

Achieving High Performance in Pakistani HEIs: A Framework for Sustainable Improvement

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the applicability of the High-Performance Organization (HPO) framework in addressing performance challenges in Pakistani Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Despite global efforts for quality improvement, Pakistani HEIs face issues like outdated curricula, faculty shortage and low quality of teachers, insufficient funding and (research) infrastructure, poor school management quality, inadequate quality assurance programs and lack of continuous development. Using an exploratory quantitative approach, data were collected from six public HEIs via the HPO questionnaire, analysing 259 responses. Findings confirm the validity of the HPO framework's five factors—Management Quality, Openness and Action Orientation, Long-term Orientation, Continuous Improvement, and Employee Quality—within this context. The study highlights the framework's effectiveness in identifying and addressing key performance gaps. The research contributes theoretically by extending the HPO framework to a new sector and region and practically by offering HEI leaders a structured pathway to enhance competitiveness and educational outcomes. The insights are particularly relevant for developing countries with similar challenges. This study enriches the literature on higher education performance frameworks and also provides actionable solutions for fostering excellence in Pakistani HEIs.

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INTRODUCTION

Developing and nurturing human capital is essential for the socio-economic progress of any country (Naidu & Derani, 2016; Nasreen & Afzal, 2020). Education has a pivotal role in this endeavour by fostering the development of competencies and skills that can enhance the productivity of the workforce of a country (Schwab and Sala-I-Martin (2015). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), such as universities, colleges, technical institutes, and research centres, play an essential role in the development of the human capital of the country (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010) in a way that national productivity can be enhanced. Good education enables workers to accomplish tasks efficiently, facilitates the transfer of knowledge and technologies, and fosters creativity and innovation (Barro & Lee, 2013). The role of HEIs is multifaceted, and they serve as engines of knowledge creation, innovation, and economic development while fostering social mobility and addressing societal challenges (Chankseliani & Mccowan, 2021; Meo et al., 2013). They are responsible for equipping individuals with the skills necessary for the 21st-century workforce, advancing scientific research, and contributing to the cultural and intellectual fabric of society (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010).

The performance of HEIs has always been a topic of concern because high performance ensures the quality of education. Therefore, HEIs all over the world have formulated indicators based on which performance can be analysed. Thus, the quality and performance of HEIs have become of paramount importance to a country. The quality of higher education depends on the quality of services provided to students and the quality of graduates produced by the university (Naidu & Derani, 2016). Educational institutions' performance refers to activities, tasks, processes (such as teaching, learning, research, and mission-related tasks), outputs (such as graduation rates, student learning, and employability of students), and consequences based on these actions (Kivistö et al., 2019; Ryan, 2015). The performance of HEIs is influenced by different internal factors, such as leadership, organisational culture, resource allocation, and faculty performance; and external factors, such as government policies, economic conditions, and competition from other institutions (Islam et al., 2021).

HEIs in Pakistan have experienced rapid growth and expansion in recent decades (Rasool et al., 2019). The number of universities and degree-awarding institutions increased significantly, driven by the government's initiatives to enhance access to education and meet the growing demand for higher education. Unfortunately, the quality and performance of Pakistani HEIs have long been a concern (of Pakistan (2020); (Meo & Jawaid, 2021; Murtaza & Hui, 2021). Their main problems are:

- **Outdated curricula:** Study programs are not aimed enough at fostering research abilities and critical thinking skills among students, abilities and skills which are essential for academic and professional growth (Abid, 2022; Akbar & Khan, 2020; Murtaza & Hui, 2021).
- **Faculty shortage and low quality of teachers:** There is a shortage of faculty members. This leads to a high student-faculty ratio (too many students having to be supervised by a teacher, leading to not enough attention for these students). Also, the quality of teachers is too low, leading to poor educational quality (as the teachers themselves are not qualified enough to deliver the required quality of teaching). In addition, limited career progression opportunities, low salaries, and lack of research support keep talented individuals from pursuing academic careers (Abid, 2022; Akbar & Khan, 2020; Q. I. Khan et al., 2021).
- **Insufficient funding and (research) infrastructure:** The lack of adequate financial resources and research facilities makes it difficult for Pakistani HEIs to be innovative and thus contribute to knowledge creation and society advancements (Abid, 2022; I. Ahmad et al., 2014; Akbar & Khan, 2020; Murtaza & Hui, 2021; Nasreen & Afzal, 2020).
- **Poor school management quality:** Outdated management practices, ineffective leadership, poor decision-making and action-taking skills, as well as inadequate resource allocation skills of the management of HEIs keeps these institutions from developing to a higher quality level in a working environment for teachers and staff that is characterised by a positive organisational culture (Akbar & Khan, 2020; Nasreen & Afzal, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2016).
- **Inadequate quality assurance programs:** Weak quality assurance systems lead to inconsistent academic standards and inadequate faculty performance evaluations. This creates a disconnect between the quality of academic programs and, thus, the quality of graduates and the demands of the labour market for highly-skilled employees (Murtaza & Hui, 2021).
- **Lack of continuous development:** Pakistani HEIs have problems with implementing systems for continuous improvement, leading to stagnation in the development of knowledge and achieving innovation. Ineffective governance and administrative practices further complicate the ability to respond to evolving demands (Abid, 2022; Nasreen & Afzal, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2016).

These problems have resulted in a literacy rate of only 62.3 percent, a large drop-out among students, and a very low enrolment in Master's and Ph.D. programs. This adverse situation is aggravated by the fact that only 1.7 percent of the GDP has been allocated to the education budget, which is the lowest in Asia (Abid, 2022; Murtaza & Hui, 2021; Nasreen & Afzal, 2020). In addition, Pakistani HEIs are not improving or even declining in international quality rankings, and the

country has only a few institutes that meet international standards by producing quality output (Rankings (2022), (Awan, 2020; Islam et al., 2021). It is clear that the current HEIs' quality compromises the development of skilled graduates who can contribute effectively to the Pakistani economy and society (I. Ahmad et al., 2014; Rasheed et al., 2016).

Although the Pakistani Higher Education Commission – which oversees the development and regulation of universities and institutes (Q. I. Khan et al., 2021) and has a crucial role in promoting quality education, research, and academic collaborations – introduced performance standards, the commission has not provided nor prescribed a comprehensive and holistic framework to help Pakistani HEIs to evaluate and subsequently improve their quality. In this study, we look for such a framework. To this end, we first review the literature to find a potentially suitable framework and then test its suitability in practice. We do this by collecting performance data from Pakistani HEIs and statistically evaluating them for the suitability of the selected framework for improving the quality and performance of Pakistani HEIs. Our research goal is to identify and evaluate a quality performance framework with which Pakistani HEIs can improve their results. This research aims to contribute to the literature on the quality and performance of HEIs in Pakistan. In addition, the findings should aid the management of HEIs in improving the quality of education and enhancing their institutions' competitiveness. Policymakers can also use the results to guide decisions related to higher education reforms.

Current research on the performance of HEIs in Pakistan largely focuses on isolated factors such as leadership, resource allocation, and faculty development. However, this research lacks a holistic, validated framework that can address these factors collectively. This study adds to the current literature by empirically testing the applicability of the De Waal HPO framework within the context of Pakistani HEIs. By doing so, it not only contributes to the theoretical expansion of the HPO framework but also offers actionable insights for HEI leaders and policymakers to systematically address institutional challenges, thereby bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application. In addition, while the De Waal HPO framework has been extensively validated across various industries and regions (A. D. Waal (2017, 2021); A. D. Waal and Kerklaan (2015), (Kalimullah et al., 2019; A. A. D. Waal & Chachage, 2011; A. D. Waal & Sultan, 2012), its application in the higher education sector – particularly in developing countries like Pakistan – remains underexplored, so this research fills this gap in the current HPO literature.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, the literature on high performance in Pakistani HEIs is reviewed, and the research question is developed. Subsequently, the framework that was selected to

evaluate and increase HEIs' quality and performance is described. After this, the research approach and research results are given. The article ends with a conclusion, the limitations of the research and future research opportunities.

This study confirms that the De Waal HPO framework is valid and applicable to Pakistani HEIs. It provides a structured approach for improving institutional performance by addressing key challenges such as faculty shortages, outdated curricula, and poor resource allocation. The research contributes both theoretically, by expanding the HPO framework to a new sector and region, and practically, by offering HEI leaders a systematic pathway to enhance competitiveness and educational outcomes. The study is limited to public HEIs in Pakistan, which restricts the generalizability of findings to private institutions and HEIs in other countries. Additionally, it provides only a cross-sectional analysis, meaning the long-term impact of implementing the HPO framework on institutional performance remains unexamined. Future research should expand the study to include private HEIs and institutions from other provinces to ensure broader applicability. A longitudinal study could assess the long-term effects of applying the HPO framework in HEIs. Moreover, research should explore how the framework can be practically implemented within the specific cultural and administrative contexts of Pakistani HEIs to maximize its effectiveness.

HIGH PERFORMANCE IN PAKISTANI HEIS

Many studies have examined the factors influencing the performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan. Saleem et al. (2011) measured the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on organisational efficiency and effectiveness, which leads to organisational performance in Pakistani HEIs, and found that ICT adoption significantly improved organizational effectiveness and performance but not organisational efficiency. Aziz (2014) measured and compared emotional intelligence as a leadership skill among Heads in universities and reviewed whether this skill led to improvement of the quality of the university. He found that leaders with higher emotional intelligence were better equipped to manage staff and handle institutional crises, ultimately contributing to improved organisational outcomes. This was later confirmed by Bilal et al. (2021), who examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between organisational justice and performance. I. Ahmad et al. (2014) integrated the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and TOPSIS methodologies to assess the performance of public universities. Their analysis identified strengths and weaknesses across institutions, providing a framework for more targeted resource allocation and policy improvements. S. Ahmad et al. (2022) identified key factors influencing research output, highlighting that experience and collaboration had

a positive impact, whereas excessive workload and limited resources hindered productivity. Their study suggested that investing in research infrastructure and providing adequate support are essential for increasing academic output. Leadership styles and decision-making approaches were examined by Zia et al. (2019), who discovered that leaders adopting a “selling leadership” style—characterised by a combination of high task orientation and strong relationship-building—were more likely to employ rational, intuitive, and spontaneous decision-making models. These approaches were found to have a direct positive effect on institutional performance.

Q. I. Khan et al. (2021) focused on the role of human resource management (HRM) practices and organizational justice in shaping HEIs' performance. Their research revealed that effective HRM strategies, including job security, autonomy, and fair compensation, alongside a strong sense of organisational justice, significantly contributed to faculty career success, ultimately enhancing university performance. Lastly, Sahibzada et al. (2021) examined the impact of knowledge-oriented leadership (KOL) on organisational performance. They found that KOL improved both knowledge worker satisfaction and productivity, enhancing institutional outcomes. This finding aligns with previous research studies, conducted by Jamil and Lodhi (2015), Sahibzada et al. (2023), A. Iqbal et al. (2019), and Rehman and Iqbal (2020), which collectively highlight knowledge management as a critical driver of academic success.

Aleem et al. (2021) analysed the impact of Training Needs Analysis (TNA) on the performance of faculty members in business schools. Their study reveals that a systematic TNA significantly enhances faculty performance by improving teaching, research, technological skills, and quality management, which in turn fosters a high-performing academic environment and improves institutional performance and educational outcomes. Nawal et al. (2021) investigated the impacts of HRM practices on the performance of HEIs, emphasising the mediating roles of service innovation and organisational commitment. They found that while HRM practices did not directly enhance organisational performance, they significantly influenced service innovation and organizational commitment, which in turn positively impacted performance.

Ikram and Kenayathulla (2023) noticed that the quality of education, consisting of high-quality instructional materials, effective support, well-equipped classroom facilities, and growth opportunities, has a direct and significant positive impact on student satisfaction. However, the study also found that many HEIs struggle to provide these elements consistently. S. Iqbal, Hanif, et al. (2024) reviewed the impact of staff training on university productivity through job satisfaction in ISO 9001-certified institutions in Pakistan and found that staff training significantly enhances both job satisfaction and university productivity, with

job satisfaction acting as a mediator between training and productivity. S. Iqbal, Taib, et al. (2024) explored the impact of accreditation on higher education performance, mediated by the quality culture within institutions and found positive relations, thus showing that fostering a strong quality culture is essential for accreditation to effectively enhance the performance of HEIs.

In summary, these studies collectively suggest that achieving high performance in Pakistani HEIs requires a holistic approach that integrates various factors such as supportive organisational cultures, effective leadership, systematic evaluation, enhanced research environments, and faculty development. However, none of these studies provide a framework for this holistic approach; therefore, do not provide a comprehensive framework which takes all relevant factors into account. Therefore, we turned towards a holistic framework that has been around for twenty years and provides this desired holistic approach, the De Waal HPO Framework (A. D. Waal, 2020). Thus, the research question of this study is as follows:

RQ. Is the De Waal HPO framework suitable for Pakistani HEIs?

To obtain an answer to the research question, first in the next section, the HPO framework - and its use in the educational sector and in Pakistan - is discussed in the next section, after which data is collected to test the framework.

THE HPO FRAMEWORK

Description of the De Waal HPO Framework

The empirical part of our research employs High-Performance Organization (HPO) framework of Santos and Waal (2020); A. D. Waal (2012); A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012). An HPO is defined as an organisation that consistently achieves superior financial and non-financial results compared to its peers over a period of at least five years by focusing on what truly matters (A. D. Waal, 2021). The HPO framework is a scientifically validated conceptual model that allows organisations to assess their performance, identify areas for improvement, and implement sustainable enhancements. We selected this framework for two key reasons: (1) after an extensive literature review, Do and Mai (2020) identified De Waal's HPO framework as the only scientifically validated conceptualisation of HPO; and (2) it has been previously applied in the education sector and in Pakistan, increasing the likelihood of its suitability for Pakistani higher education institutions (HEIs).

The framework was designed to holistically identify factors influencing sustainable high performance and provide organisations with a straightforward method for evaluation and improvement. The research behind it was conducted in two

phases (A. D. Waal (2012); A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012):

- Phase 1 – literature review: A comprehensive review of 290 studies on high performance and excellence led to the identification of 189 common characteristics. The 54 most frequently cited characteristics were selected as potential HPO indicators.
- Phase 2 – empirical validation: These 54 characteristics were incorporated into a questionnaire distributed globally through lectures and workshops. Respondents rated their organisations on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) in relation to these characteristics and compared their performance to industry peers. From 2,015 responses across approximately 1,470 organisations (profit, non-profit, and government), the statistical analysis identified 35 characteristics strongly correlated with organisational performance. These characteristics were categorised into five key HPO factors, validated across more than 60,000 respondents worldwide (A. D. Waal, 2020). Notably, the HPO factors remain consistent across different industries, organisational types, and countries.

The HPO framework identifies five essential factors for sustained high performance:

- Management Quality: HPO managers earn trust, demonstrate integrity, and support employees while holding them accountable. They serve as role models and uphold high ethical standards.
- Openness and Action Orientation: Employees' opinions are valued, and involvement in decision-making is encouraged. Mistakes and risks are seen as learning opportunities, fostering innovation and knowledge sharing.
- Long-Term Orientation: HPOs prioritise long-term commitments over short-term gains, maintaining enduring relationships with stakeholders and promoting internal career progression.
- Continuous Improvement and Renewal: HPOs differentiate themselves through unique strategies, continuous innovation, and responsiveness to market developments. Core competencies are retained in-house, while non-core activities are outsourced.
- Employee Quality: HPO employees are highly trained, adaptable, and work in diverse, complementary teams, enabling them to tackle challenges and drive improvement.

Organisations can evaluate their HPO status through an HPO diagnosis, in which management and employees complete a questionnaire based on the 35 HPO characteristics. The results are aggregated into average scores for each HPO factor, identifying areas needing improvement. An overall HPO score of 8.5 or

higher (on a scale of 1 to 10) designates an organisation as an HPO (A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012) .

Application of HPO Framework in Education

The HPO framework has been applied in various educational settings globally. A. A. D. Waal and Chachage (2011) explored its potential to elevate an African university to a high-performance status. A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012) studied its usefulness in helping a rapidly expanding South American college manage growth sustainably. A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012) confirmed its suitability for improving performance at Palestine Polytechnic University in the Middle East. A. D. Waal and Kerklaan (2015) applied an evidence-based management approach using the framework to transform a Vietnamese university into a high-performance institution. Agirdag and Muijs (2023) assessed a school leadership development program in the Netherlands, incorporating the HPO framework, which led to significant improvements in student learning progress in participating schools compared to non-participants.

Application of HPO Framework in Pakistan

Kalimullah et al. (2019) examined the impact of the five HPO factors on Pakistani public organisations' performance to evaluate the predictive power of the framework in public organisations. Questionnaires were distributed online to 513 employees from three different service-based public organisations in Pakistan. The study concluded that the HPO framework has predictive relevance for public organisations' performance and that three out of the five HPO factors (management quality, workforce quality and long-term orientation) showed positive relationships, while the other two HPO factors (openness and action orientation, and continuous improvement and renewal) had a negative relationship with public sector organisations' performance. The study attributed this last outcome to contextual issues such as excessive bureaucracy and rigid workplace structures, which hinder the implementation of these two HPO factors in Pakistan's public sector. Kalimullah et al. (2019) concluded that the HPO framework had predictive relevance and substantive significance for Pakistani public sector organisations and that public managers especially should focus on openness, action orientation, and continuous improvement and renewal to increase stakeholders' satisfaction.

K. Khan et al. (2024) tested the validity of the HPO framework and its direct effect on Pakistani public organisations' performance and found that it was valid in this context. However, the resulting model resulted in 22 characteristics as compared to the original 35 characteristics, as 13 items were

found not to be relevant. Specifically, four out of the five HPO factors—management quality, workforce quality, long-term orientation, and continuous improvement and renewal—positively influenced organisational performance, but their impact was modest. The factor of openness and action orientation did not show a significant relationship with performance, reflecting issues of rigid organisational culture and power distance. Qualitative findings identified several barriers to achieving high performance in Pakistani PSOs: a mechanistic organisational structure, lack of commitment and resources, and absence of ethical and visionary leadership. These factors hinder the effective implementation of the HPO framework, emphasising the need for transformative leadership and structural reforms in the public sector. K. Khan et al. (2024) still concluded in favour of the validity of the HPO framework in the context of the Pakistan public sector because of the universal items of the HPO framework and the predictive relevance the model showed in the research. However, they warned that the HPO framework is not a 'quick fix' for increasing public organisations' performance.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan specified basic standards for measuring the performance of universities and at different points in time various researchers have analysed the performance of universities by using different performance indicators. Despite such efforts, there were still performance measurement challenges that needed to be addressed to make the performance indicators on par with the international performance measurement standards. Previous researches have questioned that many performance standards are ambiguous because of the lack of a comprehensive standardised framework used to assess the performance of higher education institutions. They suggested revisiting the performance standard and incorporating more indicators for comprehensive and objective measurement of the performance of higher education institutions in Pakistan.

There were numerous frameworks and models. However, the High-Performance Organization (HPO) framework was found to be innovative and approve different indicators that focus on creating a culture of high performance within organisations and emphasise the importance of leadership, strategy, and employee engagement in achieving organisational goals (A. D. Waal and Sultan (2012) . Therefore, the researcher thought to consider it good to analyse the performance of higher education institutions in Pakistan through the HPO framework.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This study employs an exploratory quantitative data collection design to evaluate whether the HPO factors influence HEIs' performance in Pakistan. The design involved collecting and analysing numerical data related to HEIs performance indicators. These indicators included the characteristics of the HPO factors (see Appendix 1). The data were collected from six general public HEIs through the HPO questionnaire. The of Pakistan (2020) reported that there were 50 public and 23 private higher education institutions in Pakistan. A ranking list of these HEIs was consulted, and through purposive sampling techniques, six general public HEIs were selected as follows: two HEIs ranked in the top 20%, two ranked in the bottom 40%, and two ranked in between. In this way, we achieved a good organisational performance spread. The potential questionnaire respondents comprised all the teaching faculty, directorates of academics, quality officers, and personnel of the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization. These people were chosen as they played a substantial role in achieving academic excellence and high organizational performance of HEIs. Four faculties from each HEI were chosen. Therefore, employees from twenty-four faculties participated in this survey. These employees varied in nature; therefore, the sample was selected through a random proportionate sampling technique. In this way, six hundred people were sampled. The questionnaire link was sent to the human resource departments of the selected HEIs, who in turn distributed the link to the employees. In total, 559 potential respondents were approached, and 259 valid questionnaires were received back (which entails a response rate of 46,3%). The collected data was statistically evaluated using the 21st version of SPSS.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The validity of the study was ensured through several measures. Firstly, the content validity of the adopted HPO questionnaire was ensured through a comprehensive review. An expert panel consisting of three experienced researchers and two assistant professors in the subject matter reviewed the questionnaire for content validity, ensuring that the items effectively measured the intended constructs of interest. Face validity was established by seeking feedback from a university professional who was not part of the main study sample. Then the questionnaire was pilot-tested to assess its clarity and comprehensibility in order to enhance its validity and reliability. The questionnaire was slightly refined in language. The coefficient of Cronbach Alpha was used to decide the reliability of each HPO factor and the overall HPO framework.

Table 1.

| Scale | Cronbach's alpha | No of Items |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Total scale | 0.969 | 35 |
| Continuous Improvement and Renewal | 0.899 | 8 |
| Openness and Action Orientation | 0.856 | 6 |
| Management Quality | 0.928 | 12 |
| Employee Quality | 0.837 | 4 |
| Long Term Orientation | 0.827 | 5 |

Reliability of the HPO Framework for Pakistani HEIs

Table 2.

shows the reliability of the overall scale as well as for each of the subscales.

For the overall scale, Cronbach alpha reliability value was found to be 0.969, which is in line with A. D. Waal (2012) HPO framework Cronbach's alpha reliability value (0.967). With respect to the five HPO factors, the Cronbach alpha reliability values were also found to be practically equal to the reliability values given by A. D. Waal (2012). The results in Table 1 match those found by Kalimullah et al. (2019) and K. Khan et al. (2024) so far that all three studies show that the HPO framework and its five factors are valid for the Pakistani context.

| HPO Factors | HPO | BBSUL | MUST | QAU | UOG | PU | UOS | Mean |
|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Management quality | 8.5 | 5.4 | 6.2 | 6.2 | 5.3 | 6.4 | 6.1 | 5.93 |
| Openness & action orientation | 8.5 | 5.7 | 6.0 | 6.1 | 5.4 | 6.5 | 5.9 | 5.93 |
| Long-term orientation | 8.5 | 5.8 | 6.3 | 6.4 | 5.8 | 6.4 | 6.3 | 6.17 |
| Continuous improvement & renewal | 8.5 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 5.6 | 6.3 | 6.1 | 5.92 |
| Employee quality | 8.5 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.6 | 5.4 | 5.9 | 6.1 | 6.0 |
| Mean | 8.5 | 5.7 | 6.08 | 6.26 | 5.5 | 6.3 | 6.1 | 5.9 |
| SD | | 0.22 | 0.16 | 0.24 | 0.20 | 0.24 | 0.14 | 0.20 |

*BBSUL= Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University

*MUST= Mirpur University of Science & Technology

*QAU= Quaid-e-Azam University

*UOG= University of Gujrat

*PU= University of the Punjab

*UOS= University of Sargodha

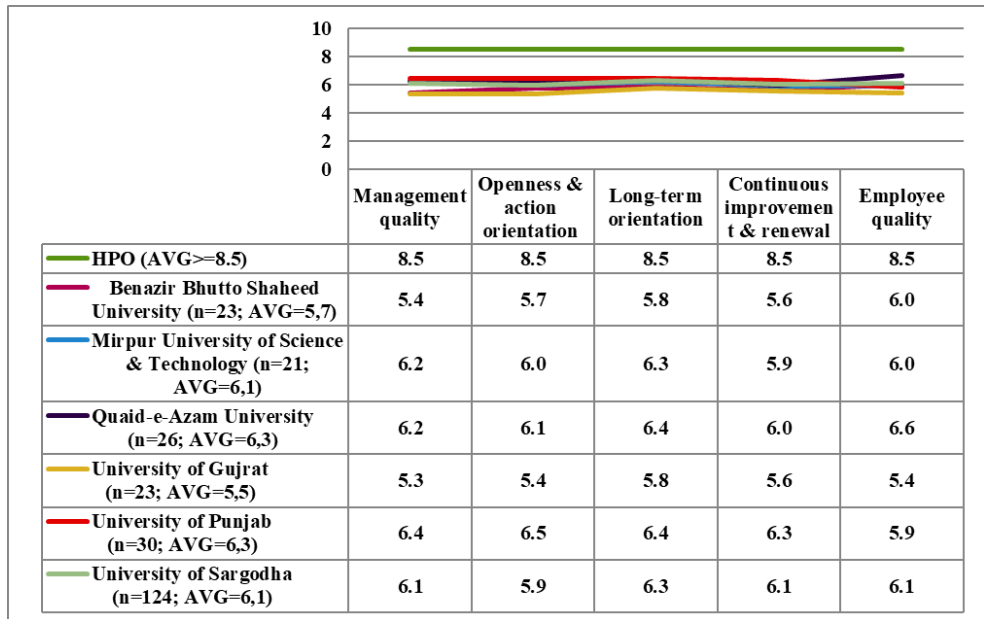


Chart 1:

Performance of Pakistani HEIs with respect to HPO Framework

indicates the performance of Pakistani HEIs through the lens of the HPO framework. Regarding “Management Quality,” Quaid-e-Azam University (mean=6.2) and University of Punjab (mean=6.4) showed relatively stronger performance. In “Openness & Action Orientation,” the University of Punjab excelled (mean=6.5), while other universities trailed slightly. For “Long-term Orientation” and “Continuous Improvement & Renewal,” the Quaid-e-Azam University and the University of Punjab led, maintaining consistent scores around 6.4. Despite these performances, all universities understudy was found to be fell below the recommended HPO average score of 8.5.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is set to find and evaluate a quality performance framework with which Pakistani HEIs can improve their results and to answer the research question: Is the De Waal HPO framework suitable for Pakistani HEIs? The research results show that the De Waal HPO framework is indeed suitable and valid for the Pakistani HEI context. This means that the HPO framework can support Pakistani HEIs in their efforts to create higher- quality institutions which can cope with the increasing demands placed on them and with their current

problems.

This study provides a pioneering contribution to the literature by empirically validating the De Waal HPO framework within the context of Pakistani HEIs. Unlike previous research that primarily highlighted individual performance factors, this study demonstrates the framework's utility as a comprehensive tool for diagnosing and addressing institutional challenges. The findings confirm the relevance of the HPO framework's five factors for improving HEI performance in Pakistan. By offering a structured roadmap for institutional improvement, the study empowers HEI management and policymakers to adopt evidence-based strategies that align with global performance standards while addressing local contextual challenges. These insights not only strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of the HPO framework but also provide a replicable model for HEIs in other developing countries facing similar issues.

Thus, this research makes significant contributions to both theory and practice in the field of organisational performance and higher education management. Theoretically, it is the first study to quantitatively validate the De Waal HPO framework within the context of Pakistani HEIs, thereby extending the applicability of a globally recognised framework to a new and underexplored sector. By doing so, the research enriches the academic discourse on organisational performance by providing empirical evidence of the framework's relevance in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by HEIs in developing countries. Practically, the study offers a validated, structured approach for Pakistani HEIs to systematically evaluate and improve their performance. By identifying the key factors, the study equips university leaders and policymakers with actionable insights to address pressing issues such as outdated curricula, faculty shortages, and inadequate resource allocation. These findings also provide a replicable model for other developing countries, bridging the gap between academic research and practical implementation in higher education reform.

The limitation of the research is that only general public universities of Pakistan were included. Therefore, future research should aim at including universities, both public and private, and also in other countries. Further research could also focus on testing the HPO framework in practice by applying the framework at the HEIs and then tracking the performance of these institutions over time (longitudinal research) to see whether their quality and performance indeed increase. Finally, this research shows the potential of the HPO framework for Pakistani HEIs, but it does not discuss specifically how the HPO framework itself caters for their context. As the HPO framework is more or less culturally neutral – it points out what should be improved, which is generically valid in many countries and industries, but it does not stipulate how to improve 'the

what', something which depends on the culture – future research could look into the degree in which the HPO characteristics can be put into practice in daily improvement actions that work in the context of Pakistani HEIs.

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