[**After education**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1685580/after-education)

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“THE youth in this country are desperate to work,” said an elderly man who has inspired many a career in his prime. He went on to talk about the hurdles and pitfalls of job hunting. It’s not that our job market is saturated — there are plenty of jobs. The problem is, the youth don’t have the skills for the future. Most university lecturers outsource teaching to a handful of textbooks challenging for students to unravel, and downgrade class time to monologues.

There are various mitigation mechanisms we can put in place, including the development of a growth mindset, and training faculty that have the ‘skills for the future’, who know how to use textbooks effectively and work towards structured outcomes. Just as students are expected to take ownership of learning, higher education institutes in Pakistan need to take on the ownership of teaching that prioritises enablement. This implies asking what the university management can do besides ensuring that students attain the pass mark required for a degree. In what ways can they empower students to transition to the professional world?

Through their higher education journey, students require direction. This can come in many forms from a mentor or counsellor to a teacher’s inspiring journey or some industry experience in the form of an apprenticeship or internship. Most global universities provide a base that consists of various opportunities for growth and learning that go well beyond the confines of a teacher-led classroom. Some have incubation centres that offer a launching pad for entrepreneurship, allowing for trial and error, a link with industry to secure funding through venture capital, and a range of subject experts that can guide the students as they launch start-ups and collaborate across borders.

In today’s screen-ready world, virtual meetings are set up in a matter of minutes across continents. There is enough intellectual prowess to engage with and capitalise on. What are the steps up this ladder that universities can offer their students? Pakistan is reportedly experiencing a 31.2 per cent unemployment rate among its 15- to 29-year-olds. Higher education institutes are flooded with intelligent, talented, motivated youth that have no idea where or how they will find a job.

The youth have no idea how they will find jobs.

Universities everywhere lay the ground for job placements. From interview skills to apprenticeships and networking opportunities to voluntary work, there is much that can be done to ensure that graduates land themselves a job or are able to tap other sources of income. Some may opt for further studies and would need help exploring options.

Any country aiming for development requires an effective and robust higher education system. No national strategies and programmes for growth such as poverty alleviation, transport services and investments in technology can bear fruit without a base in higher education. Socioeconomic needs often drive research priorities; in fact, mobilisation of our human resources in higher education may be the vital cog in achieving development goals. Several universities have been identified by the UN as SDG hubs for their contribution towards the sustainable development goals. The most notable among them are the University of Pretoria and University of São Paulo for their work on food security and poverty. The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings introduced in 2019 recognised 700 global universities for their role in tackling development challenges.

Unfortunately, these possibilities remained constrained given our higher education budgetary needs as other priorities supersede the desire to create more skill-based and research-based opportunities in higher education. Until we extricate our higher education institutes from systemic failure caused largely by conflicting interests, short-term fixes and deeply embedded barriers to learning, we may not be able to create an environment that can produce the knowledge and skills for societal development goals. The past few decades have made it clear that years of university education and targeting exams for a degree will not create conditions of growth. Much of the direction we take will depend upon a focused assessment of needs, reflective teaching by well-trained faculty and efforts to address the skills versus content gap that has cast a shadow over most tiers of our education system for many years.

Incentive packages for universities that achieve a high retention rate followed by successful job placements may be a winning formula to ensure sustained quality and effectiveness. When universities deliver on their promise, students find motivation in being part of the system, the status quo is beaten, and the positive impact is generated through many levels of society.

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