**A Fatal Blow to Higher Education (Part VI)**

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The service delivery institutions thrive under the management of honest and committed managers or controllers. As the saying goes, the fish starts rotting from the head. Similarly, corruption and mismanagement seeps down and poisons the entire swamp destroying human values, social norms and professional commitments. There is no shortage of funds or workforce and professionals in the education department. The salary packages of senior public school teachers totalling over Rs.100,000 with the right to pension are better than their peers in the private sector. Even then, the education is not performing well.

This is a moment for introspection. Is there a lack of a merit-based system for appointments, promotions and postings with a meaningful linkage with performance in teaching, research and intellectual development? With a deeper look at the overall situation, we have come to the regrettable conclusion that the ultimate responsibility for the dismaying performance of the department lies with the managers and controllers from Tehsil to the district, divisional and provincial levels. Corruption and clientele management of financial and manpower resources, abuse of powers in appointments, promotions, postings in higher grades and deputation to lucrative posts in other departments are the root cause of the unstoppable decline in the Education Department.

The professionals, having managerial control in the department, should undergo all training courses at mid-career and senior management levels like the provincial and federal civil services to build their capacity in administrative and management skills. Their further promotions should be linked with their performance in these training courses. Instead of looking for good administrators and managers from outside, as proposed at one stage by the pundits of the Ministry of Education, who may be alien to the school management and progressive development of children, the available human resources of the education should be revamped to undertake the responsibility. Their professional knowledge buttressed with administrative skills acquired through rigorous training would be far more advantageous than borrowing the services of officers of other administrative cadres.

Education bureaucracy, like other bureaucracies, has unnecessarily expanded without any standard performance.

The post of Headmaster is the pivot to the development of education. As elaborated in a report of the Ministry of Education, the Headmasters have numerous responsibilities ranging from teaching and learning to management of schools with human resources, procurement and financial management. They oversee the planning and monitor and maintain fiduciary control over the budget expenses. The ability to interact with parents, teacher unions, public representatives and with the community to resolve conflicts is also the responsibility of Headmasters. The Assistant District Officers, Deputy Education Officers, and District Education Officers are also recruited from among senior Headmasters. So, he is a linchpin of the Department.

Since headmasters don’t have sufficient management experience on a wider scale, they should have frequent management courses before elevation as Sub-divisional Education and District Education Officers. The span of managerial control assigned to these officers has grown over the period.

A District Education Officer oversees more than 2,500 schools and 10,000 staff while a supervisor in a union council monitors around 40 to 80 schools. Hence, the need for frequent and elaborative administrative and management training courses is strongly underscored to bring improvement in their capacity and performance.

A cursory look at the huge structure of the education department from the provincial to divisional, district and taluka levels, we can safely draw the conclusion that the Education bureaucracy like other bureaucracies in the provincial and federal departments has unnecessarily expanded and consumes the better part of the budgetary allocation without standard performance. Is the huge administrative structure of officers in grades 18 to 20 at the divisional level necessary for managerial control of schools and colleges when we have controlling managers including supervisors to district education officers from grade 17 to 19 separately for elementary, secondary and higher secondary and primary schools – both male and female schools?

At the regional level, we have for primary schools one Director and one Additional Director of 20 grade; four Deputy Directors of grade 19; four Assistant Directors of grade 18. At the district level, we have for primary schools two District Education Officers (DEOs) of grade-19; four Deputy DEOs in the same grade, six Assistant Education officers of grade 17. At the Taluka level, we have Taluka Education officers –one each for male and female primary school sections. We have an almost similar administrative structure for the secondary schools at the regional, district and Taluka levels. This huge bureaucratic structure with supporting staff at all these levels could be reviewed and thinned to make it more efficient and save funds. The funds so saved could be expended on the training and capacity building of the remaining lot.

After secondary high school, there is another tier of technical and vocational teaching. All students are not talented enough to reach the universities on merit. The admission of less endowed students in any university faculty particularly medical and engineering over and above merit leaves seriously harmful effects on the overall performance of the nation. This is why our doctors and engineers and technologists are unable to compete with their peers from other countries in the competitive job markets. They also play havoc with the patients and highways, roads, buildings, irrigation structures etc. here in the country after becoming doctors or engineers.

We should, therefore, promote technical, vocational diplomas in banking, accountancy, computer science, electricity and electronics and mechanics, carpentry, masonry, knitting, tailoring etc. We have had technical colleges all over Sindh which prepared skilled hands for these professions. These colleges played a fabulous role in preparing thousands of skilled hands for working abroad.

The colleges have fallen prey to the traditional criminal neglect of the feudal ruling elite. They don’t feel obliged to look after these colleges which cater to the needs of the poor. Many foreign countries including Japan and South Korea were funding such courses in poor African countries including South Sudan. These technical colleges help reduce unemployment in the country and increase the number of skilled hands abroad.

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