

Education

garding its impact on salaries and so on. They point out that indexation is a fairly easy tool to use against inflation. But in developing countries, with no safety nets or indexation, inflation plays a more significant and powerful role. Monetary authorities, fiscal authorities and policy makers in the developed countries can assume that information, regarding policy matters and implementation, will travel fairly rapidly and accurately through the society. But this assumption does not hold in developing countries like Pakistan. Rule changes can take a lot longer to understand and implement, and in the meantime they can lead to significantly higher transaction costs for the society.

Why is it that teachers are not able to do better? Three important reasons that suggest themselves as candidates are: poor training of teachers, reliance on traditional textbooks and lack of local research. The education system is in bad shape. Rote learning is common and if the teachers have come through the same system, they can at best pass on the same thing to their students. And if they are not perfect at passing on rote learning, the standard of education should decline even within the rote learning system. Of course not all teachers are bad, but the majority, coming through the system, will be of relatively poor quality. Another problem that dogs our teachers is that they go for their PhD after having been in the system for too long so that even a PhD cannot break some of the poor learning habits that they have imbibed by then.

If one is trained poorly, and incentives to do better are as bad as they are for most teachers in Pakistan, it is not a surprise that these teachers rely on traditional books and approaches for their teaching, and are seldom able to produce high quality local research. The fact that the quality of research is low has already been documented extensively by Syed Akbar Zaïdi in his review of the state of social sciences in Pakistan, and so we need not talk about that. It is the effect of the absence of quality research on teaching that I am more concerned about here. Absence of research reflects the higher likelihood that the person is not at the frontier of her area of research, and sometimes it might also show that the person cannot understand the work being done at the frontier as well. It is the latter that matters for teaching. If a person cannot follow what is going on at the frontier, she might have problems with understanding the area in general as well, and that would be bad for the students.

So what do we do about these issues? HEC has to make interventions at various levels to start the process of change. For the existing set of teachers, teacher training is a must. HEC has to get into the area of curriculum design, and they have to get interesting researchers to write some up to date and Pakistan relevant textbooks. Encouraging research is probably going to be the hardest area for HEC to go into. Just giving some money, and for Information Technology alone will definitely not do it.

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