

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN AND THE 21st CENTURY

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This conference and workshop was organized by Frontier Education Foundation (FEF) during June 2006 at Peshawar. FEF's principal function is the promotion of education in the private sector in the NWFP.

The workshop was a platform for key players and stakeholders and provided an opportunity for brain storming and problem solving. Delegates from Islamabad, including the federal minister for education Lt. General Ashraf Qazi, and all four provinces, FATA, AJK and Northern Areas participated along with students and teachers in Peshawar. The local presence, however, was thin on the ground, reflecting a disappointing lack of interest.

The delegates were asked to work within different groups, each submitting reports and recommendations in the concluding session of the workshop. Exhibit one lists the main working groups.

Exhibit 1: Major Working Groups

- 1 Goals & Objectives of Education
- 2 Examination Systems
- 3 Learning Environment
- 4 Teacher Training
- 5 The role of the private sector in Education
- 6 Foreign aid & education
- 7 21st century education needs

During lectures and discussion the following facts came to light.

- Out of the 500 best universities of the world there are 200 universities in North America, Canada and Latin America, 209 in Europe, 89 in Asia Pacific, four are in Africa, but none in Pakistan or India.

- Out of the top 100 universities 57 are in the U.S.A, UK has 11, Japan boasts of 5 and Germany 6, France and Sweden have four each, Switzerland and Netherlands each have two.
- Out of the 500 top class universities only 2 are in the Islamic world, both in Turkey.

Another interesting point was that of the total number of theses in progress at such prominent universities as MIT, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and John Hopkins. 50% are being prepared by Chinese students.

UNESCO World Education Report for 2006 indicates that the ratio of higher education to total population in Pakistan is higher than only Sikkim and Bhutan within SAARC. In Pakistan the higher education to total population ratio stands at 2.6 percent whereas in Korea it is 54.8%, in Singapore 35.2%, in Japan 30.4%, in Qatar 27.5%, in the Philippine 26.2%, in Hong Kong 27.2%, in Bahrain 20.2%, in Turkey 19.5%, in Egypt 16.9%, in Saudi Arabia 13.9%, in Iran 12.7%, in Indonesia 10.2%, and in India 6%. All participants were unanimous in their view that the extremely low rate of higher education in Pakistan is a matter of grave concern.

Pakistan is among those 12 most backward countries that are not spending more than 2% of their GDP on all levels of education. Of the 2% total education expenditure a quarter is spent on educational bureaucrats, for their salaries and allowances where teachers, and college faculty get a significantly lower share. 8% of the educational budget is spent on utilities and only 1.7% on research and development.

Other developed countries are spending 8 to 12% of their GDP on education. The workshop recommended that in Pakistan we should also bifurcate higher education into “teaching university” and a “research university” sectors. Another recommendation related to a more equitable distribution of PhDs among Pakistani universities. Recently a survey has shown that the country abounds in fake PhD degree holders and forged and “downloaded”.

Other recommendations include,

- Collaboration between public and private sector universities for promotion of national development.
- Research and teaching universities should exist in both the public and the private sectors.
- Enactment of legislation specifying norms, procedures and standards for the establishment and functioning of higher education institutions in the private sector.
- Allocation of government scholarships for private sector universities.
- Provision of vocational training facilities at schools by private sector universities.
- Preparation of course material taking account of national needs by faculty members should be encouraged.

- Establishment of an independent national regulatory authority for monitoring access to and performance of private educational institutions.

Exemptions of private schools from all taxes.