

STUDENTS AS CUSTOMERS: AN ANALYTICAL LITERATURE REVIEW OF MARKET-ORIENTED CULTURE OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This analytical literature review explores how a market-oriented culture has been emerging in the Pakistani universities, and how the culture has influenced the implementation of students as a customer in a more competitive process in the higher education settings. Due to globalization, waning state funding, and institutional competition, most of the universities are embracing business like practices that place more emphasis on branding, higher enrollment, job marketability discourses, and student satisfaction indicators. This study follows the PRISMA Framework 2020 to describe the ways in which market logic distorts university identity, faculty roles and student self-conceptions with the help of an interpretive and contextual analysis of market logic and extant literature. Initially 243 articles were included in the study after removal of duplicate and irrelevant articles 132 articles were chosen to describe this broader area, However the 64 articles are cited in this high stake literature review. The results indicate that there is profoundly different cultural transformation where education is becoming a private investing, as opposed to a state good. Students are the consumers, faculty members are the service providers and in the institutional success is market shared and reputation. As much as these practices enhanced responsiveness and efficiency in administrative life, create tensions in the academic life. There is evidences of threats to grade inflation, degraded academic rigor, transactional teacher-student relationships and ultimately erosion of ethical and intellectual responsibilities. In Pakistan's economical sustainability and International competitiveness is crucial to focus but also the maintenance of academic integrity, professional ethics, critical thinking, and social responsibility cannot be undermined. A balanced policy is confidentially required with respect to market demands and actual motives of university educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, there has been a dramatic transformation in higher education practices in the global world (Zwaan, B. 2025). The traditional learning institutions of all the contexts are now globally competitive enterprises which not only seek competition over students and financing, but also beliefs and prestige's of education (Al-Haija & Mahamid 2021). The most important feature of this change is the growing tendency toward turning

students into consumers or customers of online education, as a representation of the process of marketization of higher education when the principles of market economy and consumer logic are applied to the actions of institutions (Bunce et al., 2017). This paradigm is part of the wider trends of neoliberalism towards putting focus on competition, efficiency, and performance, requiring universities to develop business-like approaches to

attract and retain students in the context of limited public financing and increased operations expenses (Raza et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, these international pressures meet local circumstances of high levels of rivalry between state and privatized universities, the increasing number of the fee-paying students and the policies that promote non-dependence among the institutions of higher learning. This has seen most universities adopt market oriented cultures by adopting branding, promotional efforts and service quality programs that help them position themselves in favorable positions in the educational market (Rizwan et al., 2025). This has been translated into institutional marketing content like prospectuses and admission brochures, where the visual and linguistic techniques are used to represent universities in the form of desirable brands and the students as well informed consumers whose decision-making can be used to determine the success of the institutions (Rizwan et al., 2025).

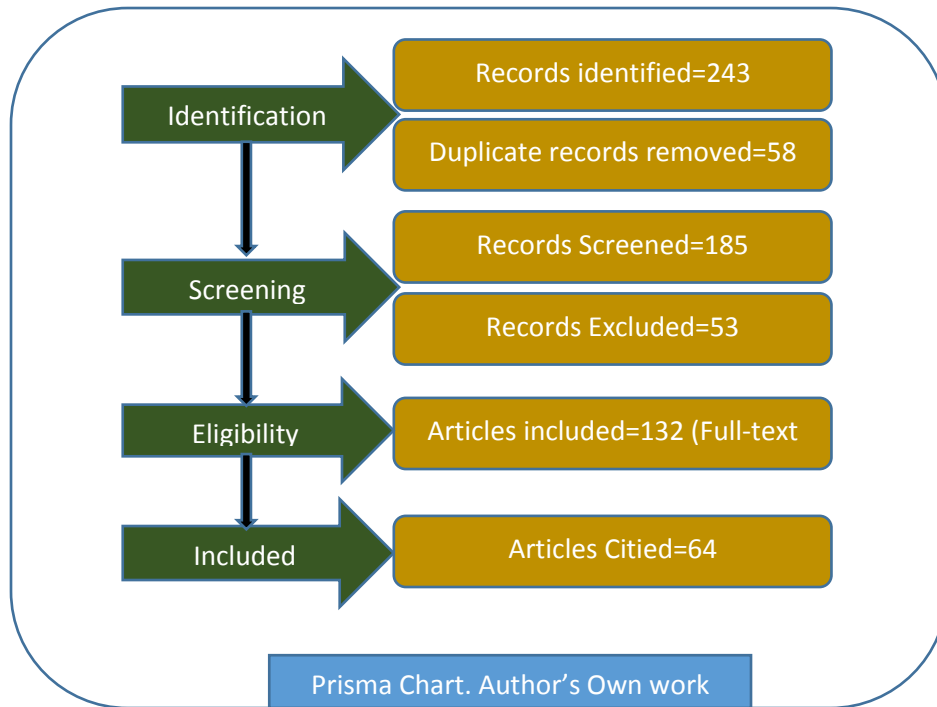
These trends are stressed by empirical studies conducted in Pakistan. Indicatively, the article by Safdar et al. (2020) highlights how institutions of higher learning are increasingly viewing students as customers, with most incurring customer satisfaction at the expense of academic standards. Whereas Khuwaja et al. (2017) states that market orientation contributes largely to the performance of the institutions, a notion that supports the notion that the university should position themselves in line with perceived student needs. Qualitative discourse analyses also indicate that advertising and communications in Pakistani universities are associated with the neoliberal and consumerist trends that focus on prestige, employability, and

lifestyle imagery to attract potential students (Raza et al., (2024).

The argument of whether to consider students as customers is not restricted to Pakistan. On the one hand, internationally, researchers have emphasized a two-sided narrative: those who support the student-as-customer viewpoint believe that it increases student responsiveness and quality of service delivery (Clayson & Haley, 2005), whereas those who critique it hold the view that this metaphor constructs mediators of educational values, transactional exchanges between students and services, and weakens the academic standards (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). Studies indicate that pursuing customer metaphors blindly can promote consumerist behavior among learners that negatively influences performance and collaboration (Alvesson, (2022).

In spite of the increasing body of literature in the world community, there is a relative lack of qualitative research and studies that are located in the Pakistani setting and discuss the way market-focused cultures influence institutional processes and attitudes of students. The following qualitative study tries to address this gap by examining how Pakistani universities can be described as employing market logic in their organizational culture and how the students identify themselves under this logic and what this means to the quality of education and identity of the institution. This study makes contributions to marketization and the higher education in Pakistan via a deep and contextualized analysis and provides the educationists, policymakers and leaders in institutions with new insights.

Methodology



This literature review is based on the Prisma 2020 framework of the meta-analysis of the complex problems from diversified literature. In the first research articles were searched on some of the main databases like Google scholar, Research gate, Scopus, Science Direct, Web of Science etcetera. Searching key words included market-oriented cultures, market oriented culture in Pakistan, student as a customer, student as a customer treating phenomena, universities towards marketization of education, market behavior in university administration, market behavior in university education of Pakistan. From plenty of articles, title relevancy was the criteria to be chosen for download. About 243 articles were initially downloaded, after removal of duplications 185 articles were screened. After excluding some of irrelevant articles, 132 were considered for full text reading. This literature review task is the results and meta-analysis of 132 articles while 64 articles are cited in this research study. Following important themes are the result of this meta-analysis.

Marketization of Higher education in Pakistan

In continuing the general discourse of how market-oriented cultures have influenced the identity of

students and universities, a major aspect the work would entail the marketization of higher education in Pakistan which is intertwined with the issue of the student-as-customer. According to research, marketization entails the validity of the competitive, promotional and consumer-driven activities, in which business-like approaches are applied to schools with the view of attracting and retaining students and ensuring financial sustainability (Sakhnovskaia, 2025). Such strategies in the Pakistani context are indicative of the neoliberal policies, falling state funding, and increasing pressures between the Pakistani public and privatized universities (Khuwaja et al., 2017), and the global trends of bringing the logics of the market to educational policies and practices.

The market oriented language and visual strategies ingrained in communications of the university in an effort to promote the university as a commodity (Buchbinder, H. 1993). As an illustration, the content of admission materials and websites of universities tends to be focused on the matter of institutional prestige, facilities and career outcomes, which contributes to making education be perceived as a product and students as consumers making the choice in the context of the competitive market

(Nasim, 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025). This promotional discourse application to recruitment is consistent with findings that marketization does not solely work in the policy layer but also is being used in the day-to-day communication of the institution to shape the way the educational value is socialized and communicated (Nguyen, (2009). These strategies of discourse indicate how marketing logic is entrenched in the sphere of recruiting and branding institutions of higher learning in Pakistan (Abbas, S. A. 2014).

Further, it has been established that use of business-like strategies that involves the implementation of market orientation influences institutional performance and reputation (Rodrigues & Pinho 2012). The perceived market orientation in which the universities focus on learning and acting on the needs of the students or other stakeholders has been demonstrated to impact the institutional reputation and apparent quality, which subsequently affects the selection of the students and competitive scope (Algarni et al., 2014). This highlights the fact that marketizing is not restricted to the use of language and persuasion but to also encompass strategic organizational practices that ensure congruence between what is being taught in academia and what the market needs (Jarzabkowski & Sillince 2007).

The role of commercialization, which is one of the aspects of the marketization, in quality and academic integrity is also important thing relating to marketization of education (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra 2024). Research on university privatization theories and practices in the commercialization of higher education institutions contend that a high emphasis on revenue streams and market logic may undermine educational quality and and content, which casts serious doubts on the balancing of market versus academic agendas (Ishtiaq et al., 2025). These issues replicate larger arguments across the research of the field of higher education that question the unrestrained transfer of market logic into academic institutions, which have the possible dangers to educational equity as well as the historic purpose of universities (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

The gap emerging empirical literature in Pakistan is the need to conduct a qualitative study relating the interaction of marketization with institutional culture and student experiences. Therefore, along with text based researches on marketization, there is

a still need to conduct deeper empirical researches to uncover the market-oriented practices on the university ethos, pedagogical values, and student outcomes within the Pakistani system of higher education.

Treating “Students as a Customer”

From the various changes of Pakistan’s education system one of the important is consider “student-as-customer”. Higher education institutions had made this a culture where pedagogical relationship, as the traditional mentorship is changed with a transactional service model (Bhatti & Ali 2021). Not only administrative change but it is become a one of the basic cultural change, where student used a customer or in or worse than this as, consumer of university products (Newson, 2004). This phenomena as Safdar et al. (2020) highlighted, is frequently accomplished at the price of the academic standards. The introduction of the customer is always right logic into the lecture hall means creating a dangerous situation where institutional strategies only work for satisfaction rates this might leads to grade inflation and curricular challenges, and such behavior leads to client satisfaction instead of intellectual growth (Quadrelli & Collins 2025)

Universities promote their students to see their degree as a high-stakes purchase instead of a process of transformation by emphasizing the use of lifestyle imagery and spending a significant portion of their promotional efforts on communicating employability and luxurious campus amenities to students (Mintz, S. (2024); Raza et al., 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025). Such framing initiates a psychological change in the behavior of students therefore students become less and less inclined to consider themselves as co-producers of knowledge and more as passive consumers of a ready-to-use product (Xue et al., 2005). According to Eagle and Brennan (2007) this metaphor (Student as a Customer) establishes a transaction meaning that the intrinsic value of education is undermined because it becomes a commodity to purchase, but not a status to gain by the hard work.

Moreover, this culture of student as a customer breeds the sense of entitlement in the student body which may be counterproductive to the learning atmosphere (Cuthbert, 2010). The rivalry between

the public and the private sector is intense in Pakistani context (Benz, 2012), so the demand to ensure the enrollment levels prompts institutions to respond to the so-called requirements of the students by sacrificing the pedagogical quality (Khuwaja et al., 2017). According to Alvesson (2022), a purely consumerist identity among students is detrimental to collaboration and long-term results because students are no longer motivated by the mastery of complicated material but by the credential they receive.

The emergence of this culture (Student as a customer) in Pakistan is more representative of a larger neoliberal direction in which the traditional role of the university as a place of social good is becoming lost to its role as a participant in the market (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Although this neoliberal idea of Student as a customer is suggested to drive greater responsiveness, the dark side of the matter is that it may cause hollowing out of the institutional ethos and may turn the pursuit of truth to the pursuit of the market share and revenue (Giroux, 2002; Ishtiaq et al., 2025; Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra, 2024).

Role of Teachers in Market oriented Culture

The shift to student-as-customer in the Pakistani context of higher education has essentially revisited the traditional facet of professional identity and pedagogical freedom of the faculty members. The long-held position of the teacher as a scholarly guide of the university faces the consequences of the new cultural perspectives imposed on higher education per the premise that, as universities grow more market-oriented to achieve financial sustainability and institutional prestige (Khuwaja et al., 2017; Sakhnovskaia, 2025), the teacher is a service provider or an educational facilitator. It is not only an administrative change but an intensive neoliberal shift that witnessed more faculties whose performance is monitored by customer satisfaction systems than on the basis of their pure academic or intellectual contribution (Fredman & Doughney 2012; Raza et al., 2018; Safdar et al., 2020).

This is a rather complicated twofold bind of teachers in a marketized environment (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). On the one hand, teachers are required to hold high academic standards, on the

other, the institutionalistic pressure to secure high rates of student retention and satisfaction, which can be associated with fee-paying models, may cause the diminution of challenges in curricular matters (Quadrelli & Collins, 2025). According to Safdar et al. (2020), the logic of the customer is always right usually filters into the classroom and compels teachers to focus on ensuring client happiness at the cost of the uncomfortable mental development that frequently goes with intellectual growth. This commercialized trade compromises the inherent worth of education and in place of an educational interaction of truth seeking between the teacher and the student, a commercialized interaction in which the position of the authority of the teacher is dissolved in the purchasing power of the student (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Giroux, 2002).

Moreover, the focus on employability and imagery of lifestyles that university brands (Raza et al., 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025) put an extra strain on the faculty to teach what the market wants them to gain rather than critical thinking or theoretical insight. Not only have teachers ceased to be merely the sources of knowledge but also they are now part of the product of the institution that should be marketed and sold (Altbach, 2002); Buchbinder, 1993; Nguyen, 2009). This transformation can lead to the development of a feeling of entitlement among the student body with learners considering the faculty as employees of the service staff whose duty is to provide a credential but they are not in a process of transformation (Cuthbert, 2010; Xue et al., 2005). As soon as students perceive themselves as consumers, the teacher is seen as an obstacle to be handled or as a tool that can be used and not as a guide to be admired (McMillan & Cheney 1996).

The psychological effect on the faculty is also very important. Claiming that the institutional reputation and the perceived quality are employed as the means of attracting the potential clients (Algarni et al., 2014), teachers are now prone to practicing the so-called performative pedagogy (Bayley, 2018). They have to concentrate on being likable and responsive to fit the measures of student ratings as they are more commonly utilized as administrative control than pedagogical enhancement (Bayley, 2018; Alvesson, 2022). Such climate discourages innovation and risk-taking in academia because

faculty members might be afraid that criticizing a student on his/her view and marking him/her strictly may get him/her backlash, which will impact his/her professional reputation.

So such, commercialization of the Pakistani classroom is a threat of emptying the institutional ethos (Tahir & Jawed 2025; Ishtiaq et al., 2025). Teachers can weaken their function in the academic integrity and the social good when they are looked at on whether they can satisfy student-consumers (HON, 2015; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra, 2024). Markets logic is increasing, which means that in Pakistani universities, the primary loyalties of the teacher might be not to the discipline, but to the institution requirement to preserve their market share and revenue (Giroux, 2002; Khuwaja et al., 2017). This transformation of pedagogy as transformation into pedagogy as a transaction indicates that the role of a teacher is now being reduced to a neoliberal mechanism cog, where the market share and survival of a given institution are being re-centered while the cultivation of human mind is pushed to the background.

Effect on Learning, Discipline, and Academic Standards

The implementation of Market logic and demands into the Pakistans higher education institutes has critical consequences on learning and maintaining academic standards smoothly. Higher education in Pakistan is made like service provider, the actual notion of education is something that is missing and the academic transformation has been pushed backward (Rogers, 2001). This transformation tends to bring a transactional style to knowledge whereby having an understanding of sophisticated theories is not as important as attaining a credential (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). Students when in the role of a customer are no longer active in the sense of inquiry (Gnusowski & Schoefer 2022), but passive in the sense of consumption, and tend to downplay the resistance of least to get what they want, which is the degree (Xue et al., 2005; Alvesson, 2022).

Among the most alarming impacts of this culture, the possibility of grade inflation and erosion of the curriculum turmoil should be pointed out (Ullah et al., 2024). Pakistani institutions are dealing with

immeasurable pressure to keep levels of student retention high in a highly competitive environment where financial survival is identified with retention (Khuwaja et al., 2017; Raza et al., 2018; Ullah et al., 2024). Therefore there is a tendency to reduce the standards in the academic field as Safdar et al. (2020) claim, to prevent the complaints of the students or adverse ratings. The intellectual irritation required by the deep learning process is perceived as a service failure and not as a pedagogical tool when the customer is always right (Quadrelli & Collins, 2025). As a result, the discipline in question suffers as department staff might be pressured into working less or making tests less demanding to guarantee the pleasure of the clients and the institutional performance (Bayley, 2018; Safdar et al., 2020).

Along with that, the emphasis on employability and lifestyle branding in Pakistani universities (Raza et al., 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025) causes a shift in the orientation of learning to narrow and vocational achievements. The subject of study is no longer regarded as inherently important and intellectually capable of developing critical thinking, but on the basis of its immediate commercial viability (Giroux, 2002; 2024; Ishtiaq et al., 2025). Such instrumentalist perception of knowledge undermines social good that has traditionally come with universities turning truth seeking to a truth seeking in market share (Fuller, 2023); Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004).

Student discipline and cooperation are also equally affected. Consumerism identity also promotes the attitude of entitlement as students might consider academic demands as a term of a contract instead of a part of an academic development (Kelley, 2021; Cuthbert, 2010). Such environment is able to undermine the working relationship between learners and educators, and turn of relationship to that of the provider of services, and consumer. Finally, with the rise in the penetration of the market-oriented culture into the education sector of Pakistan, the threat of hollowing out the institutional ethos is increasing, which may result in graduates holding a marketable degree but low intellectual content (Tahir and Jawed, 2025; Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra, 2024).

Universities as Business Institutes

Universities are not perceived just as knowledge and social development centres anymore, high stake changes of higher education in Pakistan are indicators of the overall transformation of universities into business organizations (Sain et al., 2025). They are being considered more and more as competitive organizations, they compete for students, they compete for funding, they compete for prestige. This change is directly connected with the policies of neoliberalism promoting competition, efficiency and performance (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). In this model, universities have to survive in an academic market, economic sustainability is the main focus of these universities not learning at all. Development of institutional goals becomes an end while the market share gets significant.

In Pakistan this change has been driven by a decline in government funding supported by an increase in competition between the public and private sectors (Khuwaja et al., 2017; Raza et al., 2018). States does not solely rely on public sector universities. There are a number of private sector universities in Pakistan for them earning has great importance in such particular universities, which are privately operated, their dependence on funds compels them to embrace corporate management styles (Hafeez et al., 2024). The focus is the strategic planning where branding becomes most important thing to execute (Abbas 2014). Marketing is the continuous motive of these universities and a hollow fame is gained without efficient quality education, mostly based on the modern infrastructure and strict policies (Bertelsen, 1998). In such universities there is mostly the introduction of performance indicators, the enrolment of the students is closely checked and the retention rates are assessed.

This model also alters the leadership of the institutions. The role of the vice-chancellors and senior administrators is becoming more and more the role of chief executive officer (Smith & Adams 2008). Leaders of such universities concentrate on sources of revenue, establish collaborations in the external world. They are in pursuit of collaboration in the industry, they facilitate international interconnections. The academic departments are puzzled to develop programs that are more attracting to students. Those programs that are in line with

market needs get institutional backing (Jarzabkowski and Sillince, 2007). Disciplines in these institutions that are market friendly increase at a faster rate while the some disciplines due to lake of business needs might be deprived of resources. It is a change of priorities in the institution where economic contribution is usually used to measure academic value (Balzer, 2020).

Branding is very important in this type of business orientation of higher educational institutes and universities are sold as high end brands of education (Lim et al., 2020). The advertisements focus on infrastructure, advanced facilities, employment rates, and international ratings (Raza et al., 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025). Persuasive language is employed in the websites and prospectuses and their vision imagery lays emphasis on living and winning. The important thing is that education is defined as an investment (Bobro et al., 2025). A degree is given as an avenue to jobs and promotion and such strategies which are consistent with corporate branding principles (Buchbinder, 1993; Nguyen, 2009). The universities are commoditized (Ghasemi & Yousefikhah 2022). The student turns out to be a consumer and institutional identity is turned into the market-driven one (Banwait, 2021).

This change is further enhanced through commercialization, colleges are after profits other than tuition fees and they provide services of consultation (Hentschke, 2023). Higher education institutions in Pakistan are working in collaboration with industries (Rehman et al., 2026). They present brief training programs in the profession also hire international students and such practices depict what Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) explain as academic capitalism. Along with that, the production of knowledge is linked to the opportunities of the market. The ability to generate revenue has an impact on the decision in institutions (Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra, 2024; Ishtiaq et al., 2025). Academic structures are now influenced by financial logic and market needs and productions.

This business orientation gives a lot of tensions. In the past, universities served as platforms of questioning and acting responsibly (Giroux, 2002), they were also not intended merely on economic grounds and were spiritual and intellectual. Nevertheless, the logic of the market changes its

focus to profitability and competitiveness (Fuller, 2023, Slaughter, and Rhoades, 2004). Programs whose revenues are not generated can be less emphasized in an institutional manner. Assessment of faculty performance can be carried out and based on quantifiable outputs and student appraisals instead of intellectual input (Fredman and Doughney, 2012). Customer satisfaction is related to institutional survival in Pakistan (Arif & Ilyas 2011). Also these practices can affect the grading practices and impact the academic rigor (Safdar et al., 2020). The Pakistani situation is rather competitive, and universities may focus on growth and exposure rather than substantial academic change (Khuwaja et al., 2017). It takes pressure to get in to modify academic choices and element of finance gets ingrained in institution culture. Business language is drawn into the academic discourse. Such words as efficiency, objectives, output and performance become frequent and this eventually reforms institutional identity.

Therefore, the perception of change in universities as business organizations represents more than change in the administration. It is a transition of the cultural change where market rationality takes a center stage in making decisions. The purpose of education becomes mixed with economic sustainability. Although this model might bring up efficiency and responsibility, it still brings forth reasonable issues regarding academic integrity and the social mission of higher education (Ishtiaq et al., 2025; Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra, 2024). Pakistani university, therefore, is at a grave cross-road between knowledge as public good and education as marketable good.

Consequences for Educational Values and Ethics

The rising trend in the market-oriented thinking among Pakistani higher learning institutions has far reaching effects on education values and academic ethics (Shaikh & Kazmi 2022). As universities has aligned themselves in competitive educational markets, the conventional vision of education being a community good is slowly transformed in accordance with the model of knowledge being a product and degrees being treated as investments (Bertelsen, 1998). Within this kind of atmosphere, the institutional agenda tends to shift towards enrollment expansion, branding and financial

viability at the cost of the more intellectual and moral missions of higher education. According to Giroux (2002), universities used to be a place where critical thinking, democratic involvement and social responsibility were developed. But students and higher education institutions should be careful not to place market logic at the center of their decision making because in such situations the institutions tend to redefine a successful university that in a different context would be characterized by the production of considerate, ethically sensitive graduates (Nussbaum, 2010). Such a change does not happen instantly, but is emerging as a result of policies, marketing, and management of administration which socialize the fact that education is a service that should be offered and consumed.

According to this structure, the moral relation among students, teachers and institutions also change. When students are positioned as customers, it is easy to see how learning experiences gradually become transactional where hard work, discipline and intellectual rigor seem to be less important than the hope of getting a service in return of the tuition (Naidoo & Jamieson 2005). Literature in the field of higher education suggests that this image can cause indirect pressure on the institution and its staff to value student satisfaction more than academic seriousness (Safdar et al., 2020; Alvesson, 2022). Members of the faculty might also be pressured to adjust the methods of teaching, the criteria of grading or other forms of assessment in a manner that will diminish the conflict with the students. In the long run these pressures market oriented culture may weaken the ethical standards in the classroom especially when the institutional reputation and the financial stability are linked with the retention of the students and favorable appraisals (Gould, 2003).

One more significant ethical issue is connected with integrity and credibility of academic results. The importance of student attraction and retention in universities, when they are within a competitive environment, can affect the academic decision-making processes. These various alterations can be justified as student-friendly policies, they bring critical concerns on the fair, merit and the ultimate worth of educational qualifications. When academic standards are silently changed to keep students in the

school or to save the reputation of the institution, then the moral basis of assessment would be questioned (Shils, 2008). The Pakistani context is characterized by the close correlation between academic evaluation and higher education credentials and social mobility and job prospects, so the credibility of evaluation in this context is of primary importance.

The ethical orientation of knowledge production and the disciplinary priorities are also marketized (Burrell et al., 2022). The academic capitalism theory by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades explains the way in which universities are becoming more and more aligned to teaching and research with economic opportunities, collaboration in industry, and profit making. This means that under these conditions, those programs that offer immediate monetary benefits or high demand in the market might have increased institutional support, whereas disciplines that are oriented towards critical questioning, ethics, philosophy, or social reflection might not have an easy time gaining institutional backing or funding (Tweheyo et al., 2022). Though industry engagement and emphasis on employability might be helpful to the students, the over-emphasis on market success may lead to the slurs of the intellectual mission of the universities (Schmidt, 2013). Ethical education needs to have room in its creations to challenge prevailing concepts, to evaluate the ills in society, and to develop personal judgment opportunities, which are not necessarily easily quantifiable in market contexts (Nash, 2002).

Universities should not make only skilled laborers but also socially responsible citizens but that can think, change and transform society. Therefore, market orientation strategies can be a source of institutional efficiency and international competitiveness, but at the same time it needs to be balanced by firm dedication towards academic integrity, Fairness, intellectual autonomy and most important in ethical accountability. Devoid of this balance, the universities are likely to lose the same values that made them socially legitimate and culturally significant in the past.

Redesigning the Purpose of higher education Institutions

The growing commercialization of higher education in Pakistan is placing a critical strain on the

reconsideration of the basic idea of university education. As universities start becoming more competitive enterprises, the main purpose of institutions slowly changes as an intellectual and social institution to an economy survival and positioning in the market (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Giroux, 2002). This change does not come in leaps. It develops by branding them, performance measures, enrollment expectations, and positioning students as clients whose satisfaction can make an institution successful (Safdar et al., 2020; Khuwaja et al., 2017). Education in such a setting will be diminished to a sale and the degrees are sold as investments. The knowledge is put forward as a commodity and the process of learning is linked to employability and not light epiphany (Raza et al., 2024; Rizwan et al., 2025).

The revision of the point of university education presupposes going back to the concept of education as a civic good. Universities have been traditionally places of critical thinking, democracy and ethical thinking (Giroux, 2002). They were not meant to just generate some labor to be sold in the market, they were supposed to develop intelligent citizens and socially minded people. This overtakes at the broader intellectual project by the revenue generation and reputation management (when the market logic is taken responsible) (Kezar and Sierra, 2024; Ishtiaq et al., 2025). This puts a strain between profitability and principle and it is a challenge to academic autonomy because it breaks the institutional identity.

Simultaneously, institutes should also consider that the responsiveness to student needs and accountability is not necessarily negative. Accordingly, responsiveness is not to be taken as a reply to the academic rigor and also the academic standards should not be substituted with satisfaction. Higher education institutions have to be economically viable and at the same time, deliberate on the intellectual richness and moral obligation (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Reduced thought on the role of university education in Pakistan then means to reestablish the balance. The institutions have to reconsider their determination to think critically, research integrity, and social responsibility. Faculty empowerment should be scholarly instead of being service providers

only (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Safdar et al., 2020). Students are advised to regard themselves as the active members of knowledge production instead of the passive consumers (Alvesson, 2022). It is not re-orientation that is going to deny modernization or global competition but it combines educational values and realities in the economy.

Conclusion

Overall the literature review based on 132 articles sort out that the sudden marketization of higher education has brought a great change in the culture, governance, and pedagogical relationships in institutions of higher learning. Throughout the reviewed articles, the tendency seems to be that influenced by neoliberal reforms, falling national funding, and globalization the institutions are encouraged to embrace business-oriented approaches that see the student as a customer and education as a commodity to be sold. It has been found that institutional communication and strategy are implementing market logic, therefore universities are increasing their emphasis on branding, promotion discourse, and service quality models to attract and retain fee-paying students (Rizwan et al., 2025; Raza et al., 2024; Khuwaja et al., 2017). As Scholars warns that market orientation can increase the responsiveness and institutional competitiveness, but it results in severe tensions in the academic culture. Research points to the danger of grade inflation, academic rigor, as well as to the change of pedagogical relations into traders when student satisfaction turns into a performance metric (Safdar et al., 2020; Quadrelli and Collins, 2025). Critical approaches also indicate that the student-as-customer metaphor undermines the intellectual mission of the universities by recasting the idea of knowledge as something that can be bought as opposed to knowledge being seen as a transformative experience of enquiry (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Alvesson, 2022). In this respect, there are growing expectations of faculty members to deliver service roles and not scholarly as well as institutional leadership moving towards corporate governance which focuses on reputation, revenue generation and market share. These results are consistent with the larger critiques of neoliberal higher education by other scholars like Henry Giroux and Sheila Slaughter whose work gives examples of how academic capitalism is transforming

universities into public knowledge institutions and into competitive enterprises. Overall, the literature indicates that marketization does not merely transform the administrative formations, rather it transforms identities, values, and expectations in higher education that casts serious questions on the viability of academic integrity and social role of universities.

In contextual and reflective terms, the higher education environment of Pakistani contexts depicts such dynamics in especially complicated ways. The definition of the coexistence of the public and the private universities, the growing dependence of tuition fees, and the desire to achieve the recognition in the global arena contributed to the increase in the intensity of the competition among the institutions and the acceleration of the process of embracing the market-oriented practices. According to literature, Author can propose that this transformation is not all negative but some factors like accountability, student services and efficiency could be consider relevant to educational institutions. However, the social, economic and cultural realities of Pakistan (Where there is strong relation between social mobility and higher education), this culture “student as a Customer” can be threatening for the university’s actual motive of producing responsible citizens. If universities focus on community satisfaction, increasing enrollment, and reputation indices, it will truly undermine the academic values, intellectual enhancement, critical inquiry and moral development of the students. Therefore, in Pakistani higher education system should pay attention to the intense conflict between economical sustainability and teaching philosophy. Higher education institutions can value competitive environments but their primary goal should be produce responsible and ethically aware citizen that could transform the overall society. The dilemma that is facing the higher education system of Pakistan refuse the playing field to is not refusing market forces. Therefore to maintain professional ethics and academic integrity, to make valuable employment, and to engage students as contributors to knowledge instead of degree holding man, they need to limit their marketization of universities. Through this, the higher education institutions in Pakistan will be able to reconcile the pressure in the world with the values

of academic culture in the country and keep their social mission in general.

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