom, D. (2001, February). Higher Education in Developing Countries: Promise and Potential" Conference Speech delivered at The Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan. Retrieved on October 31, 2007 from http://www.tfhe.net/resources/aga_khan.htm