

**SEMINAR ON:
IMPROVEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SINDH**

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As we are all well aware, the present state of education, in general, in Pakistan is in dire straits. It is in great need of a thorough overhaul at all levels-a task that needs to be carried out with missionary zeal. The basic foundation of education at the primary and secondary levels leaves much to be desired. It is weak riddle with outdated teaching methods and curriculum leaving it open to corruption and misuse. It is on just such a wobbly foundation that we have built the edifice of our higher Education. We cannot expect miracles to happen from such a situation.

Therefore, at the outset, let me state with sincere conviction that we need to pay serious attention to the state of affairs in the education sector at the primary and secondary levels. That is not to say that there are no fine schools in the country. Obviously, there are private schools that are doing an excellent job but they basically cater to the needs of the upper and middle classed and their fee-structures are quite high. This essentially leaves out the majority of our citizens out of schools which tend to private them with a half-backed education, this, unfortunately, is also true of our government collages and partially true of some universities where cheating and other unfair means are accepted norms. The ultimate goal a degree by any means - a degree that will open the doors to, hopefully, a cushy government job or at least a job that can help them eke out a living. Acquiring knowledge is, if at all, only of secondary importance.

This is an unfortunate situation, especially in the light of the fact that colonialism, with its entire fault, had at least left us with a legacy of a strong education system. Instead of building up it and reaping the inevitable benefits in due course of time, we have mauled it to an extent that we reap its bitter fruit now.

Quality education, in today's globalization scenario, is the need of the day. It is the only way that we can be admitted to the comity of prosperous nations instead of being left behind. Quality education can ensure a bright and happy future for our coming generations. Instead of seeking greener pastures elsewhere, our people would be in a better position to put in their best efforts in the uplifting of our country and putting down firm roots in our own country. We would not need to seek out quality of life outside our borders.

This would all require Herculean efforts but we do not have much of choice if we do not want to be left behind. We need to dig in and concentrate on the task at hand- it is our national duty and moral obligation and is something that we owe to our children.

Efforts have been made by the various governments since partition to frame policies for the improvement of education, but this has mainly been a hit or miss affair. The benefits have been few and far between and if any, usually lop-sided.

Having said all this, I would now like to have connection on the main subject matter of my paper which pertains to Higher Education. Let me first lay out the common problems that we face and the efforts being made at various levels to address them. Let's touch on the overall condition of the Government affiliated Colleges. According to a report put by the Inspector of Colleges, University of Sindh, there are, at present, 67 government degree colleges affiliated with the University of Sindh and their status as under:

- 1) About half of the College Principals are either Incharge or Acting Principals.
- 2) There is an acute shortage of faculty in the science subject in the interior of Sindh.
- 3) In many of the college building, blocks for B.Sc. classes have been constructed but there are no B.Sc. labs.
- 4) The B.Sc. practical's are hardly ever conducted.
- 5) Even Intermediate labs are in poor shape.

- 6) Theory classes are also not conducted regularly. The students usually attend their respective colleges for the first time when they take admission. The only other time they than visit their colleges is when the examinations date is announced.
- 7) There is no check on the attendance of the students.
- 8) Many of the colleges do not have qualified Librarians.
- 9) There is an acute shortage of books prescribed by the University Syllabus.
- 10) There is al Lack of proper overall monitoring.
- 11) The Faculty does not take regular classes. Absenteeism is in common-place.
- 12) The Principals state that they have not received any allocation of funds for the purchase of scientific equipment, chemicals, etc. for the last 6/7 years. During 2007-2008, the colleges have received a certain amount of funds under this head. However, the conditions of the labs did not show any improvement.
- 13) Some of the college buildings were in highly dilapidated conditions and it was quite apparent that repairs had not been carried out for the last many years.
- 14) The Educational Department has upgraded many high schools to higher secondary level, but the Department has neither provided any additional faculty nor added any essential facilities such as libraries, labs, etc. This has caused a significant drop in the enrolment even in the Class XI and XII. Science Sections in the intermediate level has suffered badly.
- 15) Another disturbing trend is the functioning of the tuition centres in the morning hours in most cities and towns. This has caused many science teachers to go straight to these centres right after signing the muster roll in their respective colleges, some not even bothering to go their colleges. Some of these teachers even at private colleges in the morning hours when they are supposed to be teaching at their respective government colleges.

These are some of the problems occurring in the government colleges. To remedy these it is imperative that we maintain tight control over the administration of the colleges as regards both the students and the faculty. Faculty must be adequately trained in proper and more innovation methods of teaching. They must be paid handsomely to discourage them from straying too far from their proper jobs. Accountability must be enforced and good works

must be adequately rewarded. Serious efforts must be made to eliminate the rampant copy culture from our colleges through vigilance and strict enforcement of rules.

As a member/convener of the Vigilance Committee, I've been visiting Examination Centres in colleges for the last 2-3 years and I have found the situation going from bad to worse. In many cases, the Principals of Degree Colleges, Faculty, and the Administrative Staff even to the level of chowkidars and peons have been found to be hand in glove with the elements encouraging cheating in the examinations. Since these colleges come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Sindh, concerted efforts have been made in the past to contact the Minister of Education, the Secretary of Education, the Regional Director of Education who have all been invited to come and have discussion on evolving ways and means to contain copy culture, unfortunately, the response has always been lukewarm.

I would like to propose that a high powered committee be appointed by the Ministry of Education to:

- a) evolve a strategy to maintain checks and balances through out the educational system in the province.
- b) to enter into and have frequent dialogues with the Principals of the college vis-à-vis their problems and,
- c) to initially discourage and finally to completely eradicate the scourge of copy culture from our colleges.

Proper infrastructure should be provided through allocation of sufficient funds to cover costs of construction of college buildings, labs, purchase of books and equipment; hiring of the right faculty for the right jobs; etc.

UNIVERSITIES

Universities all over Sindh also face some serious problems. Fortunately, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) is doing a commendable job in remedying this situation. The (HEC s' main task obviously is to raise the standards of education all over Pakistan and to ensure quality education that can stand at par with

education levels in the developed world. It's Quality Assurance Procedures set down goals for academic and performance standards for both the teacher and the taught. Some of these standards and criteria concern, e.g. Curriculum Design and Organization labs; Students Support, Counselling and Guidance; the obtaining of PhD degrees by the faculty in their respective fields, etc.

HEC recommends that each department in the universities fill out certain proformas to assess Quality Enhancement and Assurance. These filled-out proformas would contain information, e.g. pertaining to Scheme of Studies; Course Information; Faculty Survey; Students Course Evaluation Questionnaire; Daily Progress Report, Self-Assessment Report for each Department; Course Quality Assurance and would go a long ways in streamlining and standardizing the educational system in our universities and institutes.

The HEC sends out teams to various public sector universities from time to time to check on the progress being made in the implementation of its recommendations.

The HEC also ranks the universities in terms of good performance which creates a competitive atmosphere and provides incentives to them for boosting up their performances.

Another way of motivating universities to improve their performance is that the HEC asks each of the universities to recommend the names of their 3 best teachers. Proformas are filled out by the teachers which are then sent out to the HEC in Islamabad. The HEC then marks these proformas according to points system and then picks out the one scoring the highest marks and nominates him or her as the Best Teacher of the Year. This teacher then gets an award of approximately Rs.3 lacs for his or her performance.

Another sector where the HEC has made a great impact is in the field of research. Research culture in Sindh (as well as in the

rest of Pakistan) was almost non-existent in our institutes of higher learning. This culture has been given a face-lift. HEC has made it mandatory for all teaching faculty members to write research articles and have them published in journals of repute, both local and international. A fixed number of research papers have been prescribed for the promotion of each position of an Asst. Prof; Associate Professor and Professors. This research culture is gaining a foothold in the University of Sindh and in the next ten years we hope to gain 80% PhDs amongst our faculty. At present we have about 30% PhDs. Very attractive pay packages are being offered to faculty who pursue or have obtained PhDs. Professors in BPS-22 are being offered the ranks of Emeritus Professor and those in BPS-21 the ranks of HEC Meritorious Professors. As an added incentive, these Meritorious Professors may very shortly be upgraded to BPS-22 Handsome pay packages under the Tenure Track System are being offered for those faculty members who have foreign PhD degrees.

The HEC has also been providing access to the HEC digital library which includes 18000 on-line journals in all fields of knowledge and 40,000 e.-books.

By and large, the HEC has streamlined higher education in the universities in Pakistan, including Sindh. The process may be a bit slow, but a good start has been made. Unfortunately, most of these procedures for providing qualitative education are sadly missing in our colleges.

HEC's policies regarding plagiarism brook no compromise and have in some cases resulted in dismissal from services for the offending faculty.

There are many more steps taken by the HEC in improving the quality of education in our institutions of higher learning. HEC must also remain open to feedback form the universities and must recognize their individualities which may come from their unique locations. These universities must then be dealt with on a case-to-case basis.

We must continue to enforce a mindset for research culture in our universities. Our institutions must become hubs of the latest state-of-the-art research which can directly influence society at large. Without proper research, stagnation will set in and all sectors of our society be it social, business, science and technology, will be adversely affected.

We must continue to enforce a mindset for research culture in our universities as English has become an international language. Fluency in English will also open up access to vast fields of literature and knowledge on virtually every topic under the sun from all over the world.

It is also my fervent hope that we may evolve a curriculum throughout our educational system that can also teach our students to not only be competent in their respective fields but also to become better human beings and useful citizens of society at large.

Under the limitations of this paper, these are only some of the problems that this paper can highlight and offer some solutions. I hope we continue to struggle, both individually and institutionally, to try to improve the quality of education in Sindh so that it can enable our citizens to be more open to new ideas; develop a sense of tolerance for differing views; and to lead happy and fruitful lives.

THANK YOU