**Everyone has the right to education**

On **Aug 6, 2022** [Atle Hetland](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/atle-hetland/)

In a few articles during the school holidays, I have discussed education issues. I have suggested that we should make basic education for all by sharing the resources we have, and we should change the content to focus on values and the children’s interests, not an overcrowded curriculum. The school must be a place where children love to be and learn, unlike the way it is for many today. Those who never had the chance to attend formal education, mainly due to poverty, must be given a second chance in literacy, skills, and values education.
Workplaces must give room for lifelong education and training, maybe giving workers some hours off every week to attend organized courses. Like in schools, people should thrive in their jobs. Labour unions must be seen as positive organizations developing the workplaces and country, including being involved in training. Let us remind ourselves that illiterates and manual workers are just as intelligent as the rest of us, some even more, and many poor people have invaluable experience from work from early years and managing difficult home life. Education is not only school but a broad socialization experience.
Now when the new school year begins, let us continue reflecting more on education issues, realising concretely that many children and youth cannot get enrolled in formal education, but society would benefit from everyone getting an education. We could discuss a lot about the content and organization of further and higher education. But since basic education and literacy, skills, and vocation training, are more essential, I shall focus on that in today’s article – knowing, too, that only if you and I, and certainly the politicians and leaders in the private sector, want to change the situation, nothing will happen. If we don’t get every child and youth enrolled in relevant education, it is neglect we all are responsible for, and we will all suffer for it in the future. We become responsible for stealing from the poor, benefiting those who are better off.
In my recent articles, I have stressed that values must form the foundation of the new education we need, at all levels, in Pakistan and worldwide, all the way from basic education, notably primary schools, and ‘second chance’ education for youth and other adult education. Education and socialization must impart to the learners good values, and they include respect and self-confidence, skills to master life’s challenges on rainy and sunny days, and learning how to live harmonically together in communities, societies, and the world. We must stop the world from becoming more unequal and unfair. In education, we must learn how to see and analyse the world around us, and how we can contribute individually and in groups, to change and improve situations. Much of today’s curriculum can be thrown out, and relevant content introduced, where the learners, too, influence what they want to learn.
It is important that the workplaces, communities, organizations, yes, also educational institutions, give more attention to people thriving in their work, life, and learning. If we like what we do, we learn more and do a better job. Many jobs are hard, with uncomfortable work environments, exposure to the elements, poor safety measures, monotonous tasks, and many times, work that is physically and mentally taxing, and so on.
Workplaces must give time to pleasant socialization, during lunch and tea breaks, and other times, including prayer breaks, where most men participate. Many people spend longer hours at work than with family and friends. Colleagues become major persons in creating a pleasant and purposeful daily life. Good bosses know this, but still, more attention should be given to it, realizing its educational aspects.
Pakistanis are social and caring people. People usually look well after colleagues, but not always. Sometimes, people accept unacceptable work situations just because they are happy to have a job at all. If the workers were unionized, they would, with the help of their unions, also be able to focus more on education and training issues to be included during their working life. Also, employers who organize in employers’ organizations would learn that education and training on the job create a better work environment and more loyal and competent workers.
We should realize that education is a ‘common good’ that we must share. If we don’t provide education to poor people, then we steal something from them, giving it to the better off and the rich. We are all members of local communities, towns, cities, and a country, and we have equal rights to services. There will never be an abundance of everything, not even in the world’s richest countries. Tax collection from the rich should be given priority. We must learn to share and find new ways of doing it. When the rich earn more, they must certainly share more with the poor.
New and broad education policies must be at the top of the political agenda. Yes, education budgets must increase. Pakistan lags far behind most other countries in this field, leading to poverty and no basic education at all for the poorest half of the children. Everyone can see that it is unfair and wrong, and a terrible waste of resources and talent.
Alas, it is not likely that education’s share of the government budget will grow much in the near future, especially under the country’s and the world’s current economic outlook. Hence, we must reallocate and share more of what we have, and even find cheaper ways of doing things. We must not let the well-to-do and rich take the ball and keep it. They must share with the rest. Taxation and other measures must be improved.
In education, we can easily find ways of economizing; children can go to school half days or on alternate days. Curricula can and should be changed so that basic education becomes a way of making good, responsible, and optimistic citizens, who enjoy what they do, know how to look after themselves and others, and know how to improve things, yes, also through demanding their rights and find new solutions.
Under the economic circumstances, we must immediately look at how we can do better with less. For example, I believe that we must consider shorter teacher training, not always make it longer and more theoretical. A good student from secondary school, or graduate in any field from a college or university, can be a good teacher, mainly learning on the job. The main thing would be that a teacher loves his or her students, and the content of what they teach. A teacher must instill good values in the students, lead in creating a good atmosphere for learning, and encourage the students to help in all of it. The bookish knowledge and skills come much lower on the agenda.
It is my hope and belief that Pakistan can design a broad ‘education revolution’ of this kind for children and youth if it wants to do it. Then, within a short time, shall we say five to ten years, the country will be changed from being half-illiterate to being a country with literate and educated people, with good values, skills, and eagerness to contribute, proud of themselves, and others. It can be done, and it doesn’t have to cost more than what is already spent on education. All countries, indeed Pakistan, should find new ways of fairer and more relevant education systems and include everyone in what they have a right to get.