

Education: The Need for Consolidation

PERVEZ TAHIR and NADIA SALEEM

INTRODUCTION

After six decades of its existence, Pakistan finds itself in an educational quagmire. There is not much to show in terms of national, provincial and local indicators of a standard variety. At the international level, the country has earned the notoriety of being regularly lower down on all known indices and league tables on human development, competitiveness and governance. Neglect of education lies at the heart of the problem. This is surprising because the thinking on the nature of the educational system required for the newly emerging country had started quite early. An All Pakistan Educational Conference was held on November 27, 1947 in Karachi. Education thus was the subject of the very first professional conference held in the country, bringing together all the stakeholders.

The Father of the Nation set the guidelines in his detailed message: “Under foreign rule for over a century, in the very nature of things, I regret, sufficient attention has not been paid to the education of our people, and if we are to make any real, speedy and substantial progress, we must earnestly tackle this question and bring our educational policy and programme on the lines suited to the genius of our people, consonant with our history and culture and having regard to the modern conditions and vast developments that have taken place all over the world” [Tahir (1980), p.39]. Throughout his political career, Jinnah championed the cause of education. A number of critical issues which continue to bedevil the educational planners of Pakistan to this day, were identified by him long before the freedom struggle for Pakistan came to fruition. These include compulsory elementary education, non-elitist education, technical and vocational education for school leavers, merit-based higher education, equal opportunities for women, and adequate resourcing [Tahir (2002)]. The order of national priorities for him was education, economic development and then defence. The record of performance since independence shows a reversal of these priorities [Tahir (2008)]. Far from the welfare state envisaged by him, Pakistan has become an incorrigible security state. There are thus many lessons that have not been learned. This paper has space to focus only a few.

EXPENDITURE: THE LESSON NOT LEARNED

The first, and the most important, lesson not learned relates to expenditure on education. Education in Pakistan lacks money and will continue to lack money, and yet plans after plans and policies after policies continue to announce magic ratios with

Pervez Tahir <perveztahir@yahoo.com> and Nadia Saleem, respectively, are Professor and Associate Professor at the Department of Economics, FCC University, Lahore.

respect to GDP for educational spending. The draft education policy wants it jump to 7 percent of GDP by 2015, completely forgetting that the Medium Term Development Framework 2005-10 (MTDF) had envisaged an expenditure of 5 percent of GDP by 2009-10, but is likely to end up well below 2 percent. Interestingly, the ratio of 7 percent was mentioned in the Vision 2030 document as an indicative target for 2015 on the assumption that the MTDF target of 5 percent would be achieved. Formulated in the background of a relatively favourable economic climate, Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act 2005, which aimed to reduce debt without adversely affecting social sector spending, fixed the goalpost of 3.72 percent of GDP by 2013. Under any realistic macroeconomic framework, even this looks like an unrealisable dream.

The fact of the matter is that Pakistan has never spent more than 2.5 percent of GDP on education in a single year and 2.3 percent as annual average over a decade. Table 1 shows peak years for the decades of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. It also gives the average for these decades, which are in the lows of 0.8 percent, 2.3 percent and 1.7 percent.

Table 1

Past Trends in Spending

Period	Percentage of GDP per Annum	Peak Years
1980s	0.8	1986-87: 2.4 % of GDP
1990s	2.3	1996-97: 2.5% of GDP
2000s	1.7	2006-07: 2.4% of GDP

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey.

In the absence of any evidence of the economy having witnessed sustained increase in the expenditure/GDP ratio, why do the policies and plans persist in the error of elusive targets? Sadly, policy making in Pakistan is not about effecting change and seeking outcomes. It is about target setting and incremental spending on inputs. Targets are influenced by the norms set by international organisations, in this case minimum spending prescribed by UNESCO. As league tables of expenditure/GDP ratios published annually by the international institutions continue to show the country as a laggard, the temptation is to plan big, without much thought. The list of countries in Table 2 does not include any developed economy. It consists of high spenders in the developing world. The range is 1.9-9.1 percent of GDP, with the lower limit provided by Pakistan.

Table 2

International Comparisons of Educational Spending, 2006

Countries	Percentage of Budget	Percentage of GDP
Cuba	14.2	9.1
Djibouti	22.4	8.4
Maldova	20.2	7.6
Seychelles	12.6	6.5
Iran	18.6	5.2
Egypt	12.5	4.2
Indonesia	17.2	3.6
Mauritania	10.1	2.7
Pakistan	10.1	1.9

Source: UNESCO.

Curiously, expenditure on education does not necessarily rise with the growth in GDP. The year of the highest recorded growth of 9 percent, 2004-05, posted the lowest expenditure/GDP ratio. Table 3 suggests that the correlation in general is quite weak.

Table 3

Expenditure and Growth

	Expenditure on Education as Percentage of GDP	GDP Growth (Percentage per Annum)
2000-01	1.6	2.0
2001-02	1.9	3.1
2002-03	1.7	4.7
2003-04	2.1	7.5
2004-05	1.0	9.0
2005-06	1.9	5.8
2006-07	2.4	6.8
2007-08	1.7	4.1
2008-09	1.5	2.0

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2008-09.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT ANYWAY?

Education in Pakistan lacks order, direction and focus. Chaos rather than order results from confusion about federal, provincial and local responsibility. Before the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution is fully operationalised, Federal Government has exclusive jurisdiction under Federal Legislative List Part I on issues related to Pakistani students abroad and foreign students in Pakistan. It could also set up institutes for research, professional or technical training, and for the promotion of special studies.

Under the Concurrent List, Federal and Provincial Governments have joint responsibility for curriculum, syllabus, planning, policy, centres of excellence and standards of education. However, Federal legislation has precedence over Provincial legislation under the Concurrent List. Universities, colleges and schools fall in the Provincial jurisdiction. Poor funding by the Provinces led the Federal Government to set up a University Grants Commission, which in 2002 was upgraded to the present high-profile Higher Education Commission under a new ordinance. Devolution Ordinance 2001 placed elementary and college education under the district governments. Colleges, which already received less funding per capita compared to elementary and university education, faced serious neglect under the devolved system due mainly to capacity constraints. They had to be reverted subsequently to the provincial domain.

DIRECTIONLESSNESS

Directionlessness of education is reflected in the pendulum swinging from one level or type of education to another and back in fairly short periods of time. Medium of instruction and the role of English continue to be an unsettled debate. The Dakar enthusiasts of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2010 and Education For All (EFA) by 2015 pressed into service Social Action Programme in the nineties, which

turned out to be a disaster in its second phase. Lack of provincial ownership, donors essentially taking over to resolve an intractable coordination puzzle and corruption led to its premature termination. Primary education was again the focus in the Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000. In the following decade, however, the Federal Ministry of Education lost out to an autonomous Higher Education Commission (HEC) its control of resources and the subject of higher education. Its role was confined to push an Education Sector Reform Programme of no consequence.

It is obvious from Table 4 that the pendulum swung towards higher education in the 2000s. Primary and secondary education continue to claim the largest share of the total expenditure on education sector, but their shares have declined. As the overall resource envelop remained more or less the same, higher education gained at the expense of elementary education. Primary education has been the worst sufferer. Its share plummeted from 42.4 percent in 2002-03 to 32.4 percent in 2008-09, i.e. 10 percentage points in a matter of 6 years. The slight recovery in 2009-10 is based on half-yearly returns and any firm conclusion will have to await the availability of information for the full fiscal year. Secondary education has also suffered but not as much as the primary education. Its share declined from 25.8 percent in 2002-03 to 21.23 percent in 2006-07, but has been recovering since. General universities and colleges are clubbed together but the gains in this category are all due to the universities. Separate data is not available but the short-funding of the colleges is well-known. The sizeable gains of this category can be judged by the fact that its share in 2002-03 was half of the share of secondary education. By 2006-07, it had overtaken the secondary education. The gains of professional and technical universities are in addition. Teacher/vocational training gets the least attention.

Table 4

Education: Intrasectoral Spending (% Distribution)

Year	Primary	Secondary	General	Professional/	Teacher/	Other
			Universities/ Colleges, Institutes	Technical Universities/ Institutes	Vocational Training	
2002-03	42.4	25.8	12.70	3.98	1.71	13.41
2003-04	44.3	24.0	14.92	4.75	1.84	10.19
2004-05	42.2	23.9	14.39	12.86	2.30	4.35
2005-06	37.96	23.89	20.62	5.84	1.62	10.03
2006-07	32.53	21.23	22.32	4.54	1.97	17.41
2007-08	33.79	22.97	19.55	5.76	1.54	13.29
2008-09	32.40	24.68	19.30	5.13	1.53	16.96
2009-10 July-Dec	35.62	26.39	17.29	5.02	2.96	12.72

The higher allocation of resources to higher education has led to the highest growth per annum in the number, enrollment and teachers of the universities—all in the double-digit. In sharp contrast is the primary education, which registered less than one percent annual growth in the number of schools, 3.2 percent in enrolment and 1.6 percent in the availability of teachers. While the enrolment and teachers growth in the case of universities is in line, the growth of primary teachers is far behind the growth of enrollment. As the data in Table 5 includes private sector as well, the implication is that private sector also has a preference for higher education.

Table 5
Growth of Educational Institutions, Enrolment and Teachers, 1992–2009

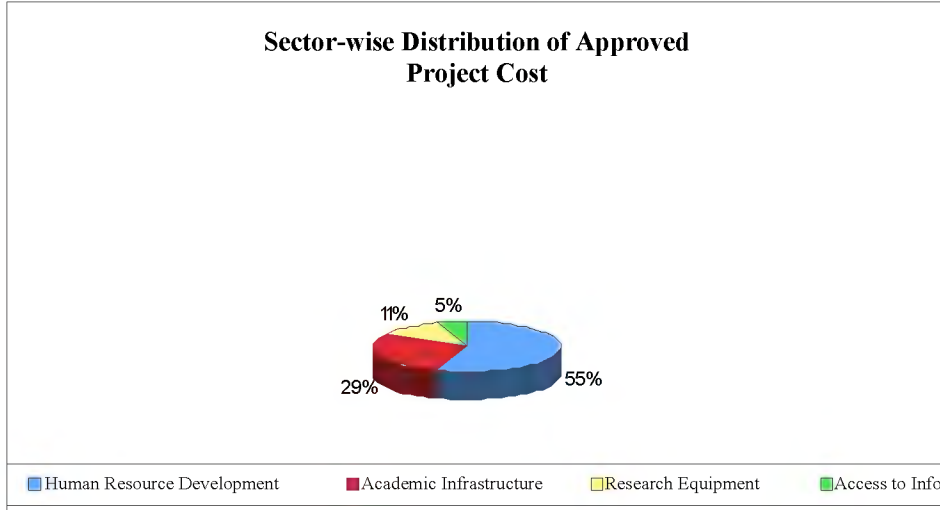
	Institutions	Enrolment	Teachers
Primary	0.96	3.2	1.6
Middle	9.39	3.2	6.5
High	7.26	3.9	4.4
Secondary / Vocational Inst.	10.15	6.8	4.2
Arts/Sc. Colleges	10.05	6.0	7.4
Professional Coll.	11.18	1.2	5.8
Universities	11.29	19	18

PRIORITIES

The obsession with expenditure/GDP ratios pushes in background the issues of quality, equity and efficiency. The current or non-development budgets are consumed almost entirely by salaries. In education sector, paying teachers well is the most desirable expenditure and describing it as non-development expenditure hides the fact that it is investment in human capital. However, current budgets are also recurrent budgets and include expenditure on education materials, repair and maintenance of equipment and buildings. One objective of the Social Action Programme in the nineties was to increase the non-salary component of the current budgets. The objective could not be achieved because the budget makers are oriented towards protecting salaries of the regular employees. By default, all else shows up in the development budget. Quality, equity and efficiency thus become goals to be achieved in the projects and programmes of the development budget. It is, therefore, from the development budget that one can get a sense of priorities.

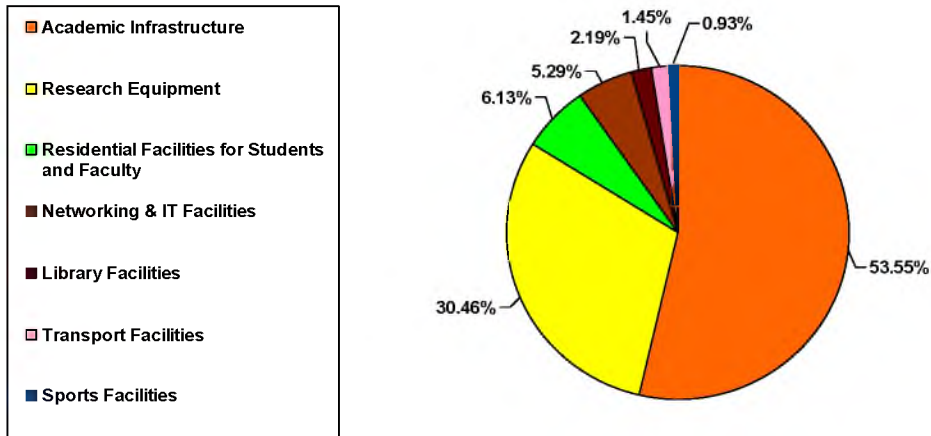
The HEC is the only body in the education sector which regularly places its budgetary information in the public domain. This is mainly why the following analysis is confined to the HEC alone. But it gives a fairly good idea of how planning and budgeting is done in the education sector as a whole.

By 2007-08, the HEC had piled up an approved portfolio of 742 projects with a total cost of Rs 337.6 billion. This is an enormous sum of money and the number of projects is the largest in the entire Public Sector Development Programme. Fig.1 shows the distribution of the money planned to be spent on various heads. It indicates the set of priorities that HEC kept in view while formulating these projects. Broadly, the distribution of the total project cost indicates a right set of priorities. Top priority is accorded to human resource development (55 percent), followed by academic infrastructure (29 percent), research equipment (11 percent) and access to information (5 percent).



This right set of priorities, however, begins to be distorted in the expenditure actually made against various projects. Figure 2 gives the distribution of the HEC’s actual development expenditure upto 2007-08, which reveals a different story. The major chunk of expenditure was on academic infrastructure (53.55 percent), followed by research equipment (30.46 percent), residential facilities for students and faculty (6.13 percent), networking and IT facilities (5.29 percent), library facilities (2.19 percent), transport facilities (1.45 percent) and sports (0.93 percent). In actual practice, top priority thus shifts from human resource development to academic infrastructure. Next comes equipment of various kinds—research, IT and transport—consuming 37.2 percent. Together, infrastructure and equipment claimed 90.75 percent of the total expenditure. If we add the 6.13 percent of expenditure made on residential facilities for students and faculty, 96.88 percent of the total expenditure was on construction and equipment.

HEC Development Expenditures 2002-08 by Category of Expenditure



The categorisation of expenditure does not include human resource development, the top priority in planning and project formulation. What happened to the projects related to this category? After all, one does hear about the programmes related to faculty development, overseas and indigenous scholarships, and fellowships. It might seem that the category of academic infrastructure has been ill-defined. However, the definition of academic infrastructure given adopted by the HEC leaves no doubt that the reference here is to brick and mortar. It states: "In pursuit of institutional excellence in teaching and research, HEC has made massive investments to upgrade the physical infrastructure of universities, particularly to cater for the requirements of increased enrolment in higher education and to accommodate the students admitted through various human resource development programs....Decades of under-investment in the Higher Education system have led to under-development of physical infrastructure of universities. Strategies for increasing enrolment in higher education, improving research capacity and improving quality of education programs succeed only when the necessary infrastructure for these intervention strategies is in place. In this regard, HEC is complementing these activities through a host of physical and technological infrastructure programs to provide high-quality education services to the sector.... Examples of the types of projects funded in this manner are as follows:

- Development of new universities and degree awarding institutions.
- Introduction of new disciplines and cutting edge technologies.
- Improvement of existing infrastructure.
- Upgrading/ strengthening/ establishing of Laboratories.

Universities have now been encouraged to submit 'University Mega-Projects', which contain all of the development activities" (HEC).

The largest proportion of spending is on brick and mortar and most of the mega projects have doubtful financial sustainability. A huge throwforward has been piled. As the vested interests in construction and supply projects are stronger than the projects related to improving the quality of human resource and its development, the latter are likely to be marginalised in the struggle for resources.

THE WAY FORWARD

In view of the foregoing discussion, the way forward is rather obvious. We must say goodbye to elusive expenditure/GDP ratios. It must be understood that more than 2 percent is unlikely for the next five years. A macroeconomic framework envisaging the tax/GDP ratio going up to 15 percent and a perceptible reduction of military and internal security expenditure will be anything but reasonable. What is required is an educational consolidation plan, with a key focus on quality within realistic financial parameters.

The consolidation plan should mark a shift from design quality to implementation quality (IQ). The pillars on which the IQ rests include students, teaching, teacher training and faculty research capability. The enrolment rate should increase, but equally important are the survival rate and the percentage of students achieving mastery.

In the case of elementary education, learning outcomes, reduction in drop out rates, better pupil teacher ratios, improved quality of teacher training and better textbooks are the issues to be addressed. Relevant curriculum, instructional time and learning

materials present another set of issues to be tackled. The school environment in public sector has deteriorated. Attention must focus on safety, health and sanitation, access for disabled. Language of instruction continues to be a matter of contention. Research, however, shows that the mother tongue is the most effective means of instruction at the elementary level.

In sum, measuring quantity and chasing expenditure/GDP ratios has done more harm than good. Implementation quality is the name of the game. Higher education should be selective and merit-based. Priority should be given to basic and skills education to maximise social and economic returns. This is also necessary to produce citizens aware not only of their rights, but also duties. Openness, transparency, accountability and other elements of good governance are instituted best in a literate society.

REFERENCES

- HEC. <http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Divisions/FPD/DevelopmentProjects/Pages/>
- Pakistan, Government of (2005) *Medium Term Development Framework 2005-10*. Islamabad: Planning Commission
- Pakistan, Government of (2005) *Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act 2005*. Islamabad: Finance Division.
- Pakistan, Government of (2007) *Vision 2030*. Islamabad: Planning Commission.
- Pakistan, Government of (2009) *Pakistan Economic Survey 2008-09*. Islamabad: Finance Division.
- Tahir, Pervez (1980) *Economic and Social Thinking of the Quaid-i-Azam*. Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab. (Reprinted 1991).
- Tahir, Pervez (2002) Development Priorities of the Founding Father of Pakistan. *The Pakistan Development Review* 41: 4 (Part II), 991–1010.
- Tahir, Pervez (2008) Reversing Jinnah's Development Priorities. (Paper)
- Tahir, Pervez and Nadia Saleem (2008) Financing Higher Education in Pakistan: Issues of Fiscal Sustainability. In Pervez Tahir, *et al. Financing Higher Education in Pakistan*. Lahore: GC University.