

# Chapter 13

## Discourses of Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms: Research Findings



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**Abstract** The chapter focuses on current research trends in education reforms in higher education. The chapter analyses and evaluates the ascent of a neo-liberal and neo-conservative higher education policy, globalisation and practices of governance education, global university rankings, internationalization, quality assurance, entrepreneurial and competitive ways of competition for international students among universities, both locally and globally. The chapter demonstrates that neo-liberal dimensions of globalisation and market-driven economic imperatives have impacted on the nature and directions of higher education reforms. The chapter argues that the politics of higher education reforms surrounding accountability standards, performance, excellence and quality have largely come from Northern, often World Bank ideologies. Accountability, efficiency, academic capitalism, and the market-oriented and entrepreneurial university model represent a neo-liberal ideology, which focuses primarily on the market-driven imperatives of global competitiveness.

**Keywords** Academic standards · Accountability · Governance · Globalisation · Global university rankings · Higher education · Higher education policy · Ideology · Internationalization · Neoliberal ideology · Neo-liberal higher education policy · Performance · Social stratification · Quality

### Discourses of Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms: Introduction

At the level of critical discourse analysis, we need to consider dominant ideologies defining the nature and the extent of political and economic power, domination, control, the existing social stratification, and the unequal distribution of socially and economically valued commodities, which include education, both locally and

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J. Zajda, W. J. Jacob (eds.), *Discourses of Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms*, Globalisation, Comparative Education and Policy Research 27,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83136-3\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83136-3_13)

197

globally (Zajda & Majhanovich, 2021). They all have profound influences on the directions of education and policy reforms. Many scholars have argued that education systems and education reforms are creating, reproducing and consolidating social and economic inequality (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Zajda, 2015, 2021; Milanovic, 2016). Furthermore, current globalisation, policy and higher education reforms suggest the emergence of new economic and political dimensions of cultural imperialism. Such hegemonic shifts in ideology and policy are likely to have significant economic and cultural implications for national education systems, reforms and policy implementations.

It has been argued that the politics of higher education reforms surrounding standards, excellence and quality have “largely come from Northern, often World Bank, ideologies” (Watson, 2000, p. 140; Zajda, 2021). At the same time, Moses and Nanna (2007) argued that high-stakes testing reforms, driven by political and cultural ideology and concerns for efficiency and economic productivity, serve to impede the development of *real* equality of educational opportunity, particularly for the least advantaged students (Moses and Nanna (2007, p. 56). Although centralization and decentralization reforms in education reflect a neo-liberal ideology at work, they do not necessarily capture a complexity of forces fuelling educational and policy change. Academic standards, performance and quality of schooling continue to dominate the reform agenda globally; especially the performance leagues tables (Zajda & Rust, 2021).

The divided and highly elitist and stratified higher education sector, by means of their hegemonic structures, legitimises social inequality (Zajda, 2021). In general, students from lower SES are unlikely to be successful in entering universities, let alone prestigious universities. Hence, equity-driven policy reforms in higher education are unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, national economic priorities, aligned with a knowledge economy, human capital and global competitiveness, compel increasingly entrepreneurial universities to reward high-level over low-level knowledge, skills and training (Zajda, 2012). The latest higher education reforms focus more on economic competitiveness, academic elitism, quality and standards, rather than on addressing access and equity, in order to solve serious educational inequalities in the higher education sector (Zajda, 2020; Zajda & Rust, 2021).

### ***Globalisation and Competitive Market***

Globalisation and competitive market forces have generated a massive growth in the knowledge industries that are having profound effects on society and higher educational institutions. One of the effects of globalisation is that the education sector is compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of efficiency, performance and profit-driven managerialism. As such, new entrepreneurial educational institutions in the global culture succumb to the economic gains offered by the neoliberal ideology and governance defined fundamentally by economic factors. Both governments and educational institutions, in their quest for global competitiveness, excellence,

quality and accountability in education, increasingly turn to international and comparative education data analysis. All of them agree that the major goal of education is to enhance the individual's social and economic prospects, which can only be achieved by providing quality education for *all*. Clearly, these new phenomena of globalisation have in different ways affected the current developments in education and policy around the world. First, globalisation of policy, trade and finance has some profound implications for education and reform implementation. On the one hand, the periodic economic crises (e.g. the 1980s, the financial crisis of 2007–2008, also known as the Global Financial Crisis or GEC in 2008), coupled with the prioritised policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (e.g. SAPs), have seriously affected some developing nations and transitional economies in delivering quality education for all.

Second, the policies of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UNESCO, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) operate as powerful forces, which, as supranational organisations, shape and influence education and policy. The impact of globalisation on higher education policy and reforms is a strategically significant issue for us all.

When discussing the politics of education reforms, and role of the state, and dominant ideologies defining policy priorities, we need to go beyond the technicist and business-oriented model of education, which focuses on accountability, efficiency and performance indicators. Why? Because, apart from the dominant human capital and rate of return, driving efficiency, profit and performance indicators, there are other forces at work as well. From the macro-social perspective, the world of business, while real and dominant, is only one dimension of the complex social, cultural and economic world system. At the macro-societal level we need to consider the teleological goal of education reforms. Are we reforming education systems to improve the quality of learning and teaching, academic achievement and excellence, and do we hope to change our societies, creating the 'good society'? The changing nature of higher education and the changing mission of the university was discussed by Sabour (2021). He argues that both 'institutionally and intellectually, the contemporary university has its roots in the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment' (Sabour, 2021). However, he also points out, the university's role shifted to being a producer of new knowledge and skills, which were necessary for social progress, social rights and well being:

...as far as its practice of interpreting and applying culture and knowledge is concerned, this is largely swallowed up in the flow of the project of modernity. In other words, the production and elaboration of knowledge was seen as a means of achieving social progress and the well being of society, and the university became the epicentre and dominant field for the production and channelling of this knowledge... The function of the university shifted away from its principle mission of acquiring knowledge and searching for the 'Truth' to a new position where it sought to defend political convictions and social rights (Sabour, 2021, p. 289).

## Neo-Liberalism in Higher Education Policy Reforms

Globally, neo-liberalism in higher education policy reforms has been characteristic of capitalist societies. The politics of higher education reforms both locally and globally, reflect this new emerging paradigm of accountability, globalisation and academic capitalism, performance indicators and standards-driven policy change. Furthermore, national economic priorities, aligned with a knowledge economy, human capital and global competitiveness, compel increasingly entrepreneurial universities to reward high-level over low-level knowledge, skills and training. One of the effects of globalisation is that the higher education sector, having modelled its goals and strategies on the market-oriented and *entrepreneurial* business model, is compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of the efficiency, accountability and profit-driven *managerialism*. As Jacob (2021) explains, higher education political environment is defined and shaped by four core dimensions: structure, culture, strategy and technology. I would add here ideology as well. It is this dominant ideology, which is responsible for current policy trends in accountability, academic standards, competitiveness-driven reforms, and global university rankings.

Let us examine some of the emerging current research on higher education and policy reforms. In ‘Conceptualizing Policy for International Educational Development’ John C. Weidman ([this volume](#)), discusses conceptual frameworks for understanding social and educational changes that influence international educational development policy. The author, drawing from several main trends, as reflected in international educational policy declarations generated by United Nations agencies (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs) and initiatives of the World Bank, discusses emerging trends. In order to illustrate the underlying complexity of international educational development initiatives, Weidman uses positivist conceptual underpinnings, with historical roots in the field of comparative and international education. Weidman ([this volume](#)) concludes that international educational development will continue to be a complicated area for study, policy development, and practice. Consequently, it is increasingly important to prepare emerging scholars and development practitioners in ways that emphasize building conceptual and analytical capacities necessary for addressing the complexity of educational problems.

In ‘Higher education curriculum reforms in Vietnam in the era of globalization’, Ninh Nguyen and John Chi-Kin Lee discuss the impact of globalization on curriculum reforms in Vietnam, as well as its nexus with higher education policy making. The authors focus on major curriculum changes over the last four decades, against the globalization backdrop, in terms of national-level policy making and institutional-level curriculum development and implementation. Higher education policy changes are discussed through document analysis of higher education curriculum policies, promulgated between 1980 and 2020, university curricula and their policy reports on curriculum design and implementation. The authors note that the Vietnamese higher education reforms borrowed from the East, especially the USSR higher education policies, and from the West, notably France, Germany, and the USA (see also

Phillips, 2021). These policy borrowing had revealed local adaptations to educational and political ideologies, as well as social and economic changes.

In 'The University and Globalisation as a New Mediaevalism', Joshua Rust examines a key role of universities in facilitating the rebalancing of power relations both locally and globally. At the centre of this discourse is the perennial importance of the university's mission today (see Sabour, 2021). Bull (1977), explained that new medievalism was an order of 'overlapping authority and multiple loyalty' that would emerge as a consequence of globalization as well as internationalization of power (Bull, 1977).

Negotiating minority rights in expansion and quality assurance in public university in Kenya is increasingly relevant in culturally diverse environments. As a result, in 'Globalization, the State, and Cultural Identity: Negotiating Minority Rights in Expansion and Quality Assurance in Public University in Kenya' Edith Mukudi Omwami argues that Kenya presents an interesting case study of a realization of minority rights claim to public infrastructure and a subsequent contradictory outcome arising from governmental implementation of globally aligned policy framing in higher education reform. The current analysis explores the discourse in articulation for minority rights in expansion of higher education infrastructure in Kenya as drawn from legislative debate around education and the subsequent enactment of reforms and interventions that seem to roll back gains in expansion of rights to public resource.

How different universities respond to Covid-19 pandemic and how students were affected is examined by Aki Yamada, who focuses on internationalization in Japanese higher education and comparing the reality post-Covid-19. She argues that the reality post-Covid-19, demonstrates that there are many challenges education systems need to address. From the data collected from Japanese students enrolled in university or graduate school, there is evidence that despite Covid-19, which made it extremely challenging for international studies, students are even more interested in international issues than pre-Covid-19:

Having more knowledge and information about current events happening worldwide, students observed and started to think more about international and global issues. So, while there is still student demand for international engagement, universities, programs, and educators must adapt how they develop global skill sets. Prior to Covid-19, global competencies were a major pillar of Japanese education reform, and they will likely continue to be after the pandemic is over. With restrictions from Covid-19 in place, it is unclear how soon international education will recover. Even if it does, it still raises an important question of whether educators can truly teach global competencies without in-person interactions (Yamada, [this volume](#)).

There is a growing demand for academic standards, education quality and global competencies (Zajda, 2021). Yamada argues that while there is still student demand for international engagement, universities, programs, and educators need to adapt their policies and curricula in order to develop global skill sets. If, prior to Covid-19, global competencies were a major pillar of Japanese education reform, they are likely continue to be equally significant in the future.

The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically impacted the instruction and research in higher education globally as most higher education institutes (HEIs) are forced to shift to distance teaching, learning and research. This is further examined by Xi Wang, in 'Global higher education technology trends and opportunities in a Post-COVID-19 Context'. The author discusses the common practices and challenges of higher education technology that has emerged during Covid-19 around the globe, with a focus on three geographic regions: North America, Asia, and Africa. Within each region, that provides insights into the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on higher education systems and how education technologies are applied to facilitate learning and research. An examination of how unequal access to digital infrastructures and high-quality teaching, learning, and research resources may also contribute to the long-lasting educational inequality experienced by marginalized groups is also discussed. Future opportunities and suggestions based on national and sub-national contexts are provided in the discussion and conclusion section.

The spread of neoliberal reforms in higher education, with a primary focus on an empirically specific location in Zambia, a Sub-Saharan African economy, is examined by Chipindi and Daka ([this volume](#)). They argue that neo-liberal policy reforms in the higher education sector have resulted in significant levels of regulation or control over the actors within higher education. Neo-liberal reforms include reduction in public spending for social services, which include reducing government support to education and healthcare. This is also accompanied by a trend toward greater participation by private actors in public life, and in higher education provision and finance. There has been an institutionalisation of entrepreneurial and managerial modes of organising higher educational institutions, by promoting a business-like model of relations between the institutions and industry, commerce, and government. It has resulted in the performance appraisal system, as one of the audit technologies introduced in the higher education sector. The emergence of accountability, transparency, and an audit culture are dimensions of neo-liberal policy reforms in higher education globally.

Major paradigm shifts of neoliberal higher education reforms in East Asia and an emerging Self-Reorientation Model of higher education reform in this region is discussed by Jing Liu. In 'Neoliberal Trends of Higher Education Reforms in China, Japan, and Korea: Catch-up and Self-reorientation', the author offers a comparative analysis of education reforms in East Asia. It is argued that higher education in East Asia has made 'unprecedented progress over the past decades' (Liu, [this volume](#)). By following neoliberal model and catch-up mentality of higher education reforms, China, Japan, and Korea, as the major countries in East Asia, have successfully expanded their higher education scale to enter into the stage of universalization of higher education:

Through marketization, higher education in these countries absorbed diverse resources to build more higher education institutions to accommodate an emerging demand for highly educated and trained human resources to sustain their rapid economic growth as well as a rise of need for higher learning to satisfy individual well-being (Liu, [this volume](#)).

Liu ([this volume](#)) also discusses market-driven massification higher education policies, competition-oriented internationalization of higher education, the World-Class University Movement, and their overall impacts on higher education institutions and societies in these three countries. This likely to result in an emerging unequal, imbalanced and stratified higher education based on the neoliberal reforms.

Some authors explore the rise of the entrepreneurial university culture, with its market-driven neoliberal accountability that focuses on business model of organizational efficiency, accountability, performance and transparency. Melanie Lawrence and Goli Rezai-Rashti ([this volume](#)) focus on performance-based funding and accountability in higher education in Ontario, Canada. Their critical analysis of higher education policy documents of quality assurance and accountability, demonstrate a shift from professional accountability to that of neoliberal accountability in higher education. They conclude that that these recent policies are fundamentally transforming Ontario's higher education, at the expense of a more egalitarian system that promoted social equity and critical citizenship.

What is the overall impact of neoliberal reforms in higher education on students, in particular on ethnic minority students and their access to higher education? The marginalized groups in many countries, especially ethnic minority and indigenous peoples struggle for equal access to higher education. Weiyan Xiong ([this volume](#)) examines the outcomes of neoliberalism in higher education and their impact on ethnic minority, in terms of access to quality education in three countries, China, Canada, and the United States. It is suggested that ethnic minority and indigenous institutional leaders need to balance their missions through carefully evaluating and applying the opportunities brought by the neoliberal trends in higher education, such as the national preferential policies.

Hou and Cheng ([this volume](#)), in their documentary analysis dealing with higher education reform in Taiwan from the year of 2000 to the present, the authors examine the relationships between globalization and localization, together with the higher education reforms, covering their missions and values, academic ranking and global impact, market-driven forces and social responsibilities, and excellence and accountability. The authors suggest the needs of rethinking the development of higher education in Taiwan.

## Discussion

Higher education reforms globally, as discussed earlier, represent policy responses to globalized market ideology, which focuses on increasing global competitiveness, accountability, efficiency, quality- and standards-driven policy reforms, and higher education stratification (Rust & Kim, 2012, Bagley & Portnoi, 2015; Zajda, 2021). They reflect aspects of a dominant ideology of neo-liberalism and neoconservatism. Neo-liberal policies are largely based on dominant market-oriented ideologies, rather than democratic policy reforms. Global competitiveness was and continues to be a significant goal on the higher education policy agenda (Carnoy et al., 2013;

Turner & Yolcu, 2014). Accountability, efficiency, academic capitalism, performance indicators, and the market-oriented and entrepreneurial university model represent a neo-liberal ideology, which focuses primarily on the market-driven imperatives of economic globalisation.

Using elements of discourse analysis and critical theory, the chapter critiques current imperatives of globalisation, and educational policy reforms, designed to achieve global competitiveness, quality, and diversity. Globalisation, policy and the politics of education reforms suggest new politico-economic dimensions of cultural imperialism. Such hegemonic shifts in ideology and policy are likely to have significant economic and cultural implications for education reforms and policy implementations. It is argued that forces of globalisation have contributed to the on-going globalisation of schooling and higher education curricula, together with the accompanying global standards of excellence, globalisation of academic assessment (OECD, PISA), global academic achievement syndrome (OECD, World Bank), and global academic elitism and league tables: the positioning of distinction, privilege, excellence and exclusivity.

### *Evaluation of the Teaching and Research Performance*

Summative evaluation of the teaching and research performance in universities involves annual faculty career and performance plans, annual research plans for individual academics and obligatory evaluation of teaching. At some universities, evaluation of teaching is compulsory for all teaching staff, and is administered in the online mode. Students rate their lectures online. An annual career and performance plan for an academic covers teaching workload, short-term and long-term career goals, and agreed performance objectives for teaching, research and other activities (such as university leadership, profession and service), as well as strategic links to school, faculty and university targets, and professional and career development, which includes development to be undertaken to achieve agreed performance outcomes. All these are typical features of a neo-liberal ideology and its focus on accountability, efficiency and ongoing performance surveillance of learning, teaching and research.

All these new facets of evaluating teaching and research represent a very high degree of surveillance, power (Foucault, 1980) and control over academics' professional lives. It becomes a global and ubiquitous managerial version of "panopticon", or the all-seeing environment. Certain offices, without walls, all in glass, are modern examples of surveillance and panopticon. Panopticon, as a concept, was an institutional building designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham (c. 1798). In Foucault's development of this notion, the individual is under constant surveillance in the prison/organization. This power/knowledge mechanism over time becomes *internalized* by the subject, resulting in a self-surveillance and self-analysis in terms of the *normalizing* pressure of the system. This power/knowledge mechanism "compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes. In



short it normalises” (Foucault, 1979, p. 183). Its contemporary manifestation is present in such managerial systems as ongoing annual appraisals, performance reviews, the constantly reworked CV and E portfolios--a ubiquitous feature of today’s higher education environment. It could also be seen as redolent of the historically recent phenomena of “samo kritika” (self-criticism) in the former Soviet Union.

In deconstructing modes of evaluation of the performance of universities, we may also refer to “simulacrum”, to critique the reification of systemic accountability, quality and standards. The simulacra that Jean Baudrillard (1994) refers to are the significations and symbolism of culture and media that construct perceived reality. According to him, our perception of the world/reality is constructed out of models or simulacra, which have no referent or ground in any “reality” except their own. One could argue, in terms of reification, that the models employed for measuring the overall quality of the Australian higher education system are taking on a life of their own, and parading as truth in their own right. It is essential, argues Robertson (2012), to remember that ranking universities is based on a selection of criteria of preferred “fragments” of knowledge:

That we remind ourselves of just what a ranking is a fragment of knowledge about what university knowledge and experiences mean, rather than some essential understanding, or distilled essence of the whole. (Robertson, 2012, p. 244)

We could conclude that the on-going and ubiquitous evaluation of the teaching and research performance in universities, by means of annual faculty career and performance plans; annual research plans for individual academics and obligatory evaluation of teaching, represent the main tenants of neo-liberal ideology of performativity, and performance-based funding in higher education globally.

## Conclusion

As above demonstrates, that higher education transformation and policy responses to globalised market ideology, focus on increasing global competitiveness, accountability, efficiency, quality and standards-driven policy reforms, and higher education stratification. They reflect aspects of a dominant ideology of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. Neo-liberal policies are largely based on dominant market-oriented ideologies, rather than democratic policy reforms. The entrepreneurial university model, with its focus on accountability, efficiency, academic capitalism, performance, represent cost-effective strategies. The commodification of higher education is the resultant an outcome of market-driven and neo-liberal economic imperatives.

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