

Higher Education in Pakistan: Ills and Remedies

THE ESSAY

During the second world war, Churchill received a message from Hitler. Hitler made him an offer if Churchill did not bomb German Universities, he would also not destroy his ones. Churchill immediately accepted his offer and said if England was destroyed and Cambridge and Oxford Universities were spared then English Culture would also survive. This is the importance of higher education. Even after defeat, Germany restored its position on the victory stand only because of her universities. Higher Education is the only way to success and prosperity. It not only helps in ensuring the economic development of a country but also builds the character of a person and a nation. Prosperous countries world-wide pay due importance to higher education. Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing problems in higher education due to outdated curriculum, poor infrastructure, expensive education, and lack of efficient human resources. These ill have drastic impacts; immediate remedies are introducing modern curriculum, improving infrastructure, offering affordable education and hiring efficient human resource. Unless the issues of higher education are addressed properly, Pakistan can neither become prosperous nor respectable.

First come the ills in which outdated curriculum stands prominent. The syllabus of most of the Pakistani universities is old and outdate. For instance, old syllabus is there in arts and social sciences. Theory without application exists. Even a master in English cannot speak, read or write properly. Whereas our counterpart, Indians, are dominant in middle east in education and services. Similarly, our education system is teacher centered not student oriented. The teacher takes the leading role in class and the students have to listen to his instructions. He is the one who teaches, he is the one who sets the papers. He is the one who grades it. There are no open book exams. There is no external evaluator. This forces the students to keep in good terms with their teacher by hook or by crook. In the same way, our curriculum lacks analytical skills. The course does not give real life problems to be solved by the students; There are no projects and there are no logical tasks to perform. A law student has to cram laws without any understanding of the rationale behind them. Finally, there is a wide gap between industry and academia in our universities. For instance, a student of Fashion Design is unable to find any placement or exposure in fashion industry. In Business Studies, a student can neither find a placement nor can he

start any business by himself. Therefore outdated curriculum has created a big hurdle in the effectiveness of higher education in Pakistan.

The second ill of higher education in Pakistan is poor infrastructure. Most of the universities lack purpose built campuses. There is almost no facility for disabled students. There are no elevators and ramps for such students in the universities. Unfortunately, the elite universities like FAST, NUST and EME have no such facility. As a result, these students suffer ongoing challenges in terms of getting education at universities. Similarly, there are limited labs and laboratories. There are more students to accommodate in limited space. For instance, in medical schools one dead body is surrounded by few doctors to examine who come first. Rest have to wait or adjust. So is the case with engineering labs. There are few gadgets for scores of students. Even the students of literature do not have the opportunity to borrow books from the library because there are only one or two copies available on the same subject. In this way, the students who have no proper access to labs and libraries cannot conduct research properly. Apart from purpose built campuses and modern labs, the universities have mostly unhygienic environment. Their cafeterias and washrooms always create troubles for

students. Most of the universities' cafeterias are in open areas with unhealthy food which becomes the cause of many diseases. The washrooms are so smelly that it is hard to stand there for seconds and breath. Therefore, lack of proper infrastructure creates hurdles in the aims of higher education in Pakistan.

The third ill inflicting the higher education in Pakistan is the question of affordability. In past, universities were supported by the government. Any person from any class could go for any education on merits otherwise on self-finance. However, in the present times when the government is already under the burden of fiscal deficit, it is impossible for it to support the public colleges or universities. Resultantly, students have to bear the burden of high fees. The cost of fees for Fashion Design is generally higher, ranging from 45,000 - 50,000 per semester. Moreover, there are almost no travel discounts for majority of the students. Except for few cities, students from rural areas have to bear the brunt of massive transportation costs. Unfortunately, unlike developed countries, Pakistani students have very limited access to student support programs. For example, HEC (Higher Education Commission) announces stipend for students pursuing higher education every year, but the available scholarships

are just a fraction of the majority studying in universities. Nor do the banks offer any student loans to the needy. Lastly, online education - which reduces transportation expenses - is no more promoted by the universities except for some natural calamity ~~or~~ or pandemics. The corona pandemic was a blessing in disguise so far as online mode of learning was concerned. However, its benefits were not extended after the pandemic was over. Physical classes, thus, cost the pockets of Pakistani students and hampers their smooth learning process. All these reasons make education expensive for the common residents of Pakistan.

Finally, there is lack of efficient human resource not only in higher educational institutes in Pakistan but also in Higher Education Commission (HEC). On one hand, universities are still interested to hire more and more visiting faculty to cut their expenses. They are paid minimum wages for each lecture. The six months salary of a visiting faculty is almost Rs. 110,000 whereas that of permanent faculty is Rs. 460,000. The duration of teaching of visiting faculty cannot be claimed as experience anywhere. This is the worst discrimination against the educated youth. And this leads to lack of dedication and focus towards their work. They can never show efficiency

because of their exploitation. This is also one of the main reasons of brain drain of intellectuals and youth from Pakistan.

In such environments students are only gathering information but not knowledge.

Moreover, there is a significant absence of structured teacher training programs, leading to an unskilled faculty that struggle to keep pace with modern educational standards. Teachers often rely on outdated methods, failing to engage students with

innovative pedagogies. Bahria University is the exceptional case which offers 15

days teacher training program which is arranged on its own. Furthermore,

faculty members in many universities are overburdened, as institutions face a shortage of qualified staff. Professors

are often tasked with handling multiple classes, administrative duties, arranging seminars and orientations, and research projects,

which dilutes the quality of education they can provide. This heavy workload

results in burnout, reducing their ability to focus on student mentoring and

research. Nepotism further aggravates this issue, as unqualified individuals are some-

times hired due to personal contacts / connections, further weakening the academic

environment. Lastly, the irresponsible attitude of permanent faculty adds to the problem.

Many tenured professors, secure in their

positions, lack the motivation to remain active in teaching or research, becoming indifferent to professional development or student needs. Students, aware of the power ~~is~~ imbalance, often hesitate to disagree with their teachers for fear of retribution, as the same teacher grades their exams. Displeasing a teacher can risk their marks, creating an unhealthy atmosphere of submission over intellectual dialogue. Addressing these issues requires reforms focused on faculty development.

Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing problems in HE due to outdated curriculum, poor infrastructure, expensive education, and lack of human resource. These causes have drastic impacts. Immediate remedies are in the form of introducing modern curriculum, improved infrastructure, affordable education, and hiring efficient human resource.

First comes the remedy for outdated curriculum. Modern and updated curriculum must be introduced in our higher education. The syllabus must be revised every year. The services of subject experts around the world can be taken in this regard. A similar activity was performed at lower education in Punjab when the provincial government hired the services of the British Council in 2011 by Directorate of Staff Development (DSD). Master trainers trained the heads of

the state schools and then the training further went to the levels of teachers.

There were significant changes brought in the course book of schools. The standard of the content was made as per the international requirements.

In this connection the government took the services of a renowned educationist Micheal Barber, former educational advisor of ex PM Tony Blair. Such foreign collaboration to improve the syllabus can also be organized for higher

education. Similarly, life skills based education should be promoted instead of cramming based subjects. Students must be taught problem solving skills. Critical thinking and analytical reasoning should be developed among the students of higher education. Their exams may include those questions that test these abilities. Such skills are tested in exams have been

introduced in class 9 and 11 of Federal Board of Pakistan. Finally there should be industry academia link. This link is present in few universities of Pakistan such as LUMS and IBA where students in their last semester often get placements in industry. Such incentive must be provided to other degree programs so that the students can get ~~their~~ first hand experience in job industry.

By following this guideline, one of the

major ills of the higher education in Pakistan can be overcome.

Second comes the remedy for poor infrastructure. Budget should be allocated to build purpose built campuses. There must be the provision of facilities for the physically disadvantaged students. The building must have working elevators, ensuring they can access all facilities without compromising their self-respect or confidence. Features like ramps, accessible washrooms, and functional elevators are essential to ensure that handicapped students can navigate the campus independently. This can prevent them from becoming objects of sympathy among peers, allowing them to focus on their studies without facing unnecessary challenges or dependency. Similarly, budget should be allocated to provide modern laboratories and research facilities to the universities. Laboratories are not well-equipped to carry out any experiments required for the given syllabus. Due to which students often struggle with outdated tools and resources, hampering their practical learning experiences. In 2024 recently HEC demanded 125 million rupees from the federal government, but in return, the federal government first allocated only 26 million rupees, and after some table talk, they finally

agreed to give them 65 million rupees same as previous year. With this budget Universities are unable to build modern laboratories. The budget should be increased to meet the demands for equipping labs. Alongside equipping labs, universities should offer travel expense reimbursements for students who need to travel for research, internships, or collaborative projects, ensuring that financial barriers do not limit their educational opportunities. Finally, hygiene should be the top priority of the universities as health is wealth. Students spend most of their time in their universities, but the quality of food in the university is far below than the international recommended standards. A separate staff should be assigned for the cleaning purposes. Cleanliness must be observed in classrooms and washrooms so there is a better learning environment and fewer sick days. By addressing these areas, universities in Pakistan can create a healthier and more conducive learning environment, significantly improving the overall well-being of students and staff.

Third comes the remedy for unaffordable education. Firstly, student support programs should be introduced

in universities. Education is the right of every individual but even a middle class isn't able to afford education nowadays. The government and the universities should start student support programs to encourage such students to join education programmes. Easy loans by banks, and private organizations should come forward in offering financial support to poor students. For example, in King Edward University, Lahore, there is a programme by alumni of the University who offer loans to their students who are unable to pay their educational expenses. Secondly, If students are provided with scholarship programs it will increase affordability of the parents and more students will be able to study. The Higher Education Commission should establish clear, merit-based, and need-based criteria for scholarship eligibility. It must simplify the application process and ensure widespread awareness. Apart from national scholarships, there are many international scholarships available but students can not avail them due to difficult processing. Thirdly, students' travelling expenses can be reduced by providing discount travel cards. Travel discount cards for students who use public transport to reach universities must be provided. These cards will make travel convenient and affordable for the students, from

far flung areas, so that there are no hurdles for them in reaching the institutes. A train station in Japan had plans to close but discovered that a school going girl was the only one using it with no other reliable means of getting to school on time. For her, the station was kept running until she graduated. So, this is the way how access to education is made easier so that as many students can get benefited as possible. Finally, universities must promote Online education. This will not only reduce the travel expenses of students and staff, but also the running costs of universities. Universities should organize online classes three days a week at least for theory based lessons. Therefore, in this way the issue of expensive education can be resolved.

Fourth comes the remedy for inefficient human resources in Pakistan's higher education sector, a comprehensive strategy centered on hiring and developing a skilled faculty is essential. First and foremost, universities should prioritize the appointment of permanent faculty rather than relying heavily on visiting or adjunct teachers. Permanent members

tend to be more invested in the institution, allowing them to build long-term relationships with students and contribute meaningfully to the academic environment. This stability is crucial for maintaining the continuity and quality of education. Secondly, promoting teacher training programs is vital to ensure that faculty members remain updated on modern teaching methodologies and subject expertise. Regular training sessions, workshops, and professional development programs will enhance the pedagogical skills of teachers, enabling them to offer a richer learning experience. Furthermore, faculty members should not be overburdened with multitasking, such as managing both administrative responsibilities and teaching large scale loads. By limiting their tasks to what they excel at - teaching and research - faculty can focus on providing quality education and conducting impactful research. Lastly, there must be regular checks on the performance of permanent faculty to ensure they remain engaged and effective. This can include annual reviews, student feedback systems, and performance-based evaluations. These accountability measures will prevent complacency and encourage continuous professional growth. By hiring efficient human resources and supporting their development, universities can

create a dynamic and productive educational environment that benefits both students and faculty.

To conclude, the major ills of higher education are outdated curriculum, poor infrastructure, expensive education, and lack of efficient human resource.

In the presence of these issues, development in Pakistan seems a distant dream. Therefore, serious efforts must be taken to address these issues. Introducing modern curriculum, improved infrastructure, affordable education, and employing efficient human resource are the remedies available to counter the ills of higher education in Pakistan. Only those nations earn respect and prosperity which focus on their higher education.

After World War II, Britain was deprived of all her colonies and source of raw material and revenues, she emerged as a respectable nation due to her excellence in higher education. Even today, the majority of population aspires to get a British degree from Oxford or Cambridge. Even today, the British curriculum rules the lower education in the form of Cambridge O' and A' levels exams all over the world. It is the education that gives prestige; it is the education

that gives respect. It is never too late to pledge for a new change to create a new tomorrow. Where there is a will there is a way, regardless of the obstacles and hinderances we can also definitely achieve our goals.