**Is national education emergency a need of the hour?**

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It is unfortunate that rather than increasing the education budget, it has been decreased and due to this, universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)have suffered the most. Certainly, it should be the first and foremost responsibility of the governments, education ministry and the concerned authorities, like the Higher Education Commission (HEC), to examine existing problems and come up with the best possible solutions At the same time, it is the responsibility of academia to give their feedback and recommendations to the education ministry so that education standards can be uplifted.

A close review of HEC’s budget for the last five years reveals that it remained stagnant at Rs.63.183 billion in 2017-18, Rs.65.020 billion in 2018-19, Rs.64.100 billion in 2019-20 and the same allocation of Rs.64.100 billion in 2020-21. This budget seems quite insufficient to meet the requirements of the 138 public sector universities in the country. That is why, during the last few years, we have witnessed chaos and unrest among the universities due to strikes by the faculty members and staff due to the non-payment of salaries and pensions.

[KTA delegation meets Imran Ismail at Governor House Karachi](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/kta-delegation-meets-imran-ismail-at-governor-house-karachi)

Concerning the involvement of academia in suggesting policy recommendations to the government, a live webinar on the topic titled, “Budget 2021-22: Needs & Expectations of Higher Education Sector” recently held in which Vice-Chancellors of different universities participated. While addressing the webinar, Prof. Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman strongly recommended an increase in allocation to education by federal and the provincial governments by at least 0.5% of the GDP annually until it reaches 5.0% of GDP over the next 5 years. He said that 33% should go to higher education and the rest 67% be spent on schools, colleges, and technical education. Prof. Rahman also suggested that at least 5% of all colleges should be converted to high-level technical colleges with foreign collaboration to ensure high-quality skilled workers. He also emphasised that 5,000 students should be sent on scholarships for PhD to top 200 universities abroad annually to pursue emerging technologies. He further added that major national programs for technology parks, promotion of innovation, entrepreneurship, funding for knowledge economy taskforce projects in emerging areas of industrial and agricultural importance and promotion of high tech manufacturing of value-added exports through appropriate policies and incentives. Also, he was of the view that the Tenure Track System (TTS) of appointment of faculty members in universities should be revised to attract top foreign faculty to Pakistan. He recommended the expansion of the matric-tech program in schools across Pakistan to provide technical training at the matric level.

[Queen marks Northern Ireland's centenary](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/queen-marks-northern-ireland-s-centenary)

The Vice-Chancellor of Quaid-i-Azam University, Dr. Muhammad Ali Shah, suggested the allocation of 150 billion rupees in the new budget as a recurring budget to overcome a years-long deficit and financial problems being faced by Pakistani universities. Other speakers recommended allocating 5% of GDP for education, involvement of stakeholders and end-users across Pakistan in the policy formulation process, equal opportunities of scholarships, research grants and faculty training both for the public and private sectors, one window facility for issuance of NOC and the accreditation of academic programs in order to avoid unnecessary delays, and the establishment of a contributory fund for payment of pensions and encouraging the role of the private sector in the higher education sector. They also vowed to undertake collaborative efforts in order to overcome challenges being faced by the higher education sector. In the end, Prof Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman assured that these important recommendations made by the stakeholders would be communicated to the concerned quarters.

[PM announces 'no compromise' over blasphemy law](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/pm-announces-no-compromise-over-blasphemy-law)

Simultaneously, issues being faced by the Tenure Track System (TTS) faculty are also great headaches as well. Resolving the TTS promotion and salary issues, special bailout package for the universities which are unable even in paying salaries & pensions and allocating special budget for the universities with student hostels are some of the issues that must be tackled immediately.

In summing up the whole discussion, it is quite clear that the Federal and Provincial Governments have to consider education as their top priority and, as it is obvious that due to a rapid increase in population and the youth bulge, it is high time to give due importance to improve standards as well as provide quality education to every citizen of Pakistan. For this, let’s join hands together and move forward collectively for making the future of our contemporary as well as future generations of the country brighter.