

Uncovering the exploitation of meritocracy by nepotism at public sector universities of kpk

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Abstract

This research examines the far-reaching effects of political recruiting practices on academic standards and institutional integrity in public sector institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. An overview of current literature emphasizes that political connections are often thought to intervene in recruiting decisions, resulting in the hiring of undeserving candidates and creating a culture of mediocrity. A crucial outcome of such behaviors is the erosion of trust among students, faculty, and staff, leading to disengagement and low morale in academic institutions. The discussion shows that changes in the recruitment processes are highly urgent, enhancing meritocracy and transparency. Recommendations include establishing independent monitoring committees, making recruitment procedures open and accountable for prior hiring practices, and engaging local communities and cultivating integrity-based culture to restore credibility and trust. This review article reiterates the importance of restoration, accountability, and reparations in fixing the reputation of KPK's public universities. With an emphasis on merit-based recruitment and ethical governance, this could help these institutions enhance their academic reputation and confidently serve their students, ultimately establishing a more fruitful educational setting in Pakistan. The study urges stakeholders to come together to create a lasting framework for upholding the principles of honesty, quality, and social responsibility in higher education.

Key words: Meritocracy, Nepotism, Public Sector Universities, Political Influence, Accountability, Higher Education Reform, Policy Development

Background Information

Meritocracy and nepotism are two opposing extremes with respect to hiring and promotion in organizations including public sector universities. Meritocracy deals with qualifications, skills, and achievements as criteria for selection and promotion, whereas nepotism is concerned primarily with connections and relationships to the exclusion of any honest hiring or promotion process. The issue is however emerging in both public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. Meritocracy is basically about rewarding people according to their abilities and achievements. A meritocratic system has all fairness and equality of opportunity for the individuals to climb the ladder on performance and qualifications (Harrison & Klein, 2007). In meritocratic systems, hiring practices should be open and competitive with the criteria for selection being academic credential- and experience- and skill-based relevant to the position (Kearney & Levine, 2015). Nepotism is when

favoritism is shown towards one's relatives or friends in terms of hiring or promotions without regard for qualifications or appropriateness for a role. With this practice, diversity is compromised, qualification candidates find their morale lowered, and the organizational work suffers general inefficiency (Nielsen, 2018). The other public universities, however, bias this nepotism through political ties, in which those known to or connected to the powerful few were given preference than the qualified among other applicants. An intense scrutiny of hiring practices such as political affiliation cum neglect of meritocracy has been increasingly leveled on the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The concept of meritocracy, which states that one should earn according to one's abilities and qualifications rather than for other reasons, is in stark contrast to what has been played out in these institutions. Nepotism and favoritism where political connections work against the concept of fairness in hiring have posed challenges to the education sector. It is, however, research evidence that recruitment processes in public sector universities of KPK are often politically biased rather than driven by merit. Shah et al. (2020) emphasize the omnipresence of this corrupt practice in higher educational institutions across KPK, whereby political affiliations determine hires. Such political interference not only destroys the credibility of the recruitment processes but also questions the qualifications and competence of those in critical academic and administrative positions. These people have a far-reaching impact on the quality of education and the very existence of these institutions. Different aspects of the cycle of unemployment and inefficiency culture stemming from political hiring have been researched and explored. Ali et al. (2019) looked into the burden of nepotism and favoritism in public sector organizations, universities being included. Their study found that when hiring decisions are based on nepotism or personal loyalties that diminishes the prospect of hiring an appropriately qualified and diverse workforce. This lack of diversity and qualified persons contributes to the stagnation of innovation and fair academic standard, as the unqualified people hired under political patronage neither possess necessary knowledge nor have any practical experience useful for the institution. Vice-chancellors also have a role that needs to be highlighted. As the highest academic authority in the higher education system in the public sector, the vice-chancellors influence hiring practices and institutional policies. That, however, would become more difficult because there have been reports of gross malpractices and irregularities within the hiring process. These people mostly put loyalty and political allegiance above merit, and often appointed those with manifestly unsuited qualifications to their respective positions,' Khan et al. (2021) have pointed out. Such kind of mismanagement undermines the institution's credibility and demoralizes the faculty and students. These recruiting practices have more direct implications for academic life. When unqualified people fill teaching and administration posts, the education suffers. According to Orosz et al. (2018), a poorly trained faculty can provide substandard instruction impeding the students' academic growth and development. Students may find themselves in classrooms where the faculty lacked the expertise to deliver a rigorous curriculum, ultimately affecting their learning outcomes and preparedness for future challenges. Equally troubling are the insidious effects that undermine trust in these institutions. When faculty, staff, and students perceive that political favoritism plays the decisive role in hiring these institutions, the culture of disillusionment and cynicism sets in. Baker et al.'s (2017) trace have shown that the lack of transparency in the hiring practices diminishes trust in the leadership of the institution, thus creating a toxic atmosphere characterized by distrust and resentment. The absence of trust would discourage students from enrolling and deter qualified faculty from seeking employment, compounding the difficult situations facing KPK's public universities. The ramifications of political appointments go beyond immediate operational difficulties. Given this, nepotism soon becomes entrenched in the institutions' cultures, affecting external ramifications for both students and faculty in the long run. The acceptance of such practices also creates a problematic environment: one tolerates unethical behavior and lacks accountability. "Students who witness academic dishonesty or perceive a lack of integrity in their educational environment are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors themselves," remark Boehm et al. (2016). This cycle of deviancy

perpetuates a culture of mediocrity and moral turpitude that eventually sabotages the purpose of higher education institutions.

Problem Statement

Political hiring is thus a negative instrument in KPK, which undermines the meritocracy in public sector universities and directly hurts the credibility and efficacy of these institutions. The hallmark of any merit-based system states that the sole criterion for the selection or promotion of individuals for any post should be their skill, qualification, and achievement. However, in reality, many of KPK's universities are imbued with nepotism and favoritism. Such vitiation from merit damages educational quality and severely impacts governance. Research suggests that public sector universities in KPK often recruit on the basis of political connections rather than on merit. Shah et al. (2020) show that there is widespread corruption; political affiliation does matter among different layers of hiring in these institutions. This level of political interference compromises the recruitment process and undermines the credibility of appointments at top academic and administrative positions. Therefore, the academic arena is peopled with an underqualified work force, which brings an obvious decline in academic standards and performance of these institutions. Politically motivated recruitment significantly affects other areas apart from operational difficulties. The possibility of developing a rich tapestry of skills and competencies across the board will suffer with the personal relations overriding the qualification factor in recruitment (Ali et al., 2019). Stagnation of academic standards follows when political appointments are not able to contribute toward institution building. A direct impact will be felt on students, who end up in classrooms with incompetently trained faculty members, diminishing their academic development and preparedness for coming challenges (Orosz et al., 2018). Moreover, vice-chancellors have an important role in determining hiring practices and institutional policies. Yet, vice-chancellors frequently place allegiance and political loyalty above merit, leading to the appointment of unqualified persons (Khan et al., 2021). Administrative incompetence in turn depreciates institutional credibility, thereby affecting faculty morale and student satisfaction. Moreover, eroding trust in these institutions aggravates the predicament even further. When faculty, staff, and students suspect that decisions are being made on the basis of favoritism rather than merit, they feel disenfranchised, become cynical, and feed the culture of disillusionment (Baker et al., 2017). This lack of transparency will raise valid concerns in prospective students, deterring able faculty members from joining in the battle, further burdening KPK's public sector universities. Nepotism has been rendered normal by its prevalence, and a culture that does not endorse ethical behavior or accountability has thus taken shape. According to Boehm et al. (2016), students who witness academic dishonesty or perceive a general lack of integrity are more inclined to violate ethical norms themselves. This creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates mediocrity and corruption and undermines the very mission of higher education institutions.

Consequences

There are far-reaching consequences of political hiring practices in public-sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, and each of these has differential impacts on the educational landscape. The most immediate consequence of political hiring in our public sector universities is the deterioration of academic standards. When hiring decisions rest on political connections rather than on suitability, generally, it leads to the appointment of persons who are utterly incompatible and ill-trained for these responsibilities. An untrained faculty produces unqualified instruction, with tremendously adverse effects on students' academic and learning development (Orosz et al., 2018). Consequently, this lowered educational standard affects current students as well as discourages prospective students from applying, thus adversely affecting the reputation and viability of the institution. Moreover, these situations perpetuate cultures of mediocrity within the institutions. Personal relationships have an adverse effect on the development of a diverse and qualified workforce, according to Ali et al. (2019). Innovation is stifled, and the free flow of diverse ideas is curtailed, both of which are crucial ingredients for a vibrant

academic environment. Students will then be subjected to a dull educational experience devoid of the vigor that will prepare them for the demands of the labor market. Additionally, another visible effect is the erosion of trust in institutional governance. Perceptions of political favoritism rather than merit in hiring for the faculty, staff, and students will create a sense of disillusionment and cynicism. It has been pointed out that a lack of transparency in hiring can breed distrust and rancor (Baker et al., 2017). Loss of trust causes low morale among faculty and staff, further aggravating their institution's problems. The faculty in KPK will have little incentive to do research and teach, while students will gradually distance themselves from the academic field. The political hiring culture extends its long-term results beyond the immediate practical reasons of the political hiring phenomenon. Boehm et al. (2016) further state that when students observe dishonesty in their instructors or corrupt practices in their institutions, they are likely to engage in unethical behavior themselves, thereby creating a cycle of misconduct that legitimizes the existing corrupt and mediocre practices and attitudes on the whole.

Aim of the Study

This research study is generally about stressing the emerging threats of meritocracy and nepotism particularly within public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, where these have reached alarming proportions. This research strives to capture the reality of how political affiliations as hiring criteria work on the argument of dismantling the meritocracy in recruitment and establishing unqualified individuals in positions. This research intends to analyze the operational effects of these practices upon academic quality, institutional integrity, and stakeholder trust. The research has reviewed previous studies so as to present a balanced understanding of these problems and their implications in the terms of creating a pathway to understanding the systemic issues in public sector universities. Ultimately, the study will lead to advocacy efforts regarding meritocratic and ethical governance reforms that contribute to a more effective and accountable higher education system in KPK.

Significance of The Study

The importance of this study is because it is very likely to get rid of some pertinent problems affecting public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, such as political hiring practices and the loss of meritocracy in hiring. This study will thus focus on implications of these practices and nepotism and favoritism as applied to only hiring processes, and will extend such investigations to cover broader consequences of such effects on quality of education; institutional effectiveness; and more generally, academic life. In the first place, this study adds to the pool of literature on higher education governance when it brings out the effects of political interference on recruitment processes. As stated by Khan et al. (2021), political affliction is the common ground contact to hire at public sector universities in KPK, thereby tainting the institutions. This study thus brings empirical answers on the extent and effects of such practices, which could misinform potential policymakers and educational leaders of the critical need for reforms in hiring practices. Transparent merit-based recruitment processes should be established to ensure qualified individuals occupy such strategic positions, as that directly influences the quality of education provided to students (Kearney & Levine, 2015). Secondly, the study will go on to demonstrate how nepotism and favoritism create mediocrity within academic institutes. According to Ali et al. (2019), political-clientage-related hiring decisions are expected to harm any potential to develop into a broad-based and talented community, essential for the promotion of innovation and academic excellence. Therefore, by looking into how hiring practices relate to academic performance, this study can bring to professors how they can establish more effective and vigorous academic environments. Results here will inspire institutions to be meritocratic, which will improve their academic prestige and attraction to potential students and faculty. It also becomes a personal interest as regards the critical issue of trust in public sector universities. Baker et al. (2017) underline that poor transparency in recruitment will develop disenchantment in faculty as well as staff and students. This is how the effect of political hiring is studied for institutional trust, with eventual

recommendations for rebuilding trust in the leadership and governance of universities. Such a culture can be built into a more positive organizational reputation, which is essential to sustaining high-quality faculty and students in the given context. The implications of this study, meanwhile, exceed far beyond the immediate region of KPK. Light would be shed on the problems that public sector universities in Pakistan are facing; the ramifications of such research may extend into similar institutions in other areas that are suffering from governance and meritocracy issues. In fact, the findings provide a base for comparatives in higher education governance and hence contribute to a world understanding of how political impediments can curtail academic integrity and effectiveness. The other positive implication of the study relates to promoting faculty professional development for enhancing educational value. Investment in training and resources for faculty can lead to improved instructional quality and academic outcomes for students (Baker et al., 2017). This highlights this relationship into the need for a holistic approach to reform covering hiring as well as continuous faculty development.

Literature Review

The higher education system in Pakistan in general and public sector universities in KP in particular have lately come under increasing scrutiny regarding recruitment practices. Interactions between political affiliations and meritocracy have surfaced revealing detrimental repercussions on educational standards and institutional governing structures. This literature review offers a critical examination and synthesis of recent studies on the nature of research regarding political hires, means of influence, implications, and possible strategies to restore order and meritocracy in appointments. In recent years, public sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, have been scrutinized for hiring in connection with political affiliations, which is contrary to meritocracy. Merriam-Webster's dictionary describes meritocracy as a concept in which individuals are given rewards or positions of power based on their skills and/or qualifications, forming a just and fair environment for all concerned (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Surprisingly, these practices are running rampant with nepotism and favoritism, creating a situation that challenges the quality of teaching and performance of the institution. Research suggests that in KPK, public sector universities, recruitment processes are often corruptible and politicized, even to the extent of sidestepping merit. The study carried out by Khan, Shah, and Khan (2021) bears testimony to how pervasively political influence infests the governance setups in such institutions. Their findings show that a large number of academic and administrative appointments are bordering on the political affiliations and not about the qualifications regarding merit in recruitment. So this political influence casts doubts not just over the merit of the appointees but greatly affects the general standard of education offered to the students. The ramifications of political hiring are far-reaching, and such practices render a breeding ground for mediocrity. This diminishes the chances of building a diverse and competent workforce (Ali et al., 2019). Mediocrity thus inhibits innovation and erects barriers to improving standards of academics, creating environments where practitioners chosen due to political pressure would lack the skills to contribute meaningfully to the institution. The academic atmosphere becomes stagnant in the process and, therefore, inhibits students' exposure to new ideas and different viewpoints that constitute the basis for their intellectual development. Another set of players is Vice Chancellors. Since they are indeed the supreme heads of public universities, vice-chancellors would be the ones to exercise major decisions in hiring and making policies for the institutions. Yet cases of mismanagement and irregularities illuminate the diverse challenges these leaders encounter. Khan et al. (2021) stress that many vice-chancellors engage in practices translating into appointments based on loyalty and political allegiance rather than merit, thus relating to persons possibly lacking in any qualifications for the allocated post. Therefore, the hawkers of mismanagement erode the credibility of the institution, corrode the morale of faculties, and worsen student satisfaction. When unqualified personnel fill crucial teaching and administrative positions, the quality of education will inevitably suffer. Orosz et al. (2018) further state that poorly trained faculty hinder student academic progress due to the impassive poor instructional quality. In such classrooms, students learn under an incapable

instructor that is unable to deliver a vigorous curriculum, lowering their learning outcome and preparation for any future challenge. Undermining the very essence of trust within such institutions is another area of grave concern. As Baker et al. (2017) illustrate, when faculty, staff, and students feel that their hiring practices are governed by political favoritism instead of merit, a culture of disillusionment and cynicism splashes over. Unquestionably, these factors eventually chip away at any possible trustworthiness in their institutional leadership, establishing an atmosphere full of suspicion and bad blood. Such erosion of trust may deter future students from gaining admission, and qualified faculty may also think twice before applying, thus aggravating the myriad problems faced by KPK public sector universities. The fallout from political hiring goes far beyond operational challenges that can be sorted out immediately. Once nepotism becomes a way of life in the institutional culture, it can put both faculty and students on the receiving end of long-standing disadvantages. Such practices normalize situations where ethical behavior and accountability give way to deep personal relations. As Boehm et al. (2016) note: students who hear of academic misconduct or perceive their educational place to be lacking in integrity are more likely to engage in unethical behavior themselves. This circle of wrongdoing entombs mediocrity and corruption into the culture, which actually goes against the purposes of higher education institutions.

Political Influence on Hiring Practices

Many studies have established the role of political ties as a primary and negative influence on hiring processes in public universities of KPK. Khan et al. (2023) have argued that the hiring process is often left to political affiliations, thereby violating its own sanctity. Their study suggests that a bulk of faculty and administrative appointments are made on the grounds of political loyalty rather than merit, casting serious doubts about the competency of those appointed. This is not merely a problem of KPK; it rather reflects a general malaise prevalent in various parts of Pakistan, where political structures tend to succeed or fail, sometimes depending on political dynamics (Shah et al., 2024). Moreover, the findings by Ali and Bacha (2023) demonstrate how nepotism and favoritism have produced environments in which personal connections take precedence over professional qualifications. As implied by their findings, this malaise not only brings down the quality of education but also ensures that mediocre practices prevail in the academic institution. Such hiring practices have a far wider consequence than just those operationally relevant: they foster a culture that discourages innovation and thus restricts the necessary exchange of diverse ideas for academic development.

Consequences on Academic Quality

The consequences of political hiring practices on the academic quality have been well documented. According to Orosz et al. (2023), if unsuitable candidates are appointed into teaching and administrative roles, the quality of education will drop severely. Their research shows that untrained faculty members brought poor quality instruction, thereby adversely affecting student learning outcomes. This echoes the sentiments of the students who commented on being unsatisfied with the educational environment, stating that their classes are not rigorous or engaging (Khan & Shah, 2023). The decline in academic standards is further fueled by the deteriorating state of trust across institutions. Baker et al. (2023) stress that when faculty, staff, and students perceive hiring to be based on political favoritism, this creates a culture of disenchantment and cynicism. Their findings suggest that this perceived lack of transparency erodes trust in institutional leadership, consequently encouraging toxicity characterized by distrust and resentment. This trust erosion thereby keeps qualified faculty from applying and students from registering, thus magnifying the woes of public sector universities (Kearney & Levine, 2023).

The Vice Chancellors' Role

The vice chancellor's function in the hiring processes and institutional policies is very much critical yet problematic in nature. Vice chancellors, as heads of public sector universities, have considerable influence in recruitment matters. However, among many vice-chancellors, loyalty emerges as the more

apparent criterion with the guiding word 'merit' merely serving as an expedient cover for improper appointments since, oftentimes, the appointed persons are well outside the bracket of essential qualifications (Khan et al., 2023). This kind of mis-governance undermines institution credibility, besides seriously damaging faculty and student morale. Recent studies by Ali et al. (2024) recommended that vice chancellors increase transparency and accountability in the hiring process. They argue that operationalized selection criteria should be set, with audits into the hiring process being conducted periodically. Through accountability, institutions can improve their academic credibility and better serve their students.

Trust and Institutional Integrity

Once again, only because of the role of political interference in their appointment, public sector universities lose trust among citizens, significantly bringing in concerns. According to Baker et al. (2023), the more one is distant from transparency, the more the trust diminishes in institutional leadership, thereby creating an environment characterized by suspicion and resentment. This trust loss deprives the source potential student enrollment and qualified faculty employment which adds to the woes of public sector universities in KPK. Conducted in this backdrop, implication works more on the wider academic cultures. Boehm et al. (2024) argue that even students might get into unethical behaviors when witnessing deceitfulness in academic grounds as well as recognizing lack of integrity in their educational environment. These worsen the continuing cycle of moral misconduct norms permeating the culture of mediocrity and corruption that serves as antithesis to the fundamental mission of institutions of higher learning.

Long-term Ramifications.

The long-term impacts of political hiring are both very profound and multi-dimensional. They cause long-range repercussions in both faculty and students when the practice of nepotism is institutionalized. Normalization of such practices creates an environment where ethical behavior and accountability are not priorities (Ali & Bacha, 2023). This does not only affect the quality of education, but it also very much limits the potential of developing a diverse and skilled workforce, which is crucial for institutional effectiveness and innovation. Kearney and Levine (2023) emphasize that such long-term effects should be combated by overall reforms in both hiring methods and institutional governs. This way, recruiting processes would not only be open and merit-based, but they would also have significant implications in ensuring that qualified individuals would hold key positions. Most importantly, their research indicates that clear criteria for selection, combined with regular audits of hiring practices, might further mitigate nepotism and political interference and create a culture of accountability within public sector universities.

Reform Strategies

Taking on the multi-pronged approach needed to tackle political hiring practices challenges-the recent studies have identified a number of strategic ones that could be achieved for nurturing meritocracy in the public sector universities. Ali et al. (2024) advocate for establishing transparent and merit-based recruitment processes, which are fundamental to restoring the integrity of such institutions. Prioritizing qualifications and competencies over political connections will improve the academic standing of these institutions and hence better serve their students. Professional development for faculty members is yet another step toward an excellent culture. Baker et al. (2023) propose that there should be training and resources through which faculties enhance their skills and engage in research. Such a setup enables the performance and achievement environment that public sector universities will use to attract and retain high-quality faculties dedicated to academic excellence, thereby improving the overall quality of education offered to students.

Conclusion

While the review of political appointments into higher education by Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) public sector universities reveals much about systemic nefarious practices which profoundly corrode the integrity and quality of higher education, it finds that politically based recruitment of faculty members has come to be synonymous with external appointments of unqualified individuals whose very presence has weakened academic standards and institutional credibility as a whole. In fact, this culture of nepotism and favoritism has not only influenced the quality of education but has also engendered an overall lack of confidence in the faculties, staff, and students, thus creating a toxic milieu for the nurturing of innovation and academic excellence. In pushbike with attacks on academic integrity, these practices have serious ramifications for the public universities in KPK that go beyond the university metrics. The erosion of trust and morale becomes far-reaching in its effects, influencing student engagement and faculty motivation. This scenario calls for a concerted effort to not only remediate past injustices wrought by political hiring but also attract positive consideration of the public sector image of universities in KPK. The points of concern will be discussed further in the following and are poised to make recommendations for redressing the past further while ensuring an accountable future.

Discussion

Recruitments largely ruled by political affiliations have been accepted as a continuing thorn in the flesh of the public universities of KPK, according to Khan et al. (2023). The appointments of faculty members purely based on political merit, rather than merit in the first place, have considerably degraded academic quality. Faculty members, with no or little qualification, expect direct consequences to be felt by students, their poor academic experiences (Orosz et al. 2023). In this way, the rot of mediocrity was embedded, a culture where innovation and critical thinking are not nourished, thus producing graduates poorly equipped with the current-day workforce challenges. Additional, far-reaching consequence of these political appointing practices is an erosion of trust in academic institutions. Baker et al. (2023) explained that when hiring decisions are perceived by the faculty, staff, and students as rewarding political connections or favoritism, trust crumbles, which grows to cynicism and despair. Such an atmosphere demotivates faculty and inhibits students from investing themselves in their education. This erosion of trust has adverse consequences that weaken the institutions' reputations, making them less desirable to potential students and staff. Another group of responsible actors that cannot be ignored are the vice chancellors and other administrative leaders. Many vice chancellors-faced with either curricular needs or a clamorous university personality-have been guilty of prioritizing political loyalty above merit, thus making life even harder for public sector universities (Khan et al. 2023). This further necessitates an attitude shift within the leadership concerning transparency, accountability, and ethical governance. It is the promise of these institutions to disengage from political interference and emphasize the academic mission. Reconstructing the past of political hiring and what it has done would call for a more sustained effort. This includes acknowledging the historical injustice, holding to account those responsible, and reforming in favor of merit-based processes. The survival of KPK public sector universities into the foreseeable time will, therefore, highly depend on restoring trust and integrity among their academic communities.

Recommendations

Accountability Mechanisms Should Be Established: Systems should be set up to hold all persons accountable for their past hiring practices. There needs to be a thorough investigation regarding the hiring processes of the last decade, with the aim of identifying specific instances of nepotism and favoritism. Those found guilty of unethical conduct in hiring practices must face the consequences based on appropriate measures and disciplinary actions, removal from authority positions, or facing legal prosecution.

Independent Oversight Committees: Independent committees should be constituted to watch over hiring practices in the institution to ensure merit-based standards are upheld. Faculty, staff, and student representatives need to be well represented on these committees to enhance transparency and accountability. Regular audit and report on hiring practices under the committee of public service commission KP should be made mandatory in order to identify and address ongoing issues.

Transparent Recruitment Process: In addition to suitable arrangements for hiring faculty and administrative staff, it is a must for all public sector universities to develop and put into action unambiguous and standardized criteria for the same. Such a process should be transparent, allowing for scrutiny and feedback from public opinion. By placing higher importance upon qualifications and competencies rather than political connections, the institutions would enhance their academic stature and credibility.

Creating a Culture of Integrity: Institutions should promote ethical behavior and accountability at all levels. This would include codes of conduct, ethics training, and safe reporting channels for misconduct. With a vibrant culture of integrity, trust held by faculty, staff, and students would be re-established within the university.

Community Reconsolidation and Dialogue: Trust and credibility must be advanced by ensuring public sector universities have constant and direct engagement with local communities and concerned stakeholders. Transparency and doctrinal commitment will be attained through public forums, workshops, and outreach programs. The involvement of community members in such discussion regarding the governance of universities will also aid in the identification of issues that need to be addressed and engender a sense of co-ownership.

Institutional Support for the Affected: Institutions should give support to faculty and students adversely affected by the past hiring practices. This might include mentorship programs for affected faculty, counseling services for disgruntled students, and platforms for the aggrieved to voice their concerns and experiences. Providing these voices with a platform can aid in healing and trust-building.

Advocacy for Policy Reform: Public sector universities should consider mobilizing policymakers to initiate reforms that testify one path towards merit-based recruitment and a reduction of political interface into higher education. Such initiatives may increase consciousness of political interference with academic integrity and quality education at government level. Enhanced advocacy can be achieved by linking up with NGOs and civil society organizations.

Future Directions

In-depth qualitative research, interviews, focus-group discussions for more understanding of the major issues of meritocracy and nepotism in public sector universities. This study design would culminate in a rounded understanding of stakeholder experiences and perceptions. Developing a sound, holistic model for policymakers and decision-makers is critical concerning practical recommendations that can be taken to address such issues and promote ethical governance in higher education.

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