**HE institutional reform or deform**

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Institutions in the higher education sector are governed by respective institutional law which provides a structure for various operations expected to be performed by the Institutions. The Universities in Pakistan are functionally based on their charter given by the Government for providing quality higher education for growth and development. The role of institutional leadership is to arrange smooth working of the institutions for better output in form of graduates, research, innovations, and as a catalyst of change in the society.

Most of the Institutions have been given a Charter, which is based on a format adopted from the colonial era, like most of the Universities in Punjab have almost the same Charter which the University of the Punjab has inherited from British Masters. The functions and statutory setup is also the same. The difference is only in scope and regional arrangements. The Higher Education Law in general for all Universities is given through Cabinet Criteria which requires minimum compliance in terms of Human Resource, Infrastructure, Books, Laboratories, etc. As these are just minimum guidelines, therefore, most Universities will easily fulfill these requirements without any issue. In many cases, infrastructure, human resources, books, etc are hired for an inspection period and everything is shown in order on paper. After NoC, most of the institutions will start adopting an ad-hoc approach for their academic and research processes.

Most of the time, it is observed that we as an institution or an individual adopt the popular narrative of Government for materializing or managing the institutional responsibilities without realizing that what will be future repercussions of such an ad-hoc approach. An example of this approach is the opening of Universities with the name of the political leader during the period of their rule. The reason the name was given was to just get enormous funds for the development of the institution. In this ICT age, brick and mortar-based institutions are gradually being converted to virtual institutions where most of the learning content, assessment, and support is provided through IT-based services.

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In the same manner, many institutional heads are carrying out institutional reforms within their regions without considering the basic law, readiness of stakeholders, and professional process required for such reforms. Resultantly, the institutional organs are deformed and confusion and chaos are created among the stakeholders. The basics of the policy development process are ignored, and directives of donors and other interest groups are given priority.

The reforms are a continuous and dynamic process that should be an integral part of the institution. The self-assessment models for higher education are to be adopted in true letter and spirit and strategies for further improvement may be explored scientifically. The role of institutional leadership is to use a participative strategy for need assessment. Unfortunately, business organizations conduct widespread surveys for improving their service and products. These surveys are carried out at the National level through different means i.e. Physical visits, social media platforms, etc. Whereas our national institutions have mostly adopted the selective process of policy development where good practices of the world are evaluated by the selected experts without taking on board the actual practitioners. Resultantly, there are implementation issues and ownership issues on the ground which are then addressed through short-term policy adjustments.

The Higher Educational institutions in the developed world conduct annual student survey on regular basis and findings are translated for improving current institutional practices. This helps in understanding the ecosystem of higher education in the country. In the recent past, World Bank-sponsored studies were conducted, and findings were shared with authorities having decision making powers. It is unfortunate to note that most of the heads appointed are less interested in literature review and need assessment practice which is required for developing a sustainable solution to the current crisis being faced by the Higher Education Sector. The top-down approach of decision making is considered as a dictating style and is not popular among the stakeholders. The mistrust in the local solutions and always try to find an external case is destroying the whole ecosystem of higher education. We need to change our Higher Education policy development process; it should not be donor-driven like our economy is following terms of donors most of the time.

Further, the reforms carried out in haste are not going to deliver due to improper technical, financial, availability of required human resources, and compatibility with actual ground realities. The process of consultation before policymaking is most important as evident in the cases of developed countries where a request for comments is opened to all citizens for getting maximum input for making the right decision. Even recently, the Indian Education Policy was developed after large scale consultation and assessing feasibility at its best. As our Ministry of Education has announced and opened the request for comments to our National Education Policy of 2021. It is felt that only the circulation of letters among the stakeholder will not work. Our media and other resources should be involved, and prime time shows may be planned with experts from around the country. A dedicated portal should be developed for submitted suggestions and recommendations. The institutions involved in the education sector must share their feedback and suggestions along with individuals. The only way forward is the participative approach and involving the right stakeholders in the process of policy development.

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