

Unclear Economic Thinking



Pakistan's economy remains in crisis, despite bold claims of prosperity by its economic planners. If the thinking behind our economic plans were clear, the nation might not be in constant turmoil. Well-thought-out plans lead not to such turbulence, but rather to prosperity. It makes one wonder whether our economic policies are the result of clear thinking.

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) publishes documents that highlight important economic policies. These documents are available online.. Do these documents reflect clear economic thinking?

I analyzed two documents by MoF: the “Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-2019 (PES)” and the “Roadmap for Stability and Growth,” both published in 2019. The analysis shows that economic writing published by MoF is not only difficult to understand but also inadequately researched and poorly presented. It is therefore evident that the writing suffers from the lack of clear thought.



In the first part of my analysis, I tried to determine whether these documents are written with their

audience in mind. The answer is no. These are public documents. But our general public is not well grounded in the English language. Therefore these documents, preferably should have been published in Urdu, and in a language which is most conveniently understood. Aiming for a broader readership will have two benefits. First, it will strengthen Pakistan's democracy. The more people understand economic policy, the better our economic discourse becomes. Second, it will strengthen the social fabric, because when Ministries publish work that most people across the country are able to understand knowledge becomes inclusive.

Now onto the second part of my analysis. In it I used guidelines from [work published by Steven Pinker, a linguist at Harvard University](#). I also followed [guidance from work put out by the Literary Lab at Stanford University](#).

With this guidance in mind, I measured these texts for their reading ease. I also tracked vague words, as defined by Pinker and the Stanford study. Moreover, I counted the number of times the word “and” is used. Its excessive or careless use can enable the linking of unrelated ideas.

The results of this analysis indicated that both these documents are indeed difficult to understand. Both texts contain complex, vague words, as well as overuse of the word “and” and painfully long sentences and paragraphs.

Vague words were plentiful. Words such as “growth,” “framework” and “strategy” were commonly employed. These words are vague because they can express more than one coherent thought at a time. The word “and” was also used

unnecessarily. These texts teemed with complex sentences and paragraphs. A few sentences comprised more than seven dozen words, whereas any sentence of more than thirty words can be hard for those whose native language is not English. Similarly, some paragraphs are so wordy that the reader ends up losing the spirit of the whole argument. One wonders, if a college graduate would easily understand these documents. As a test, I showed them to a few recent graduates, and I was not surprised to find them in a state of confusion.

Apart from the above analysis, I also observed that these documents are not well-researched and attractively presented.

Well-researched documents contain essential citations. Citations show that writers took pains to read a wide variety of research before reaching their conclusions. One must not forget that the hopes of millions rest upon our economic policies. Ergo, one assumes that thorough research would be conducted. But, sadly, the lack of citations in these two texts puts that assumption in question.

Attractive formatting of a document not only pleases the eye, but can also help engage the reader if the content is a bit dry. Meaningful visualizations and effective use of fonts and space were absent in both documents. A cursory look at the Indian Economic Survey surprised me, and provided a salient comparison. Their economic survey is better formatted. It is available in Hindi. Their survey also

talks about behavioral economics, data and technology. Ours does not.

Overall, my analysis showed that our government's writing on economic matters does not reflect clear thinking. Unclear thinking cannot take nations from a state of poverty to prosperity; only clear thinking can.

I am sure that the intentions of MoF personnel are good; but as a concerned citizen of the country, I expect our economic planners to make policies which go a long way towards addressing the core issues of the country.

It is time government institutions think about our economic problems in a clear manner, for it is only through the clarity of ideas that meaningful policies can be framed, which in turn, should bring about genuine economic revival.

