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The Struggle to Reform Higher Education Sector of Pakistan: Past reforms, Recent Initiatives and Confronted Challenges.

Abstract

The paper tracks the history of higher education reforms in Pakistan and examines the recent higher education reform initiatives undertaken by Higher Education Commission under 'Higher Education Commission Vision 2025'. It also highlights the challenges faced during the implementation of these reforms and proposes different solutions. Qualitative approach was adopted to carry out this study and seventeen semi-structured interviews of senior officials belonging to Federal Higher Education Commission, Punjab Higher Education Commission, Higher Education Department and senior academicians belonging to different public sector universities of Punjab were carried out. Secondary data comprising of published reports and policies was also analyzed. Multiple reform initiatives to improve the quality of faculty, higher education and its governance were found to have been implemented in higher education institutions. Jurisdictional ambiguity of federal and provincial higher education commissions after 18th constitutional amendment, their inadequate consultation with each other and other stakeholders, no formal performance evaluation of previously implemented initiatives, incompatibility between reforms and university culture and excessive political intervention in HEC and in universities were identified as major challenges faced during the implementation of reform initiatives.

Key Words: Higher Education Governance, Higher Education Reforms, Higher Education Commission (HEC), Provincial Higher Education (PHEC), Higher Education Department (HED).

Introduction:

Demands and challenges related to higher education and its management have increased in present times (Bargh et al., 1996; Saiti et al., 2018). Developed countries are putting concerted and specialized efforts to meet these growing challenges (Trakman, 2008). Developing countries, however, face more troubles in managing their higher education sector because of the limited resources and their improper utilization (Naviwala, 2016). Independently governed institutions and regulatory agencies are being formed to ensure effective utilization of resources and enhance consultative process with different stakeholders for improving higher education governance (Ali & Kassim-Lakha, 2002). It is observed that countries with centralized, multi-level and complex governance structures face more problems in management of their higher education sector (Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019). Presence of this centralized governance structure is one of the reasons why under developed countries like Pakistan are facing issues in management and governance of its higher education sector (Trakman, 2008). The governance and management related issues of higher education are also exacerbated by fragile democracy, inconsistency in policies of different governments and ad-hoc policy formulation and implementation (Gilani, 2015).

The severe political turmoil faced by Pakistan from the time of its inception and absence of long term planning has adversely affected the governance of different sectors (Hoodbhoy, 1998). This has also limited the policy formulation and implementation capacity of Pakistan regarding its higher education sector (Harvey, 2004).

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Multiple policy level initiatives at the federal level have been taken by different governments of Pakistan in past (Riaz et al., 2017). The implementation of most of these policies faced different setbacks (Majoka & Khan, 2017). However, the situation showed considerable improvement particularly after the formation of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002 which is responsible for introducing reform ideas, guidelines and multiple annual, mid-term and long term projects in order to develop the human capital and meet the modern day higher education related requirements (Gilani, 2015; Riaz et al., 2017).

History of Higher Education and its Governance in Pakistan:

The educational infrastructure at the time of independence of Pakistan was very fragile (Khan & Mahmood, 1997). Multiple education related reforms and policies failed or could not be effectively implemented due its unstable political system and inconsistent policies (Afzal & Ali, 2017). Education related reforms were also undertaken by the British before partition but in those states which later became the part of India (Bengali, 1999; Roof, 2015). Pakistan held its first national conferences on education titled as “The Pakistan Educational Conference” from 27th Nov 1947 to 1st Dec 1947 to develop guidelines and objectives for improvement of education sector. This conference was followed by nine educational policies, more than 6 educational schemes and number of workshops and seminars (Dildar et al., 2016). Some of the other reforms to improve management and governance of education sector are as follows.

The New Education Policy 1970:

“The New Education Policy 1970” was the first formal policy introduced to achieve the objectives of “The Pakistan Educational Conference 1947” (Ali, 2013). The policy focused on rapid industrialization of the state, transformation of its agricultural character into industrial one, incorporation of Islamic values in education, decentralization of educational administration and improvement in the quality of education (Dildar et al., 2016). Under this policy, Center of Excellence was established in universities, service structure of university faculty was improved, rules for the affiliation of colleges with universities were developed and postgraduate research programs were initiated in universities. New universities were also established on the basis of population distribution (Majoka & Khan, 2017). Islamic studies departments were also established in different universities (Khushik & Diemer, 2018). However, dismemberment of Pakistan, dissolution of Yahya Khan’s government, political instability and inadequate financial resources became major causes behind the lack of achievement of goals of this policy (Dildar et al., 2016).

The Education Policy 1972-1980:

The education policies of 1972-1980 intended to eradicate illiteracy and made education free till matriculation. It also aimed to achieve the goal of achieving universal primary education till year 1979 but failed (Khushik & Diemer, 2018). Private schools were also funded by the government under this policy (Bengali, 1999). However, a significant milestone with respect to higher education was achieved under this policy when “University Grant Commission” (UGC) was established in 1974 to serve as a link between government and universities, provide financial support to universities and formulate policies for higher education (Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, 1974; Khan et al., 2020; Parveen et al., 2011). The education policy of 1972-1980 also aimed to enhance the enrollment in science programs at universities by 10 percent (Majoka & Khan, 2017). However, this policy also failed to achieve desired outcomes due to low economic growth, increased poverty, military coup of 1977 and a significant policy shift by General Zia-ul- Haq (Bengali, 1999; Khushik & Diemer, 2018).

National Education Policy 1992:

“National Education Policy 1992” focused to ensure hundred percent enrollment of students at primary level, especially in the underdeveloped areas. The policy also allowed the non-governmental institutions to provide formal, technical and vocational education (Roof, 2015). It also addressed the issues of education in science and technology, emphasized the promotion of research based education and allocated special funds for research and international conferences (Khan et al., 2020). The policy also recommended the increase of education budget from 2.2% to 4% of GNP, revision of universities, academic audit of universities and initiating “*two track system for appointment of university teachers*” (Ali & Kassim-Lakha, 2002). This policy also could not be effectively implemented and fell victim to continued political instability (Shami, 2005).

National Education Policy 1998-2010:

National Education Policy (NEP) 1998-2010 primarily aimed to deal with major issues like teacher absenteeism, weak infrastructure of academic institutions comprising of schools, colleges and universities, outdated curriculum and high dropout ratio at primary education level (ALYA, 2014). UGC was changed into more autonomous and less politicized Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002 under this policy and received more funding (Mahmood, 2016). Creation of HEC resulted in infrastructural development of universities, increase in number of foreign scholarships, introduction of Tenure Track System and commencement of many new 4 years bachelor degree programs (Jahangir, 2008). HEC also provided public sector universities with access to digital libraries and exerted efforts to promote research culture (Parveen et al., 2011). However, the overall effectiveness of NEP 1998-2010 was reduced due to political instability caused by instances like that of coup of 1999 which brought a major shift in policies (Khushik & Diemer, 2018; Majoka & Khan, 2017). The policy was revised in 2008 as it proved to be ineffective in improving quality and accessibility of education (Ahmad & Hussain, 2014).

The National Education Policy (2009)

National Education Policy 1998-2010 was completely revised and updated to National Education Policy (2009) which was approved in August 2009 (Saeed et al., 2015). National Education Policy 2009 targeted increasing the enrolment ration in universities to 10% by 2015 and to 15% by 2020, increasing funds for universities to 20% by 2015, increasing the number of research grants, doctorate and post doctorate scholarships to students and faculty members, establishing new universities and increasing the number of campuses of existing universities (Ministry of Education, 2009). National Education Policy 2009 was virtually not implemented after the 18th amendment in 2010 and Inter-Provincial Education Ministries conference (IPEMC) later on suggested to completely revise the Education Policy (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017).

The National Education Policy 2017

After 18th Amendment, Education Policy was completely revised and updated in year 2017 and multiple goals like setting up 50 new private universities, 70 new sub campuses, increasing the total number of universities to 300 by 2025, increasing university enrolment from 1.5m to 5m, increasing PhD faculty ratio in universities and establishment of research centers in different universities were added (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017). Provincial Higher Education Commissions (PHEC) were also established to formulate and execute higher education policies at provincial level (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2017).

Higher Education Commission Vision 2025

“Pakistan vision 2025”, launched by the government on 11th August 2014, had 25 goals and addressed the imbalance between socio-economic development while focusing on the development of all the sectors including higher education (Ministry of Planning, 2014). HEC also introduced HEC Vision 2025 on May 29th, 2017 in alignment with Pakistan Vision 2025. It was a detailed plan formed after consultation with educational institutions, governing bodies, policy makers and other stakeholders (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017; Taylor, 2017). Its objectives were to improve higher education standards and quality, promote research based education, increase enrolment in higher education institutions, improve international ranking of Pakistani universities, increase number of higher education institutions to 300 by 2025 and increase the budget of higher education from 0.2% to 1.4% of the GDP (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2017). HEC vision 2025 also had eight strategic priorities to achieve inclusive growth and socio-economic balance. This research tends to focus more on two strategic goals which are “Excellence in Leadership, Governance and Management” and “Increased Faculty with Highest Academic Qualification” along with other higher education related reforms.

Under the strategic goal of “Excellence in Leadership, Governance and Management”, HEC intends to improve the leadership and management affairs of universities, redefine the role of vice chancellor, make appointment through syndicates, depoliticize the search committees that are involved in the recruitment at top level positions and make the positions of vice chancellor, pro vice chancellor and registrar administratively important in universities (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2017). The other strategic goal i.e. “Increased Faculty with Highest Academic Qualification” aims to increase the investment on promotion and improvement of research based environment in universities, increase the number of PhD faculty members from 10,028 in 2014-15 to 38,384 in 2025 in universities, increase PhD scholarships and increase the number of exchange programs with other international universities (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2017). This research identifies Faculty development programs, Curriculum revision, Quality Assurance and Governance & management reforms as some of the major initiatives taken by HEIs for the achievement of above two broad strategic goals.

Literature Review:

Governance can be defined in different ways (Rhodes, 1996). Plato considered it as a combination of all the techniques that are applied by the rulers in order to rule (Mazhar & Goraya, 2015). The presence of well-established state owned institutions having a monopolistic decision-making power and the capacity to enforce its decisions is indispensable for effective governance (Jabeen, 2007; Stoker, 1998). Governance can also be understood as the introduction and application of new methods, techniques, plans or processes to administer a group or class of people (Kirkpatrick et al., 2002). The understanding of governance has evolved over time and its contemporary understanding is not much different from its classical understanding which is to make the citizen follow the rules and procedures (Schneider & Hyner, 2006). However, this is only possible if all the government departments work collectively and order to ensure the smooth functioning of the state (Capano, 2018).

Governance and administration styles in different countries have underwent a drastic change during the past few years (Huang, 2018). The complex, multi-level and centralized governance systems of countries like Australia, USA and New Zealand are now being reformed (Ivancheva & Syndicus, 2019; Klijn, 2012). The introduction of neo-liberalism and New Public Management (NPM) has resulted in the emergence of relation between governance and other disciplines (Broucker et al., 2018; Kelly, 1998). NPM that emerged in 1990s as a liberal reform focuses on improving the performance of public sector using private sector techniques and also promotes consultation with different stakeholders (Donina & Paleari, 2019; Hanif et al., 2016). Both NPM and governance are two different yet similar approaches to administer an organization as both the approaches use tools to cope with growing complexities (Castells, 2011; Christensen & Lægheid, 2007; Klijn, 2012).

The presence of well-defined internal processes in higher education institutions and their partnerships with each other and other organizations where the autonomy of higher education institutions is not compromised is essential for the effective governance for higher education institutions (Kohler & Huber, 2006). The higher education institutions also need to collaborate and coordinate with other institutions to play their role in policy evaluation and implementation (Harvey, 2004). Rapid changes that occurred in the past few years have compelled the universities to connect with other stakeholders for improved governance (Bargh et al., 1996; Saiti et al., 2018).

The higher education sector of Pakistan faces multiple challenges like inadequate financial resources which makes it important for higher education to review its governance strategies (Trakman, 2008). Multiple efforts to reform higher education sector of Pakistan were taken in 2001 but failed due to lack of financial and administrative support (Gilani, 2015). This research examines the progress of two important goals of HEC vision 2025 concerned with the quality of leadership, governance, management and faculty of universities and reveals challenges faced during the implementation of these two goals. It also puts forward several recommendations to overcome the hurdles.

Research Methodology:

Seventeen semi-structured interviews of respondents belonging to the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Punjab Higher Education Department (HED), Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) and senior professors belonging to different public sector universities were carried out. Purposive sampling technique was used to carry out this study. All the respondents were currently serving or had served at senior administrative and academic positions such as Directors, Deputy Directors, Deputy Secretaries, Deans and Professors and were involved in formulation or implementation of various higher education reforms. Questions regarding the different reform initiatives pertaining to higher education particularly after the HEC Vision 2025, challenges in their implementation and solutions to overcome those challenges were asked from all the interviewees. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Secondary data comprising of reports and policies published by HEC, PHEC and Ministry of Higher Education was also analyzed.

Findings

The analysis of interviews and secondary data revealed following initiatives undertaken to achieve the two major strategic goals of HEC vision 2025 which are “Excellence in Leadership and Management” and “Increased Faculty with Highest Academic Qualification”. The challenges faced during the implementation of these and other reforms as well as their solutions proposed by the respondents during interviews are as follows.

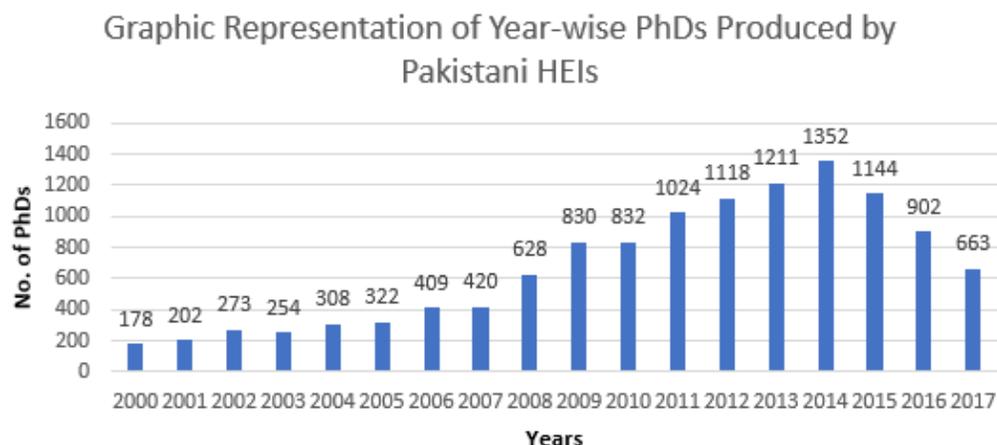
1. Major Reform Initiatives by HEC, PHEC and Higher Education Institutions:

1.1 Initiatives for faculty development:

It was found through the interviews that various initiatives were taken by HEC to achieve the major objective of ‘Increased Faculty with Highest Academic Qualification’. ‘National Academy of Higher Education’ was established in universities for the training of teachers along with the ‘Office of Research, Innovation & Commercialization’ (ORIC) for industrial academic linkages. 66 ORICs were established till 2018. Faculty Development Program was also commenced and a total of 177 scholarships were offered to students for PhD in Pakistani universities in FY 2017-18. 525 fresh PhDs were also placed in different universities under ‘Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs Program’. Under ‘Indigenous 5000 PhD Fellowship Programme (Phase I), 203 scholars completed their PhDs and under Phase II, 274 PhD scholarship were awarded in 2017-18. 17,733 faculty members were trained nationally and 145 faculty members were provided with international trainings till 2016.

It was also found that HEC had also launched ‘National Research Programme for Universities’ under which a total of 574 research projects were funded with Rs. 1551.72 million in year 2017-18 out of which 92 research projects were completed in 2018. 1178 travel grants for higher education and 1156 travel grants for research papers presentations were also approved by HEC under its ‘Research and Development Project’ in year 2018. ‘National Faculty Development Program 2020’ has also been launched recently which offers four week online training to teachers to improve research and professional skills. The number of PhD produced by Pakistani universities has also increased especially after the establishment of HEC and its initiatives as shown in following figure

Figure 1
Number of PhDs produced Annually



Source: Higher Education Commission PhD Country Directory (PCD)

At provincial level, PHEC also started ‘Faculty Development Academy’ in 2017 with an aim to provide training to 10,000 university teachers. Public sector universities also took different initiatives for faculty development like initiation of faculty orientation and leadership and governance programs for the training of departmental heads and Deans. It was found that the University of the Punjab, the largest multi-disciplinary public sector university of Pakistan, established its own Human Resource Development Center (HRDC) for faculty development purposes and sponsored more than 60 faculty members for PhD from international universities. Information Technology University, Lahore was also found to have launched its Faculty Development Program. Public sector universities were also found to provide funding for research seminars, trainings, research publications and international conferences.

1.2 Curriculum revision & quality assurance:

Efforts were also made to revise and update the curriculum taught at universities under HEC Vision 2025. ‘National Curriculum Review Committee’ was formed with the purpose of updating the curriculum. It was found that many universities were updating their curriculum. University of the Punjab had revised its curriculum in year 2019 according to the HEC guidelines. It was also revealed that HED and PHEC planned to convert all 778 colleges in the province of Punjab into community colleges which will offer 2 year specialized market driven programs. 28 colleges

were found to have been converted into community colleges while remaining colleges were to be converted in later stages.

2. Governance and management reform initiatives:

Interviews revealed that different initiatives were underway to improve the governance and management of universities. The criterion for appointment of Vice chancellors (VCs) was revised and they were now appointed through depoliticized and specialized search committees comprising of eminent academicians and other well accomplished personalities from different fields. VCs of fifteen different universities in Punjab were appointed through these search committees. Administrative structure of universities was also being modernized and 23 universities were transformed into smart universities till 2018. It was also informed by the officials of HED that University charters and PHEC Act were also being updated under the 'The Punjab Higher Education Blue Print'. More than 163 Quality Enhancement Cells (QEC) were developed in public sector universities and statutory bodies of public sector universities have been made more functional. Interviews revealed that HEC had collaborated with many other organizations to improve the overall quality of higher education institutions as well e.g. in 2019 British Council and PHEC collaborated to propose reforms to improve the higher education sector. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) have also been signed between HEC and Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) to promote entrepreneurship at universities and between HEC and National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) to combat extremism. HEC is also collaborating with international universities and plans to work on a \$400m joint project with World Bank named as 'Higher Education Development in Pakistan' to increase the capacity of affiliated colleges.

3. Challenges faced during Implementation of HE Reforms:

The analysis of interviews revealed following challenges that troubled the higher education sector, the implementation of different reform initiatives and its governance.

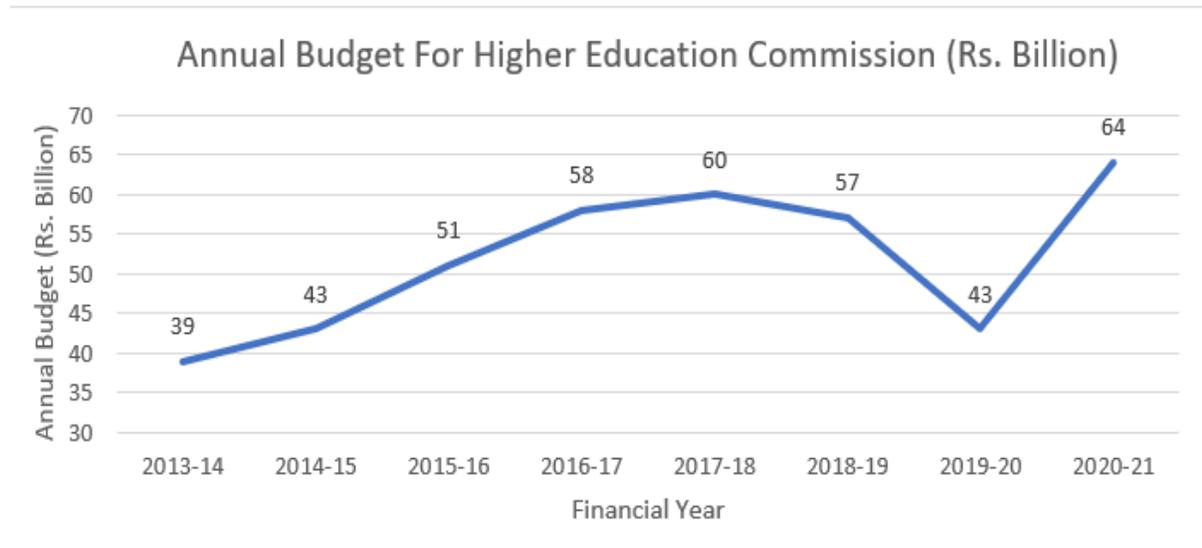
3.1 Lack of clarity after 18th constitutional Amendment and divergence between HEC and PHEC officials:

It was found that 18th constitutional amendment resulted in confusion with respect to higher education governance and regulation of universities. The subject of Higher Education was transferred to provinces and Provincial Higher Education Commissions (PHECs) were established as a result of this constitutional change. However, no actual power was transferred to them and the presence of federal level HEC, provincial HECs and higher education department (HEDs) resulted in the jurisdictional ambiguity and overlapping of institutional roles. This not only resulted in confusion and tensions between these institutions but also limited the autonomy of public universities. This institutional and jurisdictional conflict also delayed the important decisions like the appointment of VCs. Moreover, a serious divergence was also observed between the officials of HEC and PHEC regarding the roles of these institutions and both blamed each other for the ineffective implementation of reforms.

3.2 Inadequate Financial Resources and their ineffective utilization:

The HEC and PHEC officials revealed that the inadequate financial resources posed another challenge to the effective governance of higher education and implementation of HEC vision 2025. The secondary data also revealed that HEC received adequate funding in early 2000s but the funding substantially decreased in subsequent years. Rs. 60.2bn were allocated to HEC in year 2017-18. The amount was decreased to Rs. 57bn in the year 2018-19 and Rs.43bn for the year 2019-20. HEC demanded Rs.104 billion in year 2020-21 but only received Rs. 64.1 billion. This decrease in funding along with increase in the number of universities, rising inflation and ineffective utilization of funds also added to the difficulties in the implementation of HEC Vision 2025.

Figure 2
Budget of HEC over years



Source: Federal budget speech Finance Division, Government of Pakistan

3.3 Inadequate consultation with stakeholders and no performance evaluation of Implemented policies.

Inadequate consultation of HEC, PHEC and HED with each other as well as with other important stakeholders like university Vice Chancellors, Academic Staff Associations and senior academics before formulation and implementation of higher education policies was highlighted as another grave challenge faced by higher education sector. One of the interviewees mentioned that HEC had unilaterally imposed new PhD admission policy without consulting with public universities and senior academicians. Another interviewee mentioned the halting of different research degree programs in public universities by HEC without prior consultation with university representatives as another instance where no consultation was carried out with relevant stake holders. Moreover, it was also found that there was no systematic, formal and objective mechanism in place to evaluate the success of policies after their implementation.

3.4 Excessive political intervention in HEC and in Universities:

The excessive political intervention in higher education institutions was found as another major reason that stymied the implementation of different reform initiatives including HEC vision 2025. The interviewees belonging to universities mentioned that in spite of efforts to depoliticize the appointment process of VCs, the chief minister of the provinces still exerted a significant influence on the entire process especially when it comes to the selection of members of search committees. Respondent were also of the view that political intervention was also there even in the appointment of registrars, treasurers and other important administrative positions of public universities which not only compromised the autonomy of universities but also made them a tool in the hands of political elite who could appoint people of their own liking at important positions. Excessive political intervention in the routine affairs of the universities such as budget allocation and approval of other important administrative decisions by syndicate and senate was also reported. These were also pointed as major reasons behind ineffective implementation of different reform initiatives. Interviewees belonging to HEC also lamented the new Presidential Ordinance 2021 on HEC and considered it as an effort of the political elite to limit the autonomy of HEC as well as universities.

3.5 Incompatibility between reforms and university culture:

The interviewees belonging to universities mentioned incompatibility between the reforms and the culture of universities as a major reason behind the failure of implementation of different reforms. One of the respondents mentioned the case of Tenure Track System (TTS) which was introduced to promote research by offering better financial incentives and a different career track to researchers and faculty but suffered in its implementation because of the presence of bureaucratic norms and traditional mindset of majority that preferred Basic Pay Scale (BPS) system which was considered more lucrative due to permanent employment, post retirement pension and other

advantages. Such reform initiatives were also resisted by associations of faculties of old public sector universities as these reforms were against their mindset.

4. Recommendations:

Some of the recommendations to improve the quality of higher education sector and its governance proposed in the light of collected data are as follows

4.1 Clarification of jurisdictions of HEC, PHEC and HED and enhancing coordination between them

To improve higher education governance and implement higher education reforms, it is pertinent that the jurisdictions of Federal HEC, PHECs and HED are clarified. An important insight from the interviews revealed that there is not only the jurisdictional ambiguity between HEC, PHEC and HED, but also a lack of coordination and synergy between them as officials belonging to one organization blamed another for the poor implementation of reforms. Thus it is recommended to enhance coordination between these institutions and clarify their jurisdictions.

4.2 Empowerment of Provincial Higher Education Commissions

PHEC officials recommended that not only the role of Provincial Higher Education Commission should be clarified but it also should be empowered to take important decisions pertaining to the governance of higher education institutions operating in their respective provinces as they are in better position to understand the ground realities of public universities of their provinces than the Islamabad based HEC. It was also recommended that the budget and the overall capacity of PHECs should be enhanced as well so that they can provide administrative and technical support to universities when it comes to implement different reform initiatives.

4.3 Enhancing autonomy of Universities:

Interviewees belonging to universities suggested that all the decisions regarding the internal affairs of university should be taken by universities independently and political intervention in important university affairs like decisions regarding budget and selection of VCs, treasurers, registrars should be minimized. In the light of interviews, it is also recommended that regulatory institutions, particularly HEC should adequately consult with other important stakeholders like university vice chancellors and senior academicians before initiating any new reform and make the reform process more democratic instead of unilaterally imposing decisions on universities and meddling in their internal affairs without understanding the context and ground realities of universities. Similarly, university officials also condemned the HED for making unnecessary interventions within the university affairs and intentionally creating bureaucratic lags and delays regarding different university related matters.

4.4 Training of VCs, Deans, Directors and other Administrative Officers:

The HED officials pointed out that no formal training was given to the newly appointed Deans, Directors, Principals, Chairmen and VCs to manage the administrative affairs of their universities or departments which give rise to the legal and administrative issues and slows down or adversely affects the reform implementation process. It was therefore recommended by them to provide regular formal trainings to the heads of universities as well as the heads of academic and administrative departments of universities to increase their awareness regarding legal issues involved in administration of public universities.

4.5 Constitution of Performance Review Committee:

University professors and officials of PHEC recommended that a 'Performance Review Committee' comprising of public university representatives and officials of HEC and PHEC or any other such structural arrangement should be made to oversee the implementation of different reform initiatives and overcome the associated challenges. It was pointed out that no such arrangement was there in the past to monitor the implementation and success of previous reforms which resulted in their poor implementation.

4.6 Increase The HR To Reduce The Workload:

It was suggested by the interviewees belonging to Universities and HEC to increase the number of administrative and teaching staff to improve the quality of higher education and to make the administrative processes more smooth and effective.

Conclusion:

Higher education sector is undoubtedly one of the most important sectors of any state. Higher education sector in Pakistan has seen multiple reform initiatives throughout the history. Most of these reforms were either ineffectively implemented or failed to yield the desired outcome primarily because of the political instability and changes in policies of every new government. However, many reforms initiatives under the HEC vision 2025 have been recently implemented. Multiple initiatives have been taken for the faculty development. Not only new research projects and opportunities are being provided to the university faculty but they are also being encouraged to participate in national and international conferences. Efforts to revise curriculum are also underway and a “National Curriculum review committee” is functioning to provide guidelines to update and revise the curriculum for higher education. In order to improve the overall governance of the universities, changes have been made in the selection practices of Vice Chancellors. The overall process has become less political compared to the past as they are now selected through specialized search committees. The statutory bodies like senate and syndicate have been made more active and autonomous.

However, financial constraints are the hurdle towards achieving the HEC vision 2025 as lesser budget has been given to HEC in recent years. Universities are overcoming this constraint by taking different initiatives like having their own research endowment funds to promote research. The issue of autonomy of the universities and HEC still persists but efforts are also underway to ensure the autonomy of these institutions. Major hurdle in the path of these reforms also come from jurisdictional confusion created after eighteenth constitutional amendment due to the presence federal HEC, Provincial HEC and Higher Education departments with overlapping roles causing unnecessary conflicts and delays.

It is recommended to the policy makers and the people at the helm of affairs to pay a special attention to uplift of Higher education sector of Pakistan and implement the reform initiatives with utmost diligence. For the successful implementation of reforms and improvement of higher education sector, it is indispensable that the jurisdictions of HEC, PHEC and HED are made clear, coordination and synergy between these institutions is enhanced, provincial higher education commissions are empowered and their capacity to design and implement reform is improved. It is also mandatory that autonomy of universities is ensured and newly appointed VCs, Deans, Directors and other Administrative Officers are adequately trained regarding the administrative and legal issues that they may face during their service.

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