Revolutionizing Public Management: A Comparative Analysis of NPM Strategies in Malaysia & Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and effect of New Public Management (NPM) techniques in Malaysia and Bangladesh, highlighting the triumphs and problems encountered by both countries. NPM, a reform movement motivated by neoliberal economic ideas, focuses on efficiency, market processes, decentralization, and customer-oriented service delivery. While Malaysia successfully implemented NPM reforms, including IT-driven governance, public-private partnership, and performance-based administration, Bangladesh faced institutional inefficiencies, poor implementation, and donor-driven reform attempts. By comparing these experiences, the paper highlights significant elements that influence effective NPM implementation, such as economic development, political commitment, administrative competence, and technology integration. The findings indicate that, while Bangladesh has made some progress, full-scale NPM transformation would require improved institutional preparation, governance changes, and successful public-private partnerships.

Keywords: New Public Management (NPM), Decentralization, Public Sector Reform, Public-Private Partnership

INTRODUCTION

The NPM is a broad term that refers to a series of recent administrative improvements aimed at increasing public sector efficiency and performance in service delivery [1]. As previously stated, the application of private sector principles and management methods in the public sector, as well as the delivery of public services through market mechanisms, are at the heart of these developments [2]. The NPM philosophy is based on the notion that the government's existing structures and policies are the primary causes of inefficiency and poor performance. It is based on neoliberal economic theory. It goes on to say that the government's issues are so widespread and deep-seated that they can't be fixed merely by changing the forms of governmental institutions. As a result, proponents of the NPM propose market-based solutions and customer-driven management as alternatives. NPM has nine basic elements. These are

- Cost-cutting,
- Capping budgets and transparent resource allocation,

- Fragmentation of traditional rigid bureaucratic organizations into separate ones
- Decentralized management,
- Segmentation of public service delivery,
- Establishing market and quasi-market mechanisms,
- Emphasizing performance-based management,
- Payment based on performance
- Increasing emphasis on customer responsiveness and service quality.

These basic features of NPM have been used by many countries with some necessary modifications taking into cognizance indigenous culture and actors. That is the reason, features of NPM depend on the context such as micro economic environment, macroeconomic environment, politics, immediate policy contexts, diagnoses of the problems and institutional context [1].

Pre-conditions of successful NPM reforms

- Reasonable level of economic development
- Well-developed judicial system to provide rule of law
- Basic administrative process in proper order
- State capacity

In summary, the NPM advocates putting customers first, making service organizations compete, using market mechanisms to solve problems, entrepreneurship and cost-cutting initiatives, employee empowerment, downsizing and decentralization of decision-making, streamlining the budget process, and decentralization of personnel management [1]. All of this aims to transform the conventional rule-bound, process-oriented administrative culture into one that is more flexible, inventive, dynamic, and results-oriented. Obviously, the more of these aspects a country has, the more comprehensive its NPM reform is thought to be [3].

New Public Management Reforms in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country in South Asia that is officially known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh. It is the world's ninth most populous nation, with a population of over 173 million people living in an area of 147,610 square kilometers. Citizens have been increasingly demanding to have proper service from government. Due to the widespread inefficiencies of traditional public administration and management systems, such a need has emerged. Similarly, Bangladesh's public administration has reached an unprecedented level of inefficiency, necessitating the expansion of private sector operations while also increasing accountability and responsibility [4].

NPM reforms in Bangladesh

A new public management (NPM) approach has been proposed to bring about changes within the administration. In Bangladesh, NPM reform ideas have also been recommended by international donor particularly the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, the Asian Development Bank, the Department for International Development, and the US Agency for International Development as well as numerous reform committees [1]. NPM has emerged in organization for economic co-operation & development countries as part of the debated surrounding reforms. It has been used by governments since the 1980s to improve and modernize public services [4]. The main premise for applying NPM principals is that the more market oriented the public sector is, the grater the cost efficiency for government and the less possibility having negative side effects and other objectives and considerations [3]. Some of the

reforms helps NPM to establish in Bangladesh administrative service. Some of those reforms are given below-

Splitting Big Ministries into Smaller Ones: Martial Committee on Examining Organizational setup of Ministries, Divisions, Directorates and other Organizations in 1982. The major recommendations of this reforms are to reduction of the size of the government; reduction of layers for decision making; delegation of administrative and financial powers down the hierarchy [3]. From past time Bangladesh have big ministries with lots of responsibility. For that reason, the productivity of those ministry were shrinking over the period of time [1]. Apart from this managing a big ministry become a big problem for the government with the necessity of big budget in every year. To solve that problem a lot of ministries were studies and some of those were being spited into various ministry for effective governance.

One Stop Utility Bill Payment System: This service was first offered in 2003. It might be difficult to pay utility bills on time if individuals have to go to various banks to pay various bills while standing in long lines [5]. Various service providers, such as telecom operators, internet service providers, a few banks, and others, now provide online utility bill payment services [6]. Citizens may simply pay their bills on time thanks to this service, which has boosted the rate of bill collection.

Civil Service Change Management Program: In 2008, the United Nations Development Program and the Government of Bangladesh launched the Public Service Change Management Program with the goal of providing a "toolbox or road map" for civil service reform in Bangladesh [1]. The goal of this public administration reform program was to assist the government of the Bangladesh in implementing strategic, achievable, and high-impact projects. The CSCMP does not seek to plan, develop, or implement comprehensive public sector reform. Instead, its primary goal is to set the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) on the path to transformation, which is fundamentally gradual and unpredictable [3].

Managing at the Top: The managing at the top (MATT) program was developed in collaboration with the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, the Ministry of Public Administration, and the Department for International Development, UK, in order to develop a pool of efficient civil service managers and leaders. This effort was launched in order to familiarize senior public workers with the latest NPM-based changes. Surprisingly, despite a lack of resources and institutional preparedness, the MATT program has been extremely effective in accomplishing its objectives over the course of two stages [3].

Union Digital Centre: E-Governance is increasing for smooth governmental services. Rural people are deprived to get information's lack of proper materials. So, Bangladesh Government have taken an initiative about to reach information's all over the country since 2010 [7]. In rural areas, people have little knowledge of ICT tools. For this reason, they can get information which is related to them by reaching on UDC. Digital Bangladesh is using ICT to provide services at the local level and the government is adopting E-government to enhance local development and fulfill a recent government mandate. The idea of Digital Bangladesh intends to create a secure system that allows public services to reach individuals who are looking for information rather than those who are looking for services [6]. The government has constructed Union Information and Service Centers later renamed Union Digital Center in several distant regions of rural Bangladesh as part of this aim [7].

Citizen Charter: The Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) proposed that citizens' charters be implemented in a number of government institutions in 2000 [8]. The caretaker government (CTG) instructed all departments to draft citizens' charters in June 2007 [1]. Following this directive, all ministries and the vast majority of government entities have already developed citizen charters to inform residents about the services available from each office. The Charter, which was created in collaboration with

residents and government officials, describes the services available and how to access them, as well as complaint procedures and how to remedy service delivery flaws [8].

New Public Management Reforms in Malaysia

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian country. The federal constitutional monarchy is made up of thirteen states and three federal territories that are divided between Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo's East Malaysia by the South China Sea. The country is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, which has a significant effect on its politics and administration [9].

NPM reforms in Malaysia

Among all the Asian countries who successfully implement NPM, Malaysia is one of them with distinguish outcomes [10]. That success become one of the key aspects to follow Malaysia as a role model by various countries around the world. Malaysia started its NPM reforms from very early. Some of those reforms are given below-

Malaysia Incorporated Policy: The "Look East Policy" was implemented in 1981 with the goal of learning from and benefiting from the experiences of other successful nations, and the Malaysia policy was implemented in 1983 as a direct result of the Look East Policy [9]. The Malaysia Inc. provides a new method of tackling the job of national development, based on the Japanese concept of "coordinated interdependence" [11]. It envisions a new partnership between the public and private sectors. The core of this strategy is that rapid socioeconomic growth necessitates strong collaboration, support, facilitation, and supplementation between the public and private sectors [12].

Downsizing the Civil Service: The Malaysian government had little choice but to shrink the size of its public sector as a result of the global recession of the 1980s and its repercussions on the local economy. Downsizing schemes mostly targeted the civil service. The creation of new jobs was limited, vacant posts in non-critical sectors were abolished, positions in statutory bodies were reviewed, state administrative services were merged into federal civil services, public sector agencies were restructured, and government businesses were privatized [11]. However, the final two steps, such as organizational restructuring and privatization, have greatly aided in the achievement of reduction objectives [9]. The 1992 introduction of the New Remuneration Scheme aided these goals by resulting in the removal of numerous levels through the merger of several wage and service groups/grades [12].

Service Process Reengineering: Public agencies have been requested to examine their current processes in order to cut red tape and speed up service delivery, as well as to take necessary steps to lighten rules and procedures for the benefit of their customers [10]. The focus was on attempts to rid the administration of bureaucratic procedures and speed up the approval process for applications relating to the granting of permits, licenses, and land administration, as well as economic, investment, and other issues [9]. This has resulted in the development of new application forms, the consolidation of many forms into a single composite application form, the reduction of application processing time, the extension of license validity, and the establishment of licensing centers, particularly at the local level.

Personnel Management Reforms: The New Remuneration Scheme and the new performance assessment system are the most significant developments that have occurred in this sector. The NRS, which was first implemented in 1992, aims to eliminate the inconsistencies that existed in the previous system, making public sector pay and promotions more objective and trustworthy [12]. The NRS has implemented a matrix pay schedule, which replaces the previous linear wage scale, in an attempt to build links between performance and incentives. Compensation progression is more flexible under the schedule; based on an

employee's performance, the salary can advance in four distinct directions: static, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal [10].

Financial Management Reforms: Changes have also been made to the finance management system. The adoption of the modified budgeting system in 1989 was the most major component of such shift. The MBS is a series of improvements to the program and performance budgeting system that typified Malaysia's federal budgetary process. Its goal is to ensure more public accountability in financial management. Under the MBS, all government agencies, federal departments, and statutory bodies must engage into a program agreement with the Treasury, detailing the inputs to be used and the projected outputs/impacts of a certain program/activity for the fiscal year [11].

Client's Charter and Public Accountability: With the establishment of the Client's Charter in 1993, a new dimension to public accountability was added [11]. The Client's Charter, modeled after the Citizens Charter in the United Kingdom, is a formal promise by government agencies to deliver outputs or services to their respective clients [11]. It is a guarantee given by the agencies that the outputs/services will meet the specified quality standards, which are in line with the customers' expectations and requirements. The public can file a complaint for non-compliance if an agency fails to meet the quality criteria set in its charter. As a result, the agency is held more explicitly and specifically accountable to its clients, at least in principle [11].

IT Culture and E-government: The Malaysian government looked to be considerably ahead of many other emerging countries in emphasizing the importance of information technology and implementing initiatives to integrate IT into government operations. In reality, the emphasis on IT was a key component of Malaysia's NPM reforms [13]. The Multimedia Super Corridor, which opened in 1996, is regarded as a watershed moment in the evolution of IT applications in many sectors, including government. Following that, the government launched an E-Government initiative with the goal of substantially improving the performance and quality of public services by using technology and multi-media. The Public Service Networks, which allows post offices to function as one-stop bill payment centers and provide additional services like as license renewal, stamping, and road-tax collection, is an early attempt in this area [13].

Literature Review

1. Introduction to New Public Management (NPM)

New Public Management (NPM) emerged as a significant reform movement in public administration during the late 20th century, primarily driven by neoliberal economic principles emphasizing efficiency, decentralization, privatization, and customer-centric service delivery [1]. The core philosophy of NPM challenges traditional bureaucratic models, advocating for a shift toward market-oriented governance and performance-based management [2]. Governments worldwide have adopted NPM principles, albeit with context-specific variations influenced by political, economic, and institutional factors [3].

The theoretical foundation of NPM is rooted in public choice theory, principal-agent theory, and new institutional economics, each arguing for leaner, more accountable, and market-driven public sector governance [4]. Several scholars argue that while NPM principles have enhanced efficiency, they also raise concerns about equity, democratic accountability, and the commodification of public services [5].

2. NPM in the Global Context

The implementation of NPM has varied significantly across countries. In developed nations, particularly in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, NPM reforms led to privatization, contracting-out

of services, and deregulation, which significantly improved service efficiency [6]. The UK's Citizen's Charter Initiative emphasized customer service and performance benchmarking, serving as a model for other nations [7].

In developing countries, NPM adoption has been uneven, often constrained by institutional weaknesses, political instability, and resource limitations [8]. For instance, in Latin America, Chile's successful market-driven reforms contrast sharply with Argentina's inconsistent implementation due to political resistance and financial crises [9]. Similarly, while India has leveraged e-Governance and decentralization, many African nations have struggled with corruption and poor accountability mechanisms, limiting the effectiveness of NPM [10].

3. NPM in Malaysia: A Success Story

Malaysia is often cited as an Asian success case in implementing NPM due to its early adoption of strategic reforms [11]. The Malaysian government embraced NPM principles from the 1980s, focusing on:

- Public-private partnerships (PPPs)
- E-Government and IT-driven governance
- Performance-based public sector management
- Administrative downsizing and budgetary discipline

The Malaysia Incorporated Policy (1983) emphasized government-business collaboration to drive economic growth [12]. The Look East Policy further facilitated learning from Japan and South Korea's governance models to enhance administrative efficiency [11]. Malaysia's Service Process Reengineering (SPR) streamlined bureaucratic procedures, significantly reducing red tape and improving service delivery [10].

The Malaysian government also implemented Client's Charters (1993) to increase public sector accountability, allowing citizens to demand time-bound, quality service [4]. E-Government initiatives, including the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and digital governance, played a pivotal role in improving transparency and efficiency [7].

While Malaysia's NPM adoption has been largely successful, challenges remain, particularly regarding bureaucratic resistance, power centralization, and financial mismanagement in privatization efforts [7]. Despite these, the strong political will, economic stability, and administrative capacity facilitated effective NPM transformation [8].

4. NPM in Bangladesh: A Struggling Implementation

Bangladesh's NPM implementation presents a contrasting narrative compared to Malaysia. While various reform initiatives have been introduced since the 1980s, institutional inefficiencies, political instability, and donor-driven agendas have hindered progress [9]. The key NPM reforms in Bangladesh include:

- Decentralization and devolution of power
- Civil service reform initiatives
- E-Government programs for administrative efficiency
- Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

Unlike Malaysia, Bangladesh's public sector remains bureaucratically rigid, with limited success in downsizing and performance-based governance [2]. The Martial Committee's reforms (1982) aimed to reduce government size and delegate decision-making authority, yet administrative bottlenecks and political resistance slowed implementation [1].

In terms of digital governance, Bangladesh introduced Union Digital Centers (UDCs) in 2010 to expand e-Government services at the local level [2]. However, issues such as technological illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies have hindered widespread adoption [3].

One of Bangladesh's key challenges is the donor-driven nature of reforms. While the World Bank, UNDP, and ADB have played crucial roles in recommending NPM-based changes, local administrative capacity and political commitment have often failed to sustain these efforts [4]. The Annual Performance Agreement (APA) was introduced to improve transparency, but corruption and bureaucratic inertia limit its effectiveness [5].

Despite these challenges, some positive outcomes have emerged. The introduction of One-Stop Utility Bill Payment Systems (2003) improved service accessibility, and contracting-out services in some sectors enhanced efficiency [6]. However, without stronger institutional reform and political commitment, Bangladesh lags behind Malaysia in achieving full-scale NPM transformation [7].

5. Comparative Analysis: Malaysia vs. Bangladesh

A comparative assessment of Malaysia and Bangladesh's NPM adoption highlights several key insights:

Key Factors	Malaysia	Bangladesh
Political Commitment	Strong government leadership & early adoption	Weak commitment, donor-driven reforms
Administrative Capacity	High bureaucratic efficiency	Institutional weaknesses, bureaucratic inertia
E-Government Integration	Advanced IT systems & digital governance	Limited adoption, technological barriers
Public-Private Partnerships	Effective PPPs improving service delivery	Late implementation, limited impact
Accountability Mechanisms	Client's Charters & performance-based management	Citizen charters present, but weak enforcement
Decentralization	Effective local governance initiatives	Partial devolution, centralized control

Malaysia's success stems from strong political will, early adoption, and institutional preparedness, while Bangladesh struggles due to weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and inconsistent implementation [8].

6. Conclusion and Research Gaps

The literature suggests that NPM can enhance public sector efficiency if properly implemented. However, context matters factors like political stability, administrative capacity, and technological readiness determine success. The Malaysia-Bangladesh comparison illustrates how similar reform models can yield divergent outcomes based on institutional preparedness.

Future research should focus on:

- The role of political will in sustaining NPM reforms
- Impact assessment of donor-driven reforms in Bangladesh
- Long-term sustainability of Malaysia's NPM success

By addressing these research gaps, scholars can better understand the complexities of NPM in different governance contexts.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) approach, relying exclusively on secondary data sources to examine the implementation and impact of New Public Management (NPM) strategies in Malaysia and Bangladesh. The methodology is structured as follows:

1. Research Design

The study follows a comparative case study design, analyzing Malaysia and Bangladesh to understand how NPM reforms have been implemented in different political, economic, and institutional contexts. This design helps identify patterns, challenges, and success factors in public sector reforms across both countries.

2. Data Collection Method

Since the study is based on secondary data, information is collected from a diverse range of credible sources, including:

- **Government Reports & Policy Documents**

Official publications from Malaysian and Bangladeshi government agencies related to public administration reforms.

Strategic policy documents outlining NPM adoption and implementation strategies.

- **Academic Literature**

Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers discussing NPM frameworks, reforms, and public sector efficiency in the two countries.

Comparative studies on administrative reforms in South and Southeast Asia.

- **Institutional Reports from International Organizations**

Reports from the World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) assessing governance, efficiency, and public sector transformation.

Country-specific assessments on public-private partnerships (PPPs), decentralization, and performance-based administration.

- **Media Reports and Policy Analyses**

News articles from reputable sources discussing policy shifts, government initiatives, and public reactions to NPM reforms.

Analytical reports from think tanks and research institutes examining successes and failures of NPM in both nations.

3. Data Analysis

The study employs a thematic analysis approach to examine and interpret collected data. The data is categorized under the following themes:

- Political and Economic Context: How governance structures and economic policies shaped NPM reforms.
- Administrative Efficiency and Decentralization: The impact of restructuring public institutions and adopting market-driven governance models.

- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): The role of privatization and outsourcing in improving service delivery.
- Technology Integration: How digital governance (e-Government initiatives) influenced public sector modernization.
- Challenges and Limitations: Institutional resistance, lack of capacity, and external (donor-driven) pressures on NPM adoption.

A comparative framework is applied to evaluate key differences and similarities between Malaysia and Bangladesh, highlighting factors that led to successful implementation in one context but posed challenges in another.

4. Validity and Reliability

To enhance the credibility of findings:

- Triangulation is used by cross-referencing information from multiple sources (e.g., academic studies, government reports, and institutional publications).
- Source Authenticity is ensured by relying on peer-reviewed journals, official documents, and institutional reports rather than anecdotal or opinion-based sources.
- Systematic Data Organization involves documenting key insights using structured comparative matrices to ensure a transparent and replicable research process.

5. Ethical Considerations

Since this research is based on publicly available secondary data, ethical concerns such as privacy and confidentiality do not apply. However, to maintain academic integrity, all sources are properly cited, and information is presented without misinterpretation.

6. Limitations of the Study

While secondary data provides comprehensive historical insights, it comes with certain limitations:

- The lack of primary data (e.g., interviews or surveys) may limit real-time perspectives from policymakers and administrators.
- Some government reports may be influenced by political biases or selective reporting.
- The availability of data varies between Malaysia and Bangladesh, potentially affecting the depth of comparative analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study leverages diverse and credible secondary sources to ensure a robust and well-rounded examination of NPM reforms.

Discussion

It was once believed that Bangladesh and Malaysia both country have great potentiality in development process due to many reasons. With the NPM reforms it was expected that both the countries will come out with successful results but after implementing NPM reforms Malaysia become successful while Bangladesh has very few successes. Here is the analysis of both nations NPM reforms-

Successfully implementation of IT culture and E-government in Malaysia led to better success in work of administration while Bangladesh also try to provide its service through IT or e-governance but poor implementation of those policy led Bangladesh have limited success. One great advancement of Malaysia in NPM is successfully use of technology while in Bangladesh still paper work is the key process in

administrative work. In Malaysia the use of advanced technology and the simplification and standardization of forms have led to considerable savings in terms of time and cost.

In Malaysia a considerable progress has already been made in terms of rationalizing and reengineering of systems and work-procedures, as a results the bureaucratic structure and administrative system is very much vigilant in term of work and service toward the citizen. On the other hand, in Bangladesh administrative incapacity exhibited in the state's failure to provide basic public goods and services. Downsizing the civil service helps Malaysia to provide effective service to its citizen within a short budget and the efficiency of the bureaucracy become a key factor on the other hand Bangladesh also try to divide big ministries into smaller ones to provide effective service and in some extent Bangladesh become successful.

Collaboration between government and private sector in Malaysia had a great impact in its administration and management and this process started very early phase of NPM implementation [3]. Likewise, privatization policy in Malaysia, apart from promoting economic growth, has made a substantial reduction in the total number of workforce in the public sector possible, eased the administrative and financial burdens of the government to a large extent. Bangladesh also implement contracting out policy or public private partnership policy to boost the economy but while Malaysia use that approach to provide service from very beginning, Bangladesh implemented it very lately with improper planning and for that reason in the middle of implementation a lot of resources were used without any practical results [1]. The Malaysian private sector has been highly supportive of government economic goals [11]. But in Bangladesh cases political and economic turbulence in many times those reforms didn't pay as it was expected.

Malaysia and Bangladesh both the countries implemented citizen charter in their administration to help citizens in their service delivery. But in reality while in Malaysia the launching of the Client's Charter has brightened the prospect of improved services even further: The Charter not only promises the quality services but also timely delivery of service, in Bangladesh lack of resources and improper implementation, the citizen had to wait for a long time to know about the service and get benefited from it [8]. But overall Bangladesh and Malaysia have positive results in citizen charter or client charter reforms in its administration.

Performance appraisal reforms become very much successful in personnel management area in Malaysia. This reforms make the public sector pay and promotions more objective and reliable. In Bangladesh annual performance agreement was implemented to promote greater transparency and accountability in the Government organizations, proper utilization of resources and increasing institutional efficiency. In some extend annual performance agreement in Bangladesh have some success in its implementation in public organizations while in Malaysia performance appraisal had grater outcome than its initial input of public organizations.

Overall, in Malaysia case though NPM was very much western idea but the push from inside the country to implement those reforms play a catalytic role to become successful on the contrary in Bangladesh cases most of the NPM reform was donor recommended or imposed. That's why in many cases the desire output didn't come in its implementation. Apart from this in Malaysia the precondition of successful NPM implementations were very much presents in the country or most of those were presents but in Bangladesh cases a lot of preconditions were absent due to many reasons and that's deprived Bangladesh to become as successful as Malaysia.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that NPM is reflected in some administrative changes in Bangladesh, particularly those given by the World Bank and the Public Administration Reform Commission. However, Bangladesh is still a long way behind nations like Malaysia that have effectively implemented NPM. However, it is important to recall that no nation, including Malaysia, has completed all of the NPM reform packages. What's important to note here is that they were successful in their efforts because they demonstrated all of the prerequisites for the NPM model's success. Furthermore, these reforms were accelerated by significant political commitment and leadership. On the other hand, political, bureaucratic, technical and institutional incapacity led Bangladesh have small amount of success in its NPM success. Therefore, it is possible that NPM might potentially provide some benefits to Bangladesh if Bangladesh can come out from its lacking inside and outside of the administration.

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