

# Constructing the 'Ideal' Graduate Student: A Critical Examination of Language and Rhetoric in “Graduate Education Policy 2023”

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## Abstract

*This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze how the figure of the 'ideal' graduate student is discursively constructed in the Pakistan Higher Education Commission Graduate Education Policy 2023. Analyzing policy features, meaning, and discursive constitution, we reveal the ideological presuppositions that have framed graduate education in Pakistan. The study's findings are the conflict between international academic norms and the local cultural environments and between cultivating influential independent scholars and preserving the institutional order. When discussing the policy, one cannot but notice the tension between neo-liberal and traditional academics' values and the focus on bringing the national development agenda into focus. Our findings suggest that the constructed 'ideal' graduate student is expected to embody a challenging combination of traits: academic standards, creativity, high standards of integrity, and relevance to the nation's goals. It expands the literature on how educational policies construct students' identities and academic environments to aid policymakers, educators, and learners in the context of Pakistan and other countries experiencing shifting graduate attributes and pedagogical demands.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Higher Education Policy, Graduate Education, Student Identity, Academic Culture, Neoliberalism.

## Introduction

Over the past few decades, the higher education system in Pakistan has witnessed many changes, absorbing the synergistic stake that lies in the country's developmental objectives, external influences, and internal constraints (Anwar et al., 2022; Pirzada et al., 2021; Zaka & Muhammad, 2021). This was possible after the formation of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2002, and the country has seen or experienced a very rapid expansion of universities, increased enrollment in graduate programs, and more concentration in research and development. However, this growth has come with some challenges, such as the issues of quality, faculty development, and relevancy of programs offered in academic institutions to society and the existing market needs.

Consequently, graduate education in Pakistan offers a variety of institutions, including public and private universities, degree-awarded institutes, and affiliated colleges. While some institutions have reasonably succeeded in research output and international linkages, many are in a dilemma because of a range of challenges, including discrepancies in infrastructural

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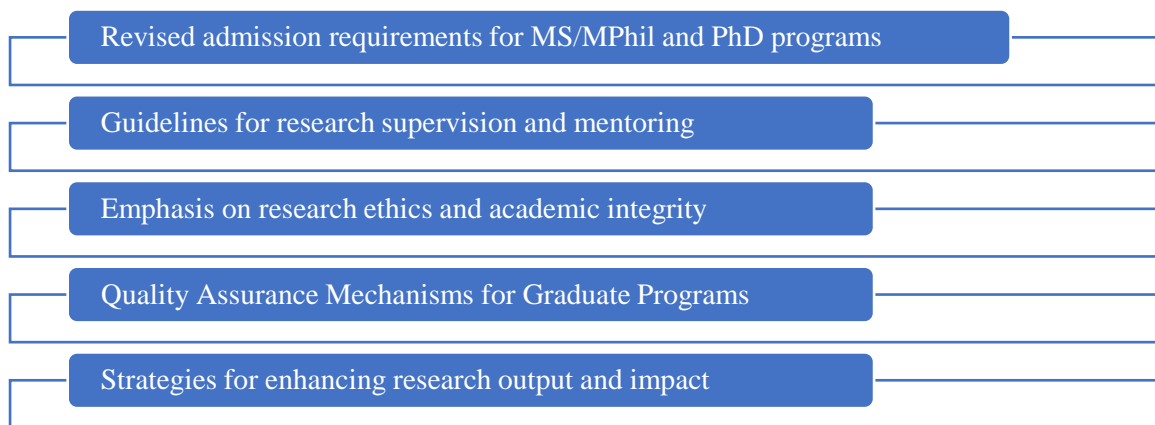
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facilities, a dearth of research funding, and brain drain (Hoodbhoy, 2009). In this context, policy intervention is a critical factor that helps to determine the strategies and quality of graduates' studies.

Higher Education Commission Graduate Education Policy 2023 has a significant role and importance for Pakistan in improving graduation programs' quality standards and relevance. This policy framework document presents several strategies for rationalizing admission policies, enhancing the quality of supervision for research activities, ensuring proper ethical practice among academics, and encouraging creativity in graduate education (Higher Education Commission, 2023). Key features of the policy include:

**Figure 1: Key features of the policy**



This policy also encompasses the aspect of comparison with the global standards in line with the domestic utility for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of Pakistani graduates who need to be educated and molded as per the international standards of graduates; at the same time, it will take care of the needs of Pakistan and prospects of the country as well.

Contrary to the opinion that an education policy is a technical instrument that gives direction to the process of teaching and learning, they are policy documents that prescribe and propagate certain ideologies, power relations, societal values, and cultural colleagues (Ball, 2015). Examining such policies is imperative for various reasons. First of all, it helps to reveal biases and presuppositions concerning education and its levels. Second, it makes it possible to understand how policies dismantle and rebuild students, faculties, and institutions and how they obtain their roles (Fairclough, 2013). Third, critical analysis can be used to differentiate between the goals and outcomes of policy and contribute to the clarification of the policy's implementation strategy.

As for graduate education in particular, identifying which of them can have great impacts on the formation of future researchers, academicians, or other professionals, such critical analysis becomes even more important. This may assist in elaborating on how policies might perpetuate or destabilize hegemonic relations within academia, constitute and deconstruct students' subjectivities, and impact the overall academic climate within the academy (Mullet, 2018).

Therefore, the aim of this specific study is to offer a critical discourse analysis of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission Graduate Education Policy 2023, keeping in view how this document establishes an ideal referent of the 'graduate student.' The research is guided by the following questions: Based on this background, the study asks the following questions:

1. How does the policy language construct and represent the 'ideal' graduate student?
2. What underlying ideologies and power relations are evident in this construction?

3. How does the policy negotiate tensions between global academic standards and local contexts in shaping graduate student identities?

## Theoretical Framework

### Critical Discourse Analysis in Education Policy Research

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may be regarded as a valuable theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of education policies (Waqar, et al., 2024). As a kind of critical analysis, the CDA operationalizes language as one of the social practices that both simultaneously constructs and is constructed by social relations (Fairclough, 2013). In the particular policy analysis, this approach assists in unveiling how certain policies build up certain 'reality,' justify certain practices, and place different subjects in educational systems (Taylor, 2004).

CDA is particularly well-suited for education policy research because it allows for a multidimensional analysis that considers: The linguistic features of policy texts (textual analysis), the processes of policy production and interpretation (discursive practice) and the broader social and cultural contexts in which policies are embedded (social practice). It helps the researchers to understand the structure of the ideology present in the policies, relations of power, and a way to move to a discussion of how policies could possibly reinforce or change existing social injustices (Wodak, 2014).

In this paper, we utilize Mullet's (2018) guidelines for CDA in educational research since it focuses on language in use, relations of power, and context within policy documents while scrutinizing the HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023.

### Conceptualizing the 'Ideal' Student in Higher Education Literature

The notion of the 'ideal' student in higher education has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention. Research has shown that conceptions of the ideal student are not universal or static but are socially constructed and influenced by various factors, including institutional cultures, disciplinary norms, and broader societal values (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003).

In the context of graduate education, the ideal student is often conceptualized as someone who embodies a complex set of attributes, including:

**Figure 2: Set of attributes**



But these notions are far from being politically correct; they demonstrate definite cultural, economic, or political perspectives. For example, neoliberal pressures in higher studies have

denounced human qualities like entrepreneurial spirit, competition, and characteristics related to the marketplace (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

However, Burke (2017) has pointed out how prevailing ideals of what constitutes an ideal student can exclude and recreate social differences. They call for a shift from a narrow and homogeneous definition of success which erases multiple forms of knowledge, existence and history that students bring into the academy.

Thus, this study advances the literature regarding student identity, academic expectations, and the goal and meanings of graduate education in a globalized age yet rooted institutionally.

## Methodology

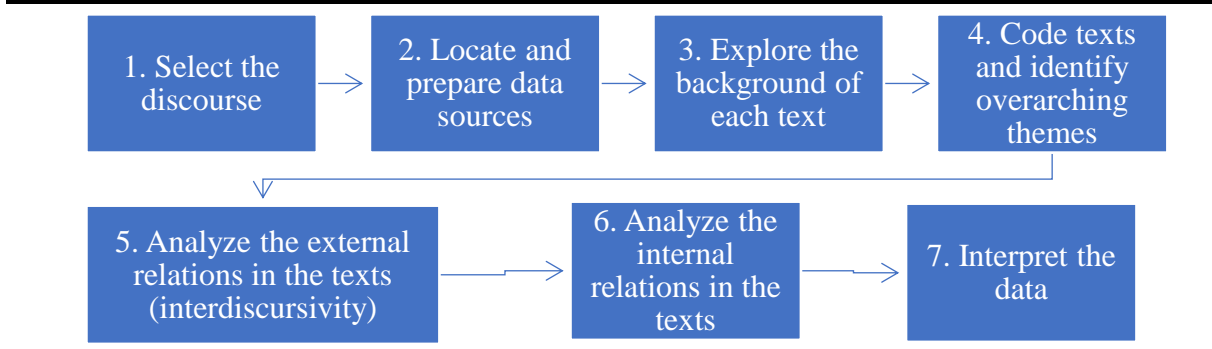
Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research aims to look into the factors that contribute to constructing the 'ideal' graduate student in the context of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission Graduate Education Policy 2023. The method's objective is to identify the clusters of ideas and values that are often unstated or at least understated in policy language.

This analysis focuses on the official HEC graduate education Policy 2023 with the aim of ascertaining the above-mentioned objectives. Due to the scope of the policy, we decided to narrow down our attention to particular segments that are of particular interest to graduate student's construction of subjectivity and work expectations. The selected sections include: introduction and purpose, minimum requirements for award of MS/MPhil/Equivalent degrees, minimum requirements for award of doctoral degree, governing the research supervision, practicing the academic research ethics, managing the grievances of graduate students and quality assurance.

These sections were chosen because they deal with key areas concerning students' qualities, research behavior and standards, ethical behavior, and academic performance. Thus, focusing on these issues, we intend to capture the most salient aspects of how the policy discursively constructs the 'ideal' graduate student.

To systematize the analysis, we use the framework for CDA in educational research suggested by Mullet (2018). With the help of this framework, it is possible to present policy documents for critical consideration and discussion focusing on language and power as well as social context interactions and relations. Mullet's framework comprises seven stages:

**Figure 3: Mullet's framework**



This specific framework is quite suitable for the consideration of the given policy in relation to our research objectives, as it is aimed at examining the linguistic features of policy and investigating its sociocultural consequences at the same time. It also provides a chance to look at works of other authors who write on CDA, for instance, like Fairclough (2013) & Van Dijk (2015), helping to enrich the provided research and its comprehensiveness.

**Initial Reading and Familiarization:** The first step used in this study is to conduct an initial thorough read of the selected policy sections to attain the major ideas regarding the content and organization of the parts under analysis.

**Development of Coding Scheme:** we developed a preliminary coding scheme based on our research questions and initial reading and familiarization. This includes codes related to student characteristics, academic expectations, power relations, and ideological markers (Muhammad & Brett, 2020).

**Textual Analysis:** We conduct a detailed analysis of linguistic features, including: Vocabulary choices and their connotations, grammatical structures (e.g., active vs. passive voice, modality), rhetorical devices and argumentative strategies and presuppositions and implications.

**Thematic Coding:** The ways of coding the text according to the scheme and the analysis of the gained data are implemented with the help of NVivo qualitative data analysis software (Muhammad, Safdar, et al., 2024). Consequently, the analysis of the discourse sample helps to reveal patterns and repetitions regarding the construction of the 'ideal' graduate student as:

**Interdiscursive Analysis:** This paper examines how an understanding of the policy's textual meanings relates to other discourses (for example, globalization of higher education and national development frameworks) and, in the process, builds up student subjectivity.

**Contextual Analysis:** In this policy analysis, we focus on the global and local conditions within and pertaining to Pakistan's higher education and examine how those contexts influence the policy's discourse and assumptions.

**Interpretive Synthesis:** Therefore, it organizes the findings to construct the synthesis that forms the comprehensiveness of the understanding of how the policy establishes the 'ideal' graduate student, major themes, paradoxes, and consequences.

Throughout the analysis, we employ several strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings. To ensure the credibility, validity, and dependability of the findings, the following strategies are used throughout the analysis: Researcher Triangulation, Peer Debriefing and Reflexivity (Safdar, et al., 2024).

Thus, this methodology provides a means by which it is possible to learn not only about the stated intentions of a new educational policy but also about presuppositions and probable impacts on graduate education in the nation.

## Findings and Analysis

According to the results of our critical discourse analysis, it is possible to state that the construction of the 'ideal' graduate student in the context of Pakistan is rather ambiguous and diverse. Based on the analysis of the data, this section of the paper is devoted to the identification of key topics that formed the basis of this construction, which reveals the specific features of the English language, as well as the discursive practices and ideologies that underpinned this construction.

### Linguistic Features and Discursive Strategies

#### Vocabulary Choices and Their Implications

It is stated that the policy document uses a rich vocabulary wherein expectations, as well as ideological orientations regarding graduate students, are observable. Words like 'excellence,' 'innovation,' and 'global standards' present themselves over and over; the overall tenor seems to be academic success and recognition in the international sphere. For example, the phrase 'international' is used repeatedly, and they suggest that the model graduate should aspire to meet global benchmarks.

It is also noteworthy that the policy uses such terms as 'indigenous knowledge' and 'national agendas'; the latter points to an effort to merge global visions with local experiences. This kind of linguistic dichotomy indicates how the study of Pakistani graduate education is situated between global and local standards.

The expectations articulated as 'rigorous,' and 'systematic' in relation to research incline toward building an image of the perfect student as highly organized and methodical. Such language choices, therefore, reproduce a certain mode of academic labour that does not necessarily take into consideration how individuals from different backgrounds engage in the production of knowledge.

### **Grammatical Structures and Agency**

The following text analysis shows that patterns of how agency is assigned to various actors in the graduate education system are discernible through the policy's grammatical structures. In the parts where communication of responsibilities and expectations is described, the terms of inclusion that the student is expected to satisfy are often stated in passive voice, especially when it comes to outlining the roles and expectations of the student. For instance, students 'are expected to' or it is 'required' that students are common. This grammatical decision is not innocent as it recreates students as subjects of institutional power rather than autonomous beings in the process of education.

On the other hand, when dealing with the roles of institutions, active voice is usually a common occurrence. Statements such as 'The university shall ensure' or 'provide' provide a distinct subjectivity to the regulating bodies and institutions. It contributes to maintaining a power relationship, according to which institutions present themselves as decision-makers and students as objects that only receive policies and expectations from institutions.

### **Rhetorical Devices and Persuasive Techniques**

The policy uses several argumentation strategies to justify its vision of graduate education and the type of student. One of them is the rule of three: the arrangement of concepts in triples—a persuasive device that presents ideas in triads. For instance, the policy categorically establishes that graduate students ought to be innovative, ethical, and globally competitive. This policy formulation is effective in making sure that important concepts are memorable.

The next noteworthy aspect of the rhetoric is the use of contrastive binarism to stress the qualities that have been deemed positive. The document often compares good and bad aspects where the good aspects define who the ideal student is while the bad aspects point out to the conduct that the students should not indulge in, hence the discursive construction of who the ideal student is through binaries. For instance, the document includes phrases such as "original research" versus "plagiarism," or "academic integrity" versus "misconduct."

The policy also uses a noteworthy amount of metaphorical language, particularly when speaking of research. This metaphorical framing creates the graduate student as an academic pioneer, reinforcing notions of innovation and originality.

### **Constructing the 'Ideal' Graduate Student**

#### **Academic Qualities and Competencies**

In meaning-making, the policy establishes the identity of the 'suitable' graduate student in terms of academic characteristics and skills. First of these is the mastery of disciplinary knowledge emphasized through requirements for rigorous coursework and comprehensive examinations. The language used implies that the kind of student that should be produced should not only have the contents of the knowledge taught imparted to him/her but also be trained in how to critically engage with and extend this knowledge.

The policy most often has to do with analytical and critical thinking skills where the policy circles the notion of "independent thought" and "critical analysis" coming out clearly in the policy. There is conformity with the global trends in higher education in terms of enhancing higher-order thinking skills. Nevertheless, the policy concerning these skills is that they should be measured in a standardized way, for example, using GRE-style admission tests, which invites critical questions regarding how these competencies are defined and, consequently, how they are tested.

Even some general student attributes such as academic writing and communication skills are represented as ideal ones in the same way. The policy's expectations of a number of research publications and presentations build a student who can communicate information to academic and extended communities.

### **Research Skills and Innovation**

Research prowess is crucial in the policy's process of constructing the graduate student subject. The document accords high priority to acquiring state of the art research skills and the capacity to generate 'innovative' research; this is in concord with the trend in graduate education across the globe to produce knowledge creators as opposed to knowledge consumers (Wergin, 2011). The nature of the language employed regarding research skills is notably aspirational, with frequent use of superlatives such as "highest quality" is used; this discourse sets the standard high for students and corresponds to the spirit of the policy as framed by standards of competitiveness and globalization.

Innovation is not only presented as a scholarly matter but also as the solution to the problems of the country's development. The policy says that graduate students should "contribute to solving socioeconomic problems," which points to the direct connection between the scholarship and the contribution to society's needs. It sets up the model learner not only as a scholar but also as a future maker of the nation.

### **Ethical Conduct and Integrity**

The policy places significant emphasis on ethical conduct and academic integrity as key characteristics of the graduate student profile. One of the numerous sections in the document is titled "Practicing Academic Research Ethics," which points to the importance of the issue in the context of the policy in question and its vision of graduate education.

The language used in ethics and integrity is especially described in strict and black-and-white terminologies. Phrases like plagiarism "under no circumstances shall...be acceptable" and "zero tolerance for academic misconduct" leave no room for ambiguity. Here, the preferred student subject is fashioned by linguistic practices that discipline not only compliance with the rules but with ethical values as well.

Noticeably, the policy puts ethical conduct in the category of a cooperative effort rather than a personal endeavor of a particular person, but rather, it emphasizes the role of institutions in fostering "a culture of academic integrity." The concept of the 'ideal student' is developed throughout the policy in relation to a culture of academic integrity, which itself is underpinned by the institution as being a key player in molding the student.

### **National and Global Orientations**

Such construction of the ideal graduate student, however, has a pronounced undertone rooted in the policy's tension between national and global orientations. On one hand, the document frequently discusses 'national development goals,' 'local needs,' and 'indigenous knowledge.' Thus, the ideal student seems to be someone deeply connected to and invested in Pakistan's specific context.

On the other hand, the policy makes regular referential uses of global standards, international recognition, and world-class research. This creates the ideal student who is very much grounded in local realities yet capable of competing in international academia. Such a formulation of the policy indicates that operating within the local-global interface is an expected process for graduate students in Pakistan.

The focus on publishing journal articles in internationally recognized journals also supports this international orientation. Still, this requirement poses questions on the process of valorization of different types of knowledge and the possibility of leaving out research relevant to local contexts that do not follow global publication trends.

## **Underlying Ideologies and Power Relations**

### **Neoliberal Influences on Graduate Education**

A clear element of neoliberal thinking can be ascertained from the very formulation of the policy with regard to the idea of graduate education in Pakistan. This is shown by the preponderance of marketization discourse, which includes competitiveness, efficiency, performance indicators and so on; the ideal graduate student, as constructed by the policy, is one who is not just an academic but a potential economic input that should give a boost to national innovation and economic development.

The pressure towards specific and measurable outputs like the number of published articles or citations fits well into the neoliberal policies of rationalization and performativity in education (Olssen & Peters, 2005). This framing may prove problematic to the extent that it commodifies research and scholarship into a set of numerical indicators and further alters the student's behavioral orientation toward achieving such scores.

Also, the emphasis on the term 'employability' seems to indicate that the policy expects graduate education to correspond to market requirements to a significant degree. As this can be helpful for students in regard to their career prospects, it also raises questions about the role of universities in producing critical thinkers versus skilled workers for the job market.

### **Balancing Academic Freedom and Institutional Control**

The policy demonstrates an interesting paradox of striving to support academic liberty and, at the same time, ensuring institutional control. On the one hand, it speaks of "independent thinking" and "original research" suggesting a high degree of intellectual autonomy for graduate students. On the other hand, a number of regulation mechanisms and standardized processes defined in the document seem to limit this freedom.

The wording used on supervision and mentoring is quite revealing. Despite this, the policy recognizes the aspect of a supportive and nurturing environment for conducting research and, at the same time, lays down documented working relations between a supervisor and a student. These two emphases build up the notion of an ideal student, who is to neither conform to the institution's rules and procedures too strictly nor think too freely and, thus, disruptively.

The policy's approach to quality assurance also epitomizes this contradiction well. Despite aiming at making graduate education the best, the use of standardized measures and external measures and evaluation may close down diversity of research methods and topics among students.

### **Negotiating Global Standards and Local Contexts**

In line with this, the policy switches back and forth between the process of standardization in the academic context at the global level and Pakistan's context in particular. The term 'International' is used quite often in the document, and it hints at the attempt to set the Pakistan graduate education standard with the global standard. This orientation thereby builds up the



desired model of the proper student, one capable of performing to these international benchmarks and competing at the global level.

On the same note, the policy has also advocated the consideration of “national Priorities” and research regarding the issues that affect Pakistan. Such a scenario puts double pressure on the head of a graduate program as expectations are two-fold: the students have to meet international standards and, at the same time, solve local issues.

The ambivalence in the policy between the global and the local is most clearly expressed in the terminology used with respect to the topics and methods of the research. Although it promotes novel and unconventional scholarly investigations, such research that has "practical implications" for the improvement of Pakistan is also favored. Such approaches of framing bring to the foreground issues of how students and institutions will be able to handle cases where the research agenda aligns with internationally recognized priorities as against local contextual issues that may not be very popular in global universities.

### **Tensions and Contradictions in the Policy Discourse**

Examining this type of policy and the identity it creates for the graduate student, several tensions and contradictions in the graduate student's imagination have been identified in the present study. Such contradictions depict the fact that many-faceted and often conflicting expectations are associated with graduate education in Pakistan.

The policy has one major contradiction of best practice focusing on the promotion of standardization while at the same time also promoting innovation. On the one hand, the document speaks about the importance of ‘originality’ and ‘innovativeness’ in the research; on the other hand, it presents highly institutionalized procedures for admission, course, and assessment. This state of affairs poses questions about how creativity can actually be promoted within a very bureaucratized academic culture.

The final tension that appears in the policy related to students' agency can be stated as follows: Despite its focus on "independent researchers," the entire process of becoming a graduate remains profoundly managed by institutions and legal authorities. This contradiction is also seen where student responsibilities are depicted as mere passive recipients of education rather than active co-creators of knowledge.

Another contradiction has been noticed in relation to the treatment of interdisciplinary research. Although, the document supports interdisciplinarity, the way of organizing the document and the words used strengthen the disciplinary approaches. This conflict appears may prove as a source of difficulty to students, when undertaking nontraditional and inter-disciplinary research projects.

Finally, the policy has a major tension on how it deals with matters concerning equity and diversity. Besides the use of phrases such as “equal opportunity” and “access for all qualified individuals,” the high standards and resource-demanding principles spelled out in the document may actually work to the advantage of students from the affluent backgrounds. This tension highlights the challenge of balancing excellence with equity in graduate education programs.

Such tensions and contradictions in the policy discourse can be considered as the result of a challenging task to envision the reform of graduate education in the context of globalization and other dynamic processes. They also show complex and sometimes contradictory roles within which graduate education students in Pakistan are expected to operate as they strive toward their academic career objectives.

## **Discussion**

### **Implications for Student Identity Formation**

The HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023 has a great role in constructing an identity for graduate students in Pakistan. Initially, it is evident how, through the discursive construction

of this 'ideal' student, a normative model is made available as a yardstick by which students may define themselves as well as by which they may be defined. Based on the features of this process of identity formation, there are several significant consequences.

Firstly, the policy might help to establish international standards and focus the students on global competitiveness, which can be considered to be the result of the formation of a cosmopolitan academic subjectivity. There is a potential for greater international interaction and partnership; such relations may help to bring the country's research to global recognition. However, it may also raise a conflict of interest for the students to embrace the Western educational system over and above the local research knowledge practices.

Second, the prevalence of research skills and innovative orientation might influence students' views on their position in academia and society. The policy also enframes graduate students in how they may become not only knowledge consumers but also knowledge producers and solvers. Such framing could enable students to embrace themselves as stakeholders in their fields and in the nation's development. However, it may also expand pressure on the students to come up with new innovations and research findings as well, which in turn brings about tension and stress among the learners who feel they cannot conduct research that can meet those high standards (Parkman, 2016).

Thirdly, due to the focus of the policy on values such as ethical conduct and integrity, which define the main characteristics of an ideal student, a strong ethical identity can be developed among graduate students. As wonderful as this is, questions are bound to arise regarding how students can handle ethical issues in an environment of cutthroat competition resulting from a system that measures intelligence by numbers in a learning institution.

### **Impact on Academic Culture and Practices**

The effects of the HEC policy are thus likely to present a socialization impact on universities in Pakistan and alter the manners in which these institutions organize themselves and encourage academic activities. Its focus on the quantity and quality of research output manifesting in international publications may change the institutional goals. It may lead to more funding for research endeavors but may also lead to situations where the mere production of articles becomes a major focus to the detriment of other aspects of the faculty and students' lives, like teaching and community service.

They proposed the policy, which generates structural and systematic aspects that can contribute to better standardization and quality assurance of the graduate programs. It could help increase the quality and standard of graduate education as well as ensure that the standards of these programs are alike, but it can also minimize the flexibility and variety of the structure of these programs and the research methodologies. It can be a problem that the culture of indoctrination can result in pursuit of universal indicators that work across disciplines and do not consider the various ways of knowing in a specific academic discipline (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

The policy's portrayal of the ideal graduate student as both locally situated and global may prompt institutions to expand the globalization of curricula and research activities further. This could lead to enhanced internationalization and globalization of universities; universities could change and adopt better approaches from other universities, which might enhance diversity and the learning culture. However, it may also result in difficulties when defining how global practices should be adjusted to local necessities and environments.

### **Challenges in Implementing the 'Ideal' Graduate Student Model**

Thus, it is highly probable that multiple challenges stand before the practical implementation of this policy model, reflecting the ideal graduate student. Firstly, the policy put forward rather high standards of research productivity, innovation, and competitiveness on the international level, which they might find hard to meet because of their background or the quality of their

university. This makes people question about equity and access to graduate education (Marginson, 2016).

Secondly, the policy that requires the publication of articles in foreign journals that have high impact factors might be difficult in some fields or in case the research is devoted to the analysis of the local context. This could result in the neglect of important local research that may not suit the interests of these international journals.

Thirdly, concept-wise, the fact that the policy comprises both of the twin priorities of standardization and innovation could potentially cause major implementation conflicts. There can be issues with the calendar and schedule required by academic institutions and universities, protecting the quality of education and research while at the same time maintaining enough free space to allow for highly creative and unique interdisciplinary collaborations.

Lastly, the initiation of the ethical and integrity-focused culture, as stipulated by the policy, will call for considerable time and capital investment. To integrate these elements of the policy, institutions will require enhanced capacity development and training, requisite infrastructures, and possibly the evolution of new policies.

### **Comparison with International Trends in Graduate Education Policy**

Thus, the HEC policy stands in synergy with some of the best practices observed worldwide in postgraduate training and, at the same time, caters to the needs of Pakistan. This focus on research skills, innovation, and global competitiveness concurs with policies in many countries where governments audaciously attempt to raise the position of their countries in the world's new knowledge economy (Nerad, 2010).

The primary goal of the policy established in the educational sector—standardization and the application of quality assurance measures—characterizes the tendency to enforce accountability in the sphere of higher education on an international level. However, the level of centralization, which the HEC policy implies, might be even more significant than in the case of certain other nations, particularly the ones with the decentralized tertiary education systems.

Responsibility for ethical conduct and acknowledgment of academic wrongdoing correspond to increasing global interest in these matters regarding graduate education. However, the policy's approach to ethics, which emphasizes compliance and penalties, may differ from more developmental approaches seen in some other contexts (East, 2009).

The policy efforts for international compatibility as well as local requisites are general difficulties shared by most developing nations in their framework of higher learning policies. Yet, how the HEC policy mediates this balance is specific to the context and goals set for Pakistani higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, the constructed 'ideal' graduate student in Pakistan through the analysis of the critical discourse of the HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023 is a multi-layered phenomenon. The policy has set out the desirable attributes of a student as someone who is a global player but with considerations for the local market, creative but conforming to best practices, and an academic achiever who is also ethical. It is constructed by the different linguistic features and discursive strategies, neoliberal ideological underpinnings, and the interaction between globalization and glocalization.

First, they reveal polarity between standardization and innovation, students' autonomy and institutional management, and excellence and equality. Such tensions portray the challenge of reimagining the education of graduates in a scenario that is seemingly local and global at the same time.

In this sense, this study aligns with the field of higher education policy analysis to reveal and identify how critical discourse analysis can be useful in the discovery of assumptions and power relations in policy documents. It contributes to the existing literature on how educational policies in the process of schooling produce and regulate students' subjectivities and academic practices, especially in the context of a developing nation in its attempts to align with the global educational benchmarks and meet the local requirements.

The findings shed light on the difficulties of executing broad graduate education reform and the possible effects on learners and the culture of the educational environment. It also contributes to current discussions on the uses of graduate education and on globalization and localization of higher education policies.

Despite that, there are certain issues that need to be mentioned concerning the current investigation's limitations. The study targeted only the policy document and did not explore the ways in which the policy is enacted and perceived by the contributing institutions and participants. There is scope to do this in future studies by including interviews with stakeholders, mostly the graduate programs or participants' observation data.

### Recommendations for Future Research and Policy Development

Based on our findings, we recommend several avenues for future research:

1. Empirical studies on the implementation of the policy and its effects on graduate students' experiences and outcomes.
2. Comparative analyses of graduate education policies across different national contexts, particularly in developing countries.
3. Investigations into how the policy's construction of the ideal graduate student aligns with or diverges from the perspectives of students, faculty, and employers.

For policy development, we suggest:

1. Greater involvement of diverse stakeholders, including graduate students, in the policy-making process to ensure a more inclusive vision of graduate education.
2. More explicit attention should be paid to issues of equity and inclusion in future policy revisions.
3. Development of flexible frameworks that can accommodate disciplinary differences and diverse forms of knowledge production.
4. Continued reflection on how to balance global standards with local needs and contexts in graduate education policy.

In conclusion, it is imperative to state that although the reforms reflected in the HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023 have been identified to be effective in reforming the graduate education system in Pakistan; to obtain the optimum results, it is pivotal to overcome various optimal balancing tensions and challenges. To achieve this, there is going to be a need for the continuing critical discourse in pulling out and developing a robust graduate education program that can compete in the international market as well as respond to the region's contexts.

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