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**University reforms**

Most state-run universities across the Islamic Republic of Pakistan are plagued by a number of issues including financial crunch, mismanagement, favoritism of all hues, extremely substandard research, pathetic level of teaching and little fruitful linkages between the academia and industries.

In addition, one of the foremost issues faced by teaching staff is the lack of a proper mechanism for the promotion of faculty working under the BPS system. To be precise, there is no appropriate service structure for BPS faculty promotion. Although as per HEC guidelines, for elevation from one position to another one needs a specific number of years in service (relevant teaching and or research experience), number of publications in the specific field in journals of note and of course a PhD degree in most cases. However, that does not mean that BPS faculty with the required qualifications, experience and number of publications are promoted routinely or via a clearly laid down and streamlined procedure.

In essence, every time elevation from one position to the next is due, it is identical to a fresh appointment and faculty members have to compete either with colleagues from the same institute or from outside. The process begins with the advertisement of positions, then submission of application dossiers, scrutiny of documents and testimonials, evaluation of research output by external reviewers, and finally appearing in the selection board. While evaluation of research produced or appearing before a selection committee of subject experts for promotion seems to be fine, that all this happens after fresh advertisement and open competition (with colleagues and external competitors) is indeed a strange practice that does not happen in any other public-sector organization across the country.

It can be argued that such open competition is a healthy process to attract the brightest minds from outside the organization as well. But the sad reality is that the same policy has been in practice for decades and one fails to see it leading to any tangible impact. Rather, this practice has led to the creation of numerous issues for university administration and faculty alike. Also, this policy is in vogue in public-sector universities only and no other government organization follows this procedure for the promotion of existing employees.

The lack of a suitable mechanism for the promotion of teaching staff in universities creates a vacuum which is exploited by certain quarters. In most cases, vice chancellors, political/pressure groups, mafia groups within the faculty, academic staff associations and people with vested interests exploit the situation which results in discrimination, favoritism and corruption. Faculty members that are associated with political groups or with officials in the administration or those with the full backing of teachers’ associations exploit and abuse the promotion process.

In a majority of public-sector universities, particularly in the older ones where such groups have become very strong over the years, these ‘professors’ are so powerful that they brazenly influence the process of appointments/promotions. Local politicians and other influential people in the government also interfere in this process as they want to ensure their relatives and political cronies get inducted/promoted.

Under these circumstances, hardworking, dedicated and honest faculty members sans political backing normally suffer. Teaching staff that is not an active part of the academic staff associations also undergo overwhelming delays in their promotions. In most cases, faculty members get promotions only if they are in the good books of the administration or have strong links with powerful lobbies. Even if you are a virtual Einstein in your field, but are somehow in the bad books of the powers that be, it is highly unlikely you will get your due rights. That is why faculty members have no other option but to either get sidelined or compromise their self-respect and integrity for getting their duly-earned promotions.

What are the repercussions of this lack of a clear path of promotion? Pseudo-intellectuals with little self-respect and integrity often get to the top of the ladder. Genuine academics with self-respect and integrity remain in the lower grades until their retirement. A university should lead society but people with no self-respect and no integrity cannot lead society. They tend to develop a generation of people with no integrity and no self-respect.

Hence, if a proper structure and mechanism for the promotion of BPS faculty is developed and agreed upon by all key stakeholders, it will really empower faculty and bring dividends for a majority of the stakeholders. There will be a politics-free environment on campuses after the implementation of time-scale promotion. Timely promotion, which is one of the foremost issues, will be solved automatically. The faculty will focus on their research and teaching rather than wasting their precious time in lobbying. Time-scale promotions will largely enable university leaders and administrators to channelize their time and efforts towards more productive endeavors rather than being occupied by matters of faculty promotions and associated realpolitik which has become a constant ingredient of our universities.

If such a clear policy is adopted for faculty promotions, it will also force politicians, high officials in the government and other vested interest groups not to get involved in university affairs. Therefore, institutes of higher education and research will get on the right track and faculty members will not have to run from pillar to post to find ‘safarish’ to initiate their promotion cases. This will also eventually put an end to the monopoly of some powerful faculty mafias in older universities where even vice chancellors are unable to spearhead reforms.

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