**A Fatal Blow to Education in Sindh (Part IX)**

[M Alam Brohi](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/m-alam-brohi/)

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Surprisingly the known educational institutions in the private sector and those under the armed forces like city and Grammar, Bahria, Air force and Army Public Schools, Army Cadet Colleges, Beacon House, Lahore University of Management Sciences, National University of Science and Technology, Agha Khan University have been far ahead of Sindh’s public sector schools, colleges and universities. The public sector school teachers and professors, with comparably better salaries, and an established process for progress in their career like other civil servants, have been grossly underperforming. The DOW University is an exception.

Is it the weakening commitment to teaching and nation-building; the overall bad governance; the lack of rule of law, slackening management and control, ineffectual accountability and prosecution; the demonstration effect of the unlawfully acquired wealth and affluence; the acquisitive temptations, and the growing sense of impunity that have cumulatively pushed the education into a vortex of chaos and decadence? This decadence has been demonstrably visible to the ruling elite for long years but has not twitched their conscience as their selfish interests grossly contrast with the needs of the poor populace. Education in the public sector weighs very low in their priorities.

Exhaustive reports and half-cooked reform schemes envisaging revamping and strengthening bureaucratic management and control of education at all tiers have failed to yield desired results. Rather, these attempts have exacerbated the situation. The patient is lying on the operation table and needs to undergo thorough surgery. The cancerous lumps devouring the life of the patient, already identified, are to be cut and thrown away. The surgeons have no other choice. This is the only way to save the life of the patient.

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A ruthless operation and cultural overhauling and rigorous reorientation and reeducation campaigns are needed to rid the department of the black sheep including the incompetent, absentees and absconders and corrupt. They did not respect their noble profession. Their loss of jobs will be less painful than what havoc they have played with the future of our children by their shameful derelictions discrediting this noble profession. This ruthless campaign has to continue for good years moving and shaking the department out of the current state of morbidity.

We should enforce a permanent automatic upward and downward revision of the remunerations or the salary packages of the teachers and educational managers in line with their performance. Education takes 1/5th of the provincial budget and a better part of this huge allocation goes into the payment of the wages (salaries, deputation allowances and pensions) of the workforce of nearly 150,000 in both teaching and non-teaching officials. The performance of this huge workforce has not achieved the minimum benchmark as compared with the teaching in the private sector.

The public service commission, being the custodian of merit and fair play and transparent recruitment in higher positions, including in Education, should be reconstituted in accordance with the directives of the superior courts and revamped by setting it free from the bloody claws of sycophants and cronies. The officers from different services generally known for their amenability to the imprudent and unlawful exercise of power by the ruling political class were accommodated in powerful positions after retirement. The Public Service Commission has been one of the big ‘shelters’ for such favourites.

The Chairman of the Public Service Commission has no say in the appointment of the senior positions including the members, controllers of examination, registrars and senior administrative officials etc. They are all appointed by the Chief Minister at the behest of the party leaders. Many of the members of the commission face NAB enquiries. Some of the members and senior officials have been in their positions for two to three tenures. The sons and nephews of these members have invariably qualified the combined competitive examinations for provincial superior services. Were these young men exceptionally bright or did they receive underhand help from inside the commission?

The three exhaustive enquiry reports on the Commission’s competitive examination of 2003 each prepared by a committee of the commission, the provincial Anti-Corruption Establishment and the NAB were quite revealing. The reports elaborated how merit, fair play and transparency were bludgeoned by substituting answer sheets, awarding generous grace marks by examiners to the failures at the peril of the successful candidates. The Sindh High Court took more than a decade to deliver a judgement on the petitions filed in 2009 directing the provincial government to constitute a committee to accommodate the petitioners within six months. The findings of the government committee are still awaited even after over one year. The petitioners have gone to the apex court to seek justice.

The Sindh Public Service Commission has to be made free from the gross interference by the political leadership to make it a true custodian of merit and transparency in the wider interests of this land and its shirtless people. The chairman should have the final say in selecting the members and other senior officers of the Commission from amongst bureaucrats and academicians of high calibre and good reputation.

By default, we have been blindly transferring all powers to the Chief Minister including the appointment of Vice-Chancellors, provincial Ombudsman, members of public service Commission etc. The political conditions and political administrations keep changing. Tomorrow, if a ruthless Chief Minister of the ilk of Late Jam Sadiq or his pliable successors come into power, it would be difficult to prevent the abusive exercise of these powers. Better to strengthen the institutions than the transient political offices.

The education and the educational institutions, their estate properties and lands, including buildings and playgrounds should be sacrosanct as the property of the people of Sindh and treated as such by all other federal and provincial institutions. Several buildings and grounds of the education department have been unlawfully occupied by police, rangers, the army and many civilian departments. These buildings should be vacated forthwith and returned to the education department for use for the purpose that underlined their construction or ownership.

(Concluded)

*The author was a member of the Foreign Service of Pakistan and he has authored two books.*