System and Reforms of Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

Since the creation of Pakistan, higher education system has been a matter of great concern among various circles in Pakistan, especially among the educationists, Government, policy makers and general public (Isani, 2001). Ranging from socio-economic system to religio-cultural lives of people (ranking in human development, 2001), the issue of higher education has several dimensions (Isani, 2001). In 1974, to address various challenges in higher education, the Government of Pakistan established University Grant Commission (UGC) (GOP, 1974). The main aim of UGC was to maintain standard of education and establish a uniform policy all over the country (Government of Pakistan, 1973, 1974). However, having no real financial powers, the UGC remained an ineffective institution (UGC, 2000). Resultantly, the standard of higher education in Pakistan declined considerably (GOP, 1976). Therefore, in 2002, the government established Higher Education Commission (HEC). HEC paved the way to revitalize invigorate, support, legalize, standardize, sponsor and made functional the endeavors undertaken by the various respective intuitions quiescent culture into mobile and active gestures (World Bank, 1994). As the title indicates, this paper is an attempt to analyze the reforms in higher education system in Pakistan.

Key terms: Higher Education Commission, brain drain, E-Learning, Education Polices Quality Education.

Introduction

Pakistan's educational history stretches over the span of 64 long years, many efforts and endeavors remained under progress during this span, but most of such efforts didn't come out successful. Political set up remained the least, army incursion and topple downs made the democratic regimes squeeze not beyond 35 years. The agenda of reforms took a long way right from 1948 to 1985, three full-fledged constitutions promulgate during the years 1956, 1962, and 1973, (GOP, 1956,62,73) four supra-constitutional frameworks launched by the military rulers in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999 (GOP, 1958, 69, 77,99) there seems to be less agreement on a mutually accepted constitution. Agricultural and land reforms were repeatedly talked about during (1953, 1958, 1969, 1972), administrative reforms agenda came under discussion during 1959, 1973, local government reforms were undertaken during the army regimes (1962 and 2000), industrial reforms were negotiated in 1972, financial sector reforms did came up in 1972. However, in spite of all these changes, the desired objectives did not achieve.

The reforms agenda did not end it did include the collection of half hearted, terminated and abandoned efforts. There are many reports of commissions, panels, committees, task forces which had never been attended which comprises the Commissions of on Agriculture (1987), Commission of Local Government (1983), and Commission on Education (1959). There remain certain policies and plans which had long term effects to yield provided these have been attended to in the manner it was desired like education policies of 1970, 1972, 1979, 1992 and 1998 (GOP, 1970, 72,79, 92, 98). The proposals and suggestions put forth were not narrow, interim in nature but were open and had very timely and positive results to yield. The inadequacy of the efforts may be sought in the fact that these lacked the way of perception and conception. These were supposed to be focused on change of attitude, acceptance with vigor and courage to undertake such reforms in the interest of the system at first level and national interest at the foremost level. Successive change of government undertaking of new reforms, accepting political intervention, honoring of vested interests lack of will and expertise did allow to go for the fulfillment of ostensible and proximate goals.

This gloomy picture raises doubts to go for and attempt another sagacity of reforms round. It would be wise to question that what would make the current initiatives to be a success just contrary to the earlier made efforts or initiatives. One will have to think what conditions, measures; approaches should be followed to make the plans in pipeline to be a success. There is a need to have a look at the agenda of reforms of the countries of the region and neighbors at the foremost before embarking upon any new agenda, it would also be a point to ponder that what measures didn't work well for other countries, what came out to be a success. The lessons learnt by the other countries should be adhered to even for necessitating and originating new reforms agenda. It would not be out of place to mention that the positive measures taken by the earlier regimes should not be ignored rather these should be sponsored and supported as the initiating government would have been gone for. A strategy now to be followed should be need based, time tested clear and coherent (GOP, 1994). The implementation strategy must be worked out and conveyed to those who are supposed to implement.

1. The needs should be clearly defined in terms of the devised strategic plan and the implementers should be motivated to mobilize to seek possible support from protagonists.
2. The process of reforms should be strengthened to (GOP, 1997) achieve the set goals and objectives.
3. This process should inspire, support, reinforce structure, and encourage the growth in the positive directions.

The champions concerned with implementation of the novel new and innovative agenda should include; government as well the private sector institutions, the advocacy groups, the print and electronic media. Pakistan inherited its systems from British colonial era – the same is true for education sector. This sector has been under severe criticism since the emergence of Pakistan, as not coming up to the level of aspiration to the general masses and the education experts in the country. After the passage of 63 long years, it becomes imperative to take stock of the reforms implemented and their effects be lime lighted. This paper aims to explore the efforts made to reform the higher education in Pakistan.

Objectives of Research

This research has been intended to explore various dimensions of reforms suggested and undertaken for over the span of time of higher education in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The following parameters reveal the significance of the study.
1. the reforms undertaken may be lime lighted;
2. the fate of reforms may be made known;
3. the proposed reforms would come up and may be thrashed out for their implementation;
4. the comparison of current and past endeavors would be possible.

Method of the Study

Population

Staff of University of Education, the Punjab and Management & Technology formed the population of the study.

Sample

Fifty staff members from each university were taken at random.

Procedure of the Study

Two procedural steps were followed for the conduct of the study:
1. The scrutiny of the UGC documentary endeavors was undertaken for the revamping of the system of higher education in Pakistan.
2. A survey of the beliefs of the staff of the universities selected was taken.
3. The questions on already proposed models and prevalent practices were asked. Where the response was supportive and more than 75 percent, that has been accepted as the proposal to be made

Part I

Formerly University Grant Commission and currently Higher Education Commission facilitate the tertiary education in Pakistan. Its key purposes include promotion of the research culture through centers of excellence throughout the Universities of Pakistan. Knowledge based economy is being promoted through novel measures like awarding doctoral scholarships for inland and education abroad and grants for the presentation of research papers at the international forums.

HEC Programs and Projects

The running of following programs may be credited to HEC:

- Capacity building of the faculty
- Under taking of revision of curriculum
- Development of infrastructure of higher education
- Award of indigenous scholarshipshttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_Education_Commission_of_Pakistan - cite_note-0
- Grant of foreign scholarships
- Patent filing support
- Travel grant for participation in the conferences
- Increasing collaboration between industry and university research
- Bringing in technology reforms

Information Technology Reforms

The following reforms have been brought into the system - also known as e-reforms.

1. Development of country wide educational research network
2. Bringing in the reach of the scholars the use of digital sources
3. Developing a research repository for the potential researchers
4. Making learning possible through e-resources
5. Making available the opportunity of video conferencing

Achievements

The establishment of HEC yielded a substantial affect on the higher education in Pakistan. For instance:

a)   Each and every student of the public sector universities has been given access to e-textbooks and research articles from international research journals - .

b)   Enrolment to the universities have been quadrupled over a span of five.

c)   Promotion of research culture has resulted into the enhanced number of research publication giving birth to new knowledge and courage to others to write and contribute to the world of knowledge.

d)   Even a long span could not get any Pakistani university some place among the high ranked universities of the world. Five Pakistani universities including National University of Science and Technology could get a standing position among the top 300 universities of the world.

e)   To bring in quality into teacher education programs, UNESCO has supported a project in the pre-step for the initiation of B.Ed elementary honors which would have international recognition.

f)   As an innovative step, HEC has financed around 5000 PhD scholars for their study in advanced countries. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Fulbright Scholarship, a prestigious scholarship of the world, is being exploited for the Pakistani scholars through the joint funding of HEC/USAID.

g)   HEC has given affiliation to around fifty universities for offering new novel market oriented programs.

The innovations brought about by the HEC may be termed as the 'peaceful intellectual revolution'. Pakistan's intellectual elite has contributed a lot towards the addition to the knowledge base through their research journals appearing in the reputed research journals. These endeavors have given birth to the concept of knowledge sharing and elite as the international property. Furthermore, higher education has entered into the competition in offering programmes, hiring the faculty and keeping the facilities for the students updated (GOP, 1988).

Video Conferencing

It had been an innovation that the scholars from world over were requested to give away the lectures utilizing the tele conferencing mode as an interactive media, this process stated in September, 2006 adding to the treasure of recorded eminent scholars lectures from with in the country and abroad. These lectures would help develop the basic concepts, habit of critical thinking to be in with the cut throat competition in varied areas of knowledge. These lectures from the Nobel Laureates, eminent scientists and researchers are expected to be initiated involving the maximum scholars of the high ranking universities of the world.

University of Education and some other intuitions alike have been provided with the opportunity to utilize the interactive sessions for the conduct of conferences, seminars, symposiums, round table conferences, interactive sessions, lectures, meetings and other events etc through video conferencing.

Part-II

Pakistan's narration of edification in expressions of investment and planning dates back to 1947 with the thoughtfulness of universal primary education; education of citizenship, eradication of illiteracy and making available the education of technology following the high level institutions of technology. The first resolute attempt in the policy making and giving the country a system of education was geared by the Sharif Commission (the first commission on education) on Education, 1959. This report covers the promotion of agro-technical education, science education, development of curriculum, switching over to three year degree programs, four year programs for engineering and medicine. These proposals were extremely relevant, had these been adopted.

After the Sharif commission report or the report of National Commission on Education, several succeeding policies did emerge time to time, e.g., education policies of 1970, 1972, 1979, 1992 and 1998. The targets set in each of the policy were arduous and grueling. All these policies shared the same fate because sound planning and investment which was needed was missing, which could have supported the take off of higher education. The new universities opened could not deliver because the earlier universities were functional and the problems faced by those universities were not addressed the way those should have to be (*The Education Policy* 1972-1980, p. 13).

It is noteworthy that these were not only the educational policies; the financial plans in succession of five years were given alongside the educational policies. The plans did highlight common problems faced by education in the broad-spectrum and higher education meticulously. These problems include the issues related to industrialization, globalization, lifelong and continuing education, relating education with industry, quality of education and skills. In addition to these, non availability of quality teachers, lack of motivation on the part of teacher, dry and interest free content, no relevance of content with the job market, non fulfillment of socio-physical, economic, and financial needs through education, gender and class disparities, student discipline, insufficient financial input to education, and nonexistence of research culture. Good teacher are not attracted towards education because of lesser emoluments, sluggish promotions and lack of incentives. All this calls for quality teachers, teaching and learning environment as well. There are other factors which are contributive towards unsatisfactory students learning are; high teacher student ratio, least concern for conceptual learning, political interference in the educational institutions, transfers teaching staff, placements and provision of incentives. These states of affair gave birth to a generation of degree holders with the least mastery of required skills.

These circumstances did not only cause the overall decline of the standard of scientific and technical education; over the last three decades inter-personal communication, use of adequate languages and writing skills, and the element of humanities had also been a matter of concern. Along with other relevant skills, Pakistan's current educational programs did not manage for the training in entrepreneurship and marketing. The environment of cheating, corruption and ignorance of merit made the situation grimmer. Academic and co-curricular environment for students go in-accordance with the societal and political thrust. The institutions of higher learning in Pakistan did not address globalization, corporate attentiveness, technological innovations, and the waves of quality in industry and its consequent impact on education at large. The weakness lies in the fact that the university education stayed away from hi-tech uprising; credible course offerings, use of ICT and course offering in biotechnology and nanotechnology. The substantial and communal infrastructures of universities and colleges demands for synchronization with the changing demands of the teaching learning culture and environment (Higher Education in Pakistan Reform Agenda) It would be wise to attend the teaching scenario right from primary through higher education rather to go for topsy-turvy. It would not only be sufficient to honor the students on merit rather there would be a need to go for financial incentives for needy and combat the deterrents accordingly; the following measures may be adopted in this regard to address the variety of programs.

1.1. Academic Problems

- 16 years degree programs be initiated like the rest of the world.
- Resources made available should be utilized to the optimum.
- Faculties among public and private sector universities be made equal.
- Monitoring be made a regular feature of the inputs, processes and products.
- Private universities be standardized.
- Emphasize on qualitative aspect of education rather than quantitative education.
- Adequate attention to research and support be given.
- Institutional frameworks be made functional to the optimum.

- Systems be made efficient and effective in terms of their functioning.
- Nature of design and delivery be made free of problems.
- Systems be funded adequately.
- An interface between industry and universities be developed.
- Wastages of funds should be minimized.
- Research base should be made adequately strong.
- Internationalization and Globalization be addressed in all the processes right from planning onwards.
- Lifelong learning and continuing education be encouraged.
- Structural, functional, instructional and pedagogical constraints be possibly overcome.

1.2. Management Problems:
- Governance, management structures and practices should be made effective.
- Regulatory steps be made efficient.
- Realization of reform be enforced.
- Faculty, staff and students' politicization be reduced.
- Recruitment practices and adequate development of faculty and staff be ensured.

1.3. Practical Problems:
- Internship facilities for students of higher education institutions and universities should be ensured.
- Coordination between universities and industrial, agricultural, and other sectors of the economy should be ensured.
- Faculty exchange programs be launched.
- Credit exchange programs at local and international levels be launched.
- Produce students who can compete worldwide.

1.4. Financial Problems:
- Funding should be enhanced.
- Fee structure of private universities should be adjusted.
- Foreign Direct investment in Education sector be encouraged.
- Debt Financing in Education sector be fashioned.

1.5. Social Problems:
- There should be moral training in higher education institutions.
- Westernization on the name of modernization should not be promoted.
- Social balances be created.
- The resources made available should be used to the optimum.
- Universities with no exception be asked to come up to the minimum standards defined in terms of faculty quality, practical reliability, and monetary solvency.
- Centers of excellence should strive to develop a research culture to give birth to the intellect of highest grit.

2.1   Proposed Institutional Reform
- The management of government sector universities be made more autonomous rather keeping it linked with government.
- Policy making and management should function in isolation; policy-making should rest with syndicate, syndicate should elect its own chair and a VC should not chair the syndicate, syndicate should appoint the Vice Chancellor (VC).
- University management should be run by the VC as answerable to syndicate.
- The Chancellor should appoint senior administrative staff, deans, and departmental chairs.
- Departmental selection committees should hire faculty on the recommendation of departmental chair.
- Committees of senior faculty should be responsible for faculty appointments and evaluation on tenure track system based on performance in research, teaching and service.
- To promote research culture with in universities, a research cell should be developed, to get the staff financial assistance, to facilitate research publication, to keep a record of the endeavors, to keep a liaison with the local and international donor agencies, to keep and maintain financial records.
- Concept of research labs should be initiated enabling to; avoid duplication of efforts, to work on the footing available, provide a forum for interaction.

- The promotions, incentives and salaries of the faculty should be linked with (i) research output (ii) performance in teaching (iii) peer rating (iv) student's rating (v) and faculty's 'market value'.
- Public sector universities should not only be the affiliating bodies rather then these should be technically supporting
- Development of Higher Education Support Commission (HESC): should be meant to mobilize financial, technical, human, and social resources for enhancing the quality of educational institutions, and for facilitating the reform process. An individual of the highest ability and integrity should be entrusted the responsibilities of a head may be coming from the government, educationists, the private sector, researchers, NGOs, journalists.
- **Examination systems:** University examination system should be made competitive and responsive to ultimate users and open to all students of the country.

2.2. Proposed Curricular Reform

It needs to be re-emphasized that the curriculum should be broad-based, general education based; and quality based scientific and technical education. Switching over to four year Bachelor's degree, following practical steps like:

- A curriculum planning monitoring and evaluation committee should be formed by each of the university.
- Such university committee should include members from faculties' administration, experts of the areas, professionals, government officials, publishing houses, industry representatives, and students.
- Such committees should keep an eye on monetary aspects, testing/examinations system, recruitment, and institutional dimensions, monetary allocations, resource generation mechanisms, student selection, faculty induction, revamping of the examination system and inter and intra institutional cooperation and sharing.
- Such committee should identify sources for the procurement of equipment, use of internet, procurement of teaching learning both print and e-materials; and manage to import necessary items at low import tariffs.
- Clear linkages should be established amongst universities, and the employing agencies.
- Worldwide networks of emigrant Pakistani scientists should be established to upgrade educational methods and resources organization of conferences, create information exchange systems, and facilitate exchange programs.

3. *Fiscal Reforms*
The commendation on fiscal reform may be made around three input areas:

3.1. Government Resources:
According to the number of programs and students' enrolment, facilities be made available and funds should be provided to the public sector universities.

- Local government should support universities under their control, through relaxation in tax as an incentive, financial support on utilities, student support and infrastructure development grants, etc.
- Finances for the projects should be made available timely, on the basis of feasibility, need and national priority.
- The continuation of funds should be institutional audit based which should be done by the committee developed for the purpose
- Universities ranking should be linked with the proper utilization of resources, program offerings, generation of research publication, university capacity building and retention.
- A position of 'Director General Finance and Administration' should be created to supervise financial resources and investments and endowments that the university might have.

3.2. University Resources:

These should include:
- The effective management of cost of education can be done by fund raising through the initiation of short term programs, evening programs and sandwich programs, professional and technical programs.
- University property should be used as funds generating media like land, flora fana and other produce but with the observance of adequate procedure.

3.3. External Resources:
Exploiting of such resources would be:

- Investing in the development of strong 'sponsored research programs'
- Involving regular staff to assist the faculty in research activity.
- Seeking help from alumni, international donor agencies for raising endowments, expanding physical infra structure, and generating scholarships.
- Evolving rational fiscal management system for the smooth conduct of financial systems.
- Use of public resources income and expenditures by the universities should be documented and disclosed regularly.

4. Implementation

There should be an office in the name of reform information having following sub-offices:

- **Public-relations/media cell** meant to mobilize and increase awareness of the community through the use of newspaper articles, press releases, TV interviews and websites etc.
- **Community involvement cell** to mobilize the community *within* universities; through consultative seminars, talks, community gatherings, and update sessions on the progress of the reform.
- **Liaison cel**l to engage the political leadership outside the university and lobby for changes.
- **Research and development cell** to collect data and document the progress which evolves.
- **Quality Assurance cell** meant to enhance the quality of university education
    - Measuring progress against the specify metrics
    - Tracking progress against those metrics.
- **Implementation Strategy** to distribute resources, construct processes and managing the socio-political side of higher education through:
    - Mobilizing the beliefs and participation of the stakeholders.
    - Reducing opposition to change.
    - Systematizing and empowering the reform-minded community enabling the change to sustain.
    - Increase the momentum of reform through credibility of institutions.
    - Reduce the vested in powers to overcome hijacking of the processes.

Review and Reflections

The purpose of the above discussion is to analyze the situation of higher education in Pakistan. The prevailing situation of this sector highlights that serious measures are required for improvement. Therefore, on the basis of this analysis, the following recommendations are put-forth:

1. The bodies of higher education be made to work in coincidence and synchronization.
2. All the universities working under the jurisdiction of higher education be encouraged to come up to minimum defined structures.
3. Reward culture should be promoted in the universities enabling them to share the reward, expenditure and resources.
4. Capacity building should be a regular feature, participation in seminar symposium, conferences be encouraged.
5. Faculty exchange program should be lunched to develop the interest incentive for the retention of the existing faculty.
6. Stress should be on stream lining and time-lining of the processes.
7. Vested in powers of authorities be reduced.
8. Processes should be regulated rather than following the processes of in anticipation approvals.
9. Powers must be decentralized and new bodies be developed to share the responsibilities.

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