



Pakistan Coalition for Education
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According to the National Education Policy (1998-2010), total expenditure on education was to rise from 2.8 per cent of GDP to four per cent of GDP. This, unfortunately, has not happened so far.

A class-based education system divided into three major streams (madressahs, vernacular medium, English medium) providing education, respectively, to the rural and very poor, the lower-middle class and the middle and upper classes continues to this date. It uses Islam to create nationalism, and allows private entrepreneurs and the military to make huge profits. If we want to enhance the quality of education we must first define what 'quality' is.

Quality normally refers to the end product of the educational process, as in the educated person who has acquired skills and knowledge to be where he/she is. This, according to well-known thinker Paulo Friere, is the 'banking' concept of education (i.e. you put in concepts in an account and draw them out, generally in exchange for money and prestige). This view connects education with power and with the prevailing fashion. What counts for knowledge is that which certifying bodies, such as universities working for the ruling elite, call 'knowledge'. Skills are those which help in acquiring lucrative and powerful jobs in service of the elite. I will modify this meaning of quality to refer to:

1. Acquiring values leading to peace, egalitarianism, tolerance, sensitiveness to human rights, women rights, animal rights and the preservation of bio-diversity, linguistic diversity and cultural diversity in Pakistan and the world.
2. Acquiring skills commensurate with sustainable development in Pakistani society.
3. Acquiring information, ideas and analytical skills commensurate with those acquired by the most educated members of highly developed post-industrial societies.

The last criterion is not meant to be universal. Only a few individuals in the country's research universities need to be at par with the educated elite of the world. This is necessary and practicable; universalisation of such high-level knowledge and skills are neither necessary nor has any society ever achieved it.

Definitions (1) and (2) given above are in line with progressive thinkers on education. Here, for instance, is Henry Giroux's definition of good schooling"

If schools are to fulfill their obligations to educate students to assume the demands of

social citizenship and democratic leadership while living in a global economy, educators need to redefine the meaning and purpose of schooling in ways that both strengthen the practice of critical education and energise representative democracy .

If quality is defined in normative terms (points one and two above), we are committing ourselves to a moral slant in school and college education. Only in the universities — and only in some of them — are we committing ourselves to the pursuit of the truth (with a small ‘t’) even if that ‘truth’ is only temporary and provisional. Most societies, in fact, do rationalise their practices, however unjust they are, by giving a moral slant to school education. During British rule in India the blessings of British rule were part of the propaganda the education system emphasised.

In Pakistan, propaganda has been used to create a garrison-state mentality in schools so as to make it easier to obtain public support for militant policies against India. In India, too, history which denies the Muslim point of view about partition and ignores problem areas such as Kashmir is taught.

While normativism is thought to strengthen the ruling elite and the system of distribution of power and resources, the kind of normativism proposed here will strengthen the people and preserve societies and the world. The following measures are suggested about schools:

(a) All schools should teach the necessity of peace, tolerance, human rights, women’s rights, animal rights etc. This means that present textbooks should be replaced by new ones. It also means fieldwork in neglected social sectors such as prisons, healthcare and so on will need to be carried out.

(b) All schools should begin by using the medium of instruction of the local people (unless it is a very small group) till class three. After that there will be a gradual shift to a language of wider communication.

(c) English should be taught from class as a subject in all schools. Films, games, songs, role-playing, drama and conversation should be used to teach it. Programmes featuring the teaching of English should be shown in all schools.

(d) Students should be sensitised to injustices and inequalities in society through documentaries, dramas on social themes (the Ajoka Theatre comes to the mind) and presentations by human rights activists.

(e) Elitist educational institutions — which happen to be English-medium ones — should be phased out. This is in contradiction to chapter 13 of the education policy of 1998 which seeks to encourage private schools. Till the process of phasing out the elitist schools is not completed, they should be legally barred from taking more than two per cent of the declared or estimated income of both parents of a student as tuition fees.

(f) Schools should be headed by the senior-most teacher. The head-teacher should not

stop teaching while performing his/her duties as administrative head. The present practice of creating a separate administrative cadre, which is superior to the teaching faculty, downgrades the faculty and lowers the quality of teaching since the best teachers, upon promotion as administrators, stop teaching.

Madressahs

There are examples of students specialising in religious education in many religious traditions including those for Catholics, Protestants, the Jewish community, the Dawoodi Bohra community and the Aga Khani community in Pakistan. Students gain specialised knowledge of religious texts as well as exposure to other fields of study. This presumably opens their minds to other points of view. However, past history shows us that this does not eliminate the possibility of strife and violence.

In my opinion the violence attributed to madressahs comes from state policies of arming them and using them to fight proxy wars. As such, these kind of policies have to completely end if products of madressahs and religious parties are to become more inclined towards peace.

However, in consultation with the faculty, madressah education can be modified so as to include research on Islam in the English language as well as other subjects. It is pointless to include the present books on social studies, languages or history in the madressah syllabus since they are not conducive to producing either tolerance or the desire for peace. Nor does it augur well for promoting such virtues if the teaching is undertaken by fundamentalist laypersons appointed by the madressah administration.

Two things are possible: 1. Winning the confidence of the ulema who run the madressahs and persuading them to introduce new subjects taught through new books and methods. 2 . Establishing government madressahs (three 'model madressahs' have been established so far) and appointing their graduates to all mosques, schools, colleges, auqaf departments etc. However, if the second measure creates unemployment it will backfire. The government must eliminate, or at least reduce, poverty before poor students can be weaned away from madressahs.

Moreover, if globalisation makes the rich richer and spreads American culture in the name of market forces or structural adjustment, people will use the idiom of Islam to revolt against the miserable conditions of their life. Even more to the point, if the US persists in supporting policies which oppress the Palestinians, fights unjust wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or threatens other Muslim countries, then the madressahs will continue to find willing recruits.

No matter what is taught, people will want to react to violence with violence whether they use the idiom of Islam or nationalism. Hence, policies of Pakistan and of other countries can play a key role in making the madressahs as well as other Pakistani institutions contribute to peace and tolerance rather than war and intolerance.

Colleges should follow a four-year bachelor's degree examined by a college education board (CEB). Lecturers should be promoted on the basis of examinations. Syllabuses for the B.A./B.Sc. degrees should also be determined and revised by the CEB. The board should run function along the lines of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council.

Universities

These should be classified as (a) research universities and (b) teaching universities.

(a) Research universities: Pakistan can afford to have at least two world-class universities equipped with the best libraries, archives, laboratories and other facilities. These should be general universities teaching all subjects including medicine, engineering and law. Initially, Karachi and Islamabad seem to be appropriate locations for them. They should be called research universities to distinguish them from the others.

They should be completely autonomous with the HEC only acting as a conduit for funds. Their standards for hiring and promotion of faculty should be very stringent. Faculty members must be paid well and this high salary should be linked to performance.

(b) Teaching universities: These should emphasise teaching and need not be completely autonomous. They should be affiliated with a universities affiliating board which should ensure that they do not compromise the quality of teaching in the name of autonomy. Initially, they should not award Ph.D. degrees. A university producing sufficient high quality research can graduate to a research university but that would require a high capital outlay and hence such a transition could take a long time.

All private universities too must be affiliated to the university affiliating board. However, one-subject institutions — in the private or the public sector — should be called university-colleges. Military academies and specialised institutions should not be called universities.

Above all, the role of the military in education must be curtailed. As civilians become employees of military entrepreneurs the self-respect of academics is eroded. Moreover, liberal values are eroded in a military atmosphere. Similarly, all heads of universities must be academics. Retired or serving bureaucrats and military officers should not be made heads of academic institutions, least of all universities. This is an important point if pride is to be given to the academic profession.

Research university faculty members should begin their career as teaching/research assistants. Such appointments should be purely temporary and subject to successful completion of a Ph.D. degree from an accredited and reputable university in an advanced country. After this they can be inducted as university lecturers.

They should be promoted on the basis of points which they can earn from publications in refereed, indexed journals, contributing chapters in edited books, contributing encyclopaedia articles, publishing books and reading out papers in international

conferences and supervising research students. If they like they can also earn points by getting students to evaluate them. The number of points can be determined by committees of scholars. (I have suggested a possible model in my book *Denizens of Alien Worlds* [Oxford UP, 2004]).

Professors should have gained most of their points from research though it should be possible to be promoted associate professors for points earned through teaching and supervision. University faculty must be paid well so as to attract the best talent. The income of full professors in good private universities is above rupees 100,000 per month at present and hence it is realistic and competitive to pay equally high salaries for quality research scholars and scientists in the public universities as well.

It is obvious that the system proposed above is so competitive that very few people will rise to the rank of professor. This is how it should be. The rank of professor should become a rare honour, given after outstanding achievement, and there should only be a few professors. Each professorship should be called a 'chair', e.g. chair in pure mathematics, chair in organic chemistry, chair in general linguistics and so on. The chair should have its own staff and funds which will be managed by the incumbent of the chair.

As for teaching universities they can modify their research requirements but their professors must draw lower salaries than the professors of a research university. Correspondingly, it should be much more difficult to attain the rank of professor in a research university than in a teaching one. In short, higher emoluments should be linked with the creation of new and high quality knowledge.

In conclusion, quality in schools is associated with becoming a sensitive and tolerant human being along with the possession of knowledge and skills. Quality at the college level should be equated with the dissemination of the best available knowledge in all fields of human interest. That at the university level should move forward from the mere dissemination of existing knowledge to the creation of new knowledge, new ideas, new analyses and insights.

Further, the unrealistic goal of having a single, universal criterion of quality should be abandoned. Different educational levels need to be evaluated differently. While access, equity, and a just distribution of schooling facilities can be emphasised in schools and colleges, universities should become unequal institutions. Research universities should be given more resources and better faculty than ordinary, teaching universities. This may seem unfair with the egalitarian stance of my writings and hence a word of explanation is in order.

I believe that the changes proposed here are already so costly that even if the ruling elite brings them about in its own long-term interest, it will simply not be able to afford to create about fifty research universities of a high standard. Two may be possible, not more.

Moreover, the number of really competent faculty is so limited that even staffing two

universities may be ambitious. Thus, our aims must be realistic if we are serious about creating quality higher education.

The teaching universities will create the bulk of our educated labour force and the state should ensure that they are accommodated in jobs commensurate with their skills. The products of the research universities should be drawn into academia and research so as to create new ideas which can take Pakistan the cutting edge in research.