

# Chapter 1

## Current Research Trends in Globalisation and Neo-Liberalism in Higher Education



Joseph Zajda and Val Rust

**Abstract** The chapter analyses and evaluates the ascent of a neo-liberal and neo-conservative higher education policy, global university rankings, internationalization, quality assurance, entrepreneurial and competition for international students among universities, both locally and globally. Higher education policy reforms 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 commodification of higher education, with its focus on vocationalism and labour market prospects for highly skilled and competent graduates, is a vivid outcome of market-driven economic imperatives of neo-liberal ideology. The chapter analyses the shifts in methodological approaches to globalisation, and neo-liberalism, and their impact on education policy. The chapter critiques globalisation, policy and education reform and suggests the emergence of new economic and political dimensions of neo-liberalism as 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.

**Keywords** Academic achievement · Authentic democracy · Business-oriented model of education · Competitive market forces · Critical discourse analysis · Cultural imperialism · Discourses of globalisation · Economic inequality · Education reforms · Global citizenship · Global university ranking · Globalisation · Global university rankings, governance · Higher education policy · Human capital · Human rights education · Ideology · Intercultural understanding · Internationalization · Macro-social perspective · Marketisation · Neo-conservatism · Neo-liberal higher education policy · Neo-liberal ideology · Paradigms ·

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Performance indicators · Progressive pedagogy · Quality education for all · Social inequality · Social stratification · Social justice · Social stratification · Transformative pedagogy

## **Current Research Trends in Globalisation and Neo-Liberalism in Higher Education: Introduction**

Globally, neo-liberalism in higher education policy reforms has been characteristic of capitalist societies (Turner and Yolcu 2014). The politics of neo-liberal 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 (Carnoy 1999). The divided and highly elitist and stratified higher education sector, mirroring social stratification, by means of their hegemonic structures, legitimises social inequality. 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. 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. Recent changes in the world economy have resulted in at least *four* responses of the higher education sector to market forces and increased competitiveness:

1. Competitiveness-driven reforms (reforms due to shifting demands for skills, commodities and markets)
2. Finance-driven reforms (reforms in public/private sectors, budgets, company income, cuts in education spending)
3. Market force-driven reforms for dominance globally
4. Equity-driven reforms (reforms to improve the quality of education and its role as source of upward social mobility) to increase equality of *economic opportunity*.

## **Continuing Trend Toward Internationalization of Higher Education**

One of the outcomes of finance-driven reforms, competitiveness-driven, and market-driven reforms for dominance globally was the expansion of the internationalization of higher education. There is a long tradition of internationalization in

higher education, featuring cooperation and harmony between countries. This feature of internationalization addresses an increase in university partnerships, flow of ideas, and exchanges of students and scholars. Marinoni and deWit (2019), argue that the first time in the history of the International Association of Universities (IAU) Global Surveys, ‘enhanced international cooperation and capacity building’ has been identified as the most important expected benefit of internationalization at global level, in all regions except North America, especially international student recruitment:

The stronger emphasis on international collaboration might be a reaction to current nationalist political trends and to the past when competition (international student recruitment, rankings, publications) was the primary driver of internationalization initiatives. Capacity building might relate to lack of staff commitment to internationalization and lack of staff expertise, referenced as a key obstacle to successful internationalization in other surveys like the 2018 EAIE Barometer on internationalization in Europe (Marinoni and deWit 2019).

The internationalization of higher education has been monitored by the International Association of Universities since 2003. In 2018, they conducted its Global Survey, the fifth in a series. It is also the first one that reflects the changing political climate in many parts of the world. The survey also demonstrated an ‘enhanced international cooperation and capacity building’. This was identified as the most important expected benefit of internationalization at global level, in all regions except North America. Marinoni and deWit (2019) have noted a growing differentiation and divide in the level of commitment to internationalization among HEIs, and that international opportunities are accessible only to students with financial means:

Inherent in this growing divide is of the perception that internationalization is limited by resources. The main institutional risk identified by respondents is in concern that, “International opportunities are accessible only to students with financial means”. This might reflect the concern that many people are left out of globalization and that institutions are not sufficiently inclusive in their internationalization strategy (Marinoni and deWit 2019).

The expansion of the internationalization of higher education was discussed by Altbach and Knight (2007), which they summarised as:

The international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volume, scope, and complexity during the past two decades. These activities range from traditional study-abroad programs, allowing students to learn about other cultures, to providing access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand. Other activities stress upgrading the international perspectives and skills of students, enhancing foreign language programs, and providing crosscultural understanding (Altbach and Knight 2007, p. 292).

Examining the policy rhetoric of the internationalization of higher education, one notices that universities were driven to maximize their profits in this sphere. Altbach and Knight (2007) confirmed in their analysis of internationalization that ‘profits earning money’, was one of the key motives for all internationalization projects in the for-profit sector and for some traditional nonprofit universities with

financial problems. This reflects both economic and political dimensions of neo-liberalism in higher education policy:

For-profit higher education providers—such as Laureate (formerly Sylvan Learning Systems) and the Apollo Group (the parent company of the University of Phoenix, now the largest private university in the United States)—entered the international market by establishing new institutions, purchasing existing institutions, and partnering with firms or educational institutions in other countries. Many countries also host new private universities with overseas links, some in the for-profit sector. Many universities use American, British, German, or other foreign curricula; many teach in English, and some are accredited in other countries. Traditional nonprofit universities also entered the international market (Altbach and Knight 2007, p. 292).

Furthermore, Altbach and de Wit (2018) also notice a policy change in the global landscape for higher education internationalization:

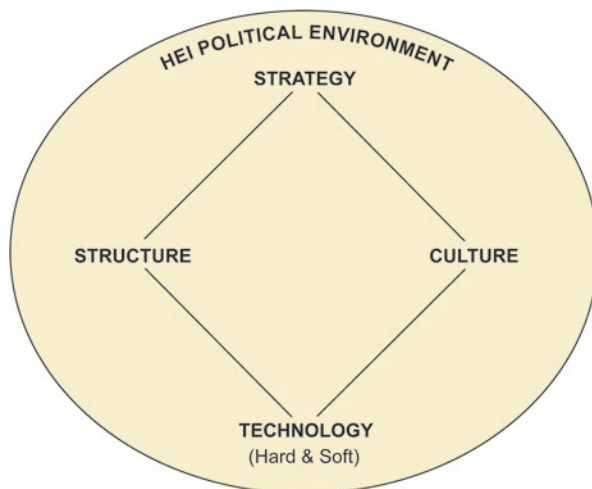
The global landscape for higher education internationalisation is changing dramatically. What one might call ‘the era of higher education internationalisation’ over the past 25 years (1990–2015) that has characterised university thinking and action might either be finished or, at least, be on life support. The unlimited growth of internationalisation of all kinds—including massive global student mobility, the expansion of branch campuses, franchised and joint degrees, the use of English as a language for teaching and research worldwide and many other elements—appears to have come to a rather abrupt end, especially in Europe and North America (Altbach and de Wit 2018).

We have identified the above conventional features as internationalization, because they have long stressed cooperation, harmony, and interdependence, but more and more we are finding internationalization in higher education focuses more on competition, a ‘profit-making machine’, and commodification in higher education, rather than being seen as a broad public good. Even internationalization efforts by nation states are often undertaken with the aim of gaining a competitive edge in the global arena. In other words, internationalization is often overwhelmed by economic global imperatives (Rust and Kim 2015).

### ***Higher Education Political Environment and Governance in Education***

As Jacob (2015) explains in his concept map below (Fig. 1.1), 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 accountability, academic standards, competitiveness-driven reforms, and global university rankings.

Recent education quality and standards-based reforms in higher education are influenced by forces of globalisation, and, in particular, by the World Bank, OECD and PISA indicators. Education reforms, targeting academic achievement, skills and standards have resulted in a significant expansion of the monitoring of educational outcomes both locally and globally. Current trends in governance in education



**Fig. 1.1** HEI political environment. (Source: Jacob 2015)

indicate that education and policy reforms are accountability, performance and output driven.

The prominence given to the nexus between globalisation and practices of governance education, reflect changing dynamics in the governance in education, and education policy reforms. The impact of globalisation on education policy and reforms around the world has become a strategically significant issue, for it expresses one of the most ubiquitous, yet poorly understood phenomena of modernity, and associated politico-economic and cultural transformations. Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that forces of globalisation have contributed to a new dimension of socio-economic stratification, which offers immense gains to the very few of the economic elite in developed nations and in the emerging economies, especially in the BRICS countries (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China, and South Africa). At the same time, this emerging socio-economic stratification creates a growing divide between the rich and the poor globally, thus planting seeds of discontent and conflict for the future.

### ***Global University Rankings***

One of the outcomes of higher education policy reforms both locally and globally, and demands for accountability and transparency, is world university rankings and *university league tables*. The USA and several European countries have used national HEI rankings or league tables for a number of years. However, the first *Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)* was published by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education in 2003. It was a significant

higher education policy and research move, because higher education rankings became a global endeavor at this point. Current major and global university ranking models include the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU), the *Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings* (powered by Thompson Reuters), *QS World University Rankings*, and the *European Commission's U-Multirank*. The global ranking of universities by the *QS World University Rankings*, the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, and Shanghai Jiao Tong University's *Academic Ranking of World Universities* dominate higher education drive for excellence and quality in education.

Institutional rankings indicate the governance of a neo-liberal ideology of accountability, competition, and cost-efficiency. Accountability instruments increasingly control the lives and careers of academics. They assess and govern the quality and standards of higher education, and include "accreditation, cyclical reviews, and external evaluation by peers, inspection, audits, benchmarking, and research assessments" (Robertson 2012, p. 241). Furthermore, it becomes increasingly evident that university rankings and university league tables are "taking on a life of their own, well beyond the purposes imagined by their originators" (Robertson 2012, p. 244), which is clearly a "reification" of the phenomenon.

Reification occurs when an abstract concept describing a social condition, in this case economic priorities for globalizing higher education reforms, becomes the reality, and the truth. According to Berger and Luckmann, "reification" occurs when specifically, human creations are misconceived as "facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 89). Unlike Marx, who used the concept of reification in his *Das Capital* (1867/1996) to demonstrate that it was an inherent and necessary characteristic of economic value; I use "reification" in a broader sense, covering all policy and education reforms which involve power, domination and control. Reification, in this sense, also connects with Baudrillard's (1994) idea of signification, where perceived key concepts and policy goals have no referent in any "reality" except their own.

Higher education reforms represent policy responses to a globalized market ideology, which focuses on increasing global competitiveness, accountability, efficiency, quality, 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 commodification of higher education, with its focus on value-added education and labour market prospects for highly skilled and competent graduates, is a vivid outcome of market-driven economic imperatives of neo-liberal ideology. The latest higher education reforms focus more on economic competitiveness, academic elitism, and quality and standards, rather than on addressing access and equity, in order to solve serious educational inequalities in the higher education sector.

## Evaluating Teaching and Research Performance in the Higher Education Sector

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 1972, 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 neo-liberal higher education environment.

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 in for measuring the overall quality of the higher education system are taking on a life of their own and parading as truth in their own right. It is essential, argues Robertson, 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).



## Evaluation

In higher education policy rhetoric, both locally and globally, there is a tendency to argue, using a powerful tool of logic, that there is a need to increase global competitiveness, and to improve excellence and quality in education, training and skills. The major problem with policy rhetoric is that its main thrust is on traditional values and commonsense. Who would argue against improving global competitiveness, and excellence and quality education, training and skills that contributes to better living conditions, and creating a world-class higher education system that benefits all, regardless of their background? 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; see also Zajda 2005; Zajda and Geo-JaJa 2005; Zajda 2015).

The divided and highly elitist and stratified higher education sector, by means of their hegemonic structures, legitimises social inequality. 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. The latest higher education reforms focus more on economic competitiveness, academic elitism, quality, and academic standards, rather than on addressing access and equity, in order to solve serious educational inequalities in the higher education sector.

## Conclusion

Higher education reforms globally, defined by a neo-liberal ideology, represent policy responses to globalized market ideology, which focuses on increasing global competitiveness, accountability, efficiency, quality, and standards-driven policy reforms. 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. The above analysis also demonstrates that neo-liberal dimensions of globalisation and market-driven economic imperatives have impacted on higher education reforms in four ways: competitiveness-driven reforms, finance-driven reforms, equity-driven reforms and quality-driven reforms. Global competitiveness was and continues to be a significant goal on the higher education policy agenda. Accountability, efficiency, academic capitalism, the quality of education, and the market-oriented and “entrepreneurial” university model represent a neo-liberal ideology, which focuses primarily on the market-driven imperatives of cultural, economic and political globalisation. It represents the emergence of new economic and political dimensions of neo-liberalism as



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. Furthermore, the divided and highly elitist and stratified higher education sector, by means of their hegemonic structures, legitimises social inequality.

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