

Undergraduate Education Policy 2023: A Paradigm Shift Leading towards Practical Training

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 is the latest policy issued by the Government of Pakistan to cope with the epistemological, sociological and economic needs of society. It is issued in the continuity of the UGE Policy 2020. The UGE Policy 2023 Version 1.1 comprises guidelines for Bachelor of Studies (BS). Discussing mainstream general education (BS 4 years degree), the policy includes two segments of practical learning named as Field Experience and Capstone Project supported by the course Entrepreneurship. Both the practical segments are mandatory for the completion of degree and have weightage of 06 credit hours. It is a timely step to meet the demand of the preparation of productive human resource. By this, the policy, for the first time, has focused on the practical training of students at the undergraduate level, enabling them to know about their future role and worth. The article under study is based on the qualitative research and document analysis approach. It presents an analysis of the curriculum of BS in the light of the UGE Policy 2023. The policy has been compared to the earlier policies and plans issued for the Undergraduate level, too. Findings of the research show that the policy has aptly focused on the practical aspects of education which will lead towards economic productivity and professional skillfulness of the students. The outcome of the policy will certainly be very encouraging if implemented in true spirit.

Keywords: Change, Education, Education Policy, Practical Training, Productivity, Psychomotor Domain.

INTRODUCTION

Change is the key to progress. It is the element that takes humanity towards new goals and destinations. Each and every thing in the world is passing through change which is leading towards advancement. Education, which was started in the lap of the first mother on earth, is now the strongest tool of positive change. Its major role is to lead society towards the required change and progress. National Education Policy 2009 stated the objectives of education to develop a self-reliant individual, capable of analytical and original thinking, a responsible member of the community and a global citizen (Pakistan, 2009, p. 11).

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Education has now secured the key position in the human advancement. Progress and backwardness of a society is caused by the education it provides. Education is the agent of change, so it undergoes swift changes by itself, too. It accepts changes first, then disseminates it to the society to achieve the goals.

21st century is the first century of the 3rd millennium. It is the age of knowledge and technology. The societies with scientific bases will survive in the coming era. The superstitious societies will undergo another dark age of slavery. The slavery will differ in shape but severe in condition. The nations and societies that want to survive with dignity will have to turn towards knowledge of practical life, or they will have to face deteriorating dooms.

Pakistan, one of the leading countries in the 3rd world, is striving hard to pace up with the modern trends in life and education. Unemployment is the top-most issue of the world these days. People see education as the basic tool for getting a good job. Job-oriented education is demanded the most. Education-providing departments and agencies are focusing on this aspect to cope with the need and demand of society. Pakistan's education system is also undergoing the same changes. Practicalization is being focused so that the human product prepared by education may get suitable jobs in the market. For this purpose, the government of Pakistan announced a policy named as "Undergraduate Education Policy 2020", which has been re-presented in 2023 in a modified form. The details of the policy are discussed in the 'Analysis' section.

Education plays its role in society through a systematic process. It designs its curriculum to achieve the goals and targets. Curriculum is the plan and roadmap towards the aims. In the words of Jenkins and Shipman, "A curriculum is the formulation and implementation of an educational proposal, to be taught and learned within a school or other institution and for which that institution accepts responsibility at three levels; its rationale; its actual implementation and its effects" (Shipman, 1976, p. 6).

Curriculum is the backbone of the education system. It leads the whole system. It transmits the required knowledge and skills to the learners and produces the demanded human resource. It is also worth-mentioning that whenever aims are changed, curriculum is also changed. It is curriculum which changes both the institution and the product (Taba, 1962, p. 53). The curriculum which fails to cope with the needs of student, discipline and society is deemed to be useless (Shami, 2008, p. 1).

Rationale

General education system in Pakistan (which is the mainstream of education in Pakistan) is producing human resource that knows nothing about his market value. Even the student graduated from the university does not know about his place in the job market. He is unaware about his skill and expertise and the place where it can earn him a value. It is a big drawback which needs to be addressed so that the educational product be directed towards his market place where he can provide best services.

This study deals with the analysis of practical aspects of the undergraduate degree curricula which can direct the students towards the proper place of action and service. The study aims to highlight and evaluate the importance of practical training elements in undergraduate curricula that will guide the policy-makers and educationists in future planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The stream of education in Pakistan is on its flow from 1947. Pakistan, with its existence, started to mould the education system according to own aims and goals; and held a conference on education December 1947. It was the first milestone in educational journey of Pakistan. The stream went through ‘Commission on National Education 1959’ (Known as Sharif Commission), ‘National Education Policy 1969’ (which was not implemented), ‘The Education Policy 1972-80’, ‘National Education Policy 1979’, ‘National Education Policy 1992-2002’, ‘National Education Policy 1998-2010’, ‘National Education Policy 2009’ and ‘National Education Policy 2017’. The long seventy years passed but the educational standard, literacy rate and productivity could not achieve the required benchmark. National Education Policy 1998-2010 lamented the situation in the following words:

Education has been used as a change agent in all societies but the dilemma in our context is that we are inclined more to use education to perpetuate tradition (Pakistan, 1998, p. 10).

Education policies of Pakistan have gone through changes in direction as some of the policies have been issued by democratic governments and some by military governments. Both of the kinds have no coherence with one another. Apart from this, most of the policies have failed to achieve the defined aims and goals (Hamid, 2013, p. 16).

Universities, research institutions, and the government agencies have conducted many researches to find out the causes of failure. Keeping in view the past failures/shortcomings, the implementation plans were included in the policies and plans for education reforms, but the loopholes still existed and the goals were not achieved. The government of Pakistan, in recent year, has issued two new policies specifically designed for the undergraduate education programmes in 2020 and 2023. The UGE Policy 2020, for the first time, focused on the practical training of the students, but no credit or marks were allotted to those elements. Discussing the matter, Dr. Hamid et al declared that it would be a failure if it is not allotted the credit and evaluation mechanism (Aslam, Fall 2021, pp. 115-124). The latest policy issued for the undergraduate level is named as “Undergraduate Education Policy 2023” which is the basis of this research study. The policy has allotted credit to the compulsory practical training and devised a mechanism for its evaluation as well.

Education planning and curriculum development is an on-going process which, all the time, undergoes analysis and evaluation; and consequently changes are made to it. Education system in Pakistan also follows the said process but there are some flaws which needs to be settled.

The critical importance of systematic piloting and evaluation of curricula is acknowledged by all involved in the process of curriculum development. However, research and evaluation of

curriculum is rarely conducted. If and when these are conducted, the findings and recommendations are not used (University, 2003, p. 13).

Keeping in view the role of evaluation of curricula, the plan and data of UGE Policy 2023 are analyzed to draw findings and present recommendations for the betterment of situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative research design following the document analysis approach. As the scope of the study is related to undergraduate level, the policies on undergraduate education have been kept under special focus. The data have been got from the undergraduate education policies, which have been compared and analyzed with respect to practical training of students. Special attention is paid to the Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 and its practical training aspects. Findings, recommendations and conclusion of the study have been drawn on the analysis of this policy.

ANALYSIS

The system of education in Pakistan's government institutions is cramming-based. It focuses some components of cognitive domain only. The Higher Order Thinking (HOT) skills (Analyzing, Synthesizing and Creating) of this domain are also neglected. Only one of the Lower Order Thinking (LOT) skills i.e. memorizing gets the highest attention, both by the teachers and the students. Understanding, the second lowest element of LOT, catches some of the attention which is deemed to be a very high achievement by the prevailing traditional system. It is such a great pity that independent learning, particularly in the Affective and Psychomotor domains, is always ignored and neglected.

The education system needs radical changes at grass-root level. The education provided must be connected to real life requirements and needs. Students should be provided with the meaningful and relevant learning (Pakistan, 2017, p. 92). Furthermore, the learning must be practicalized during the studentship period. Only then the education system would bear fruit for society, otherwise the system would produce unneeded and non-productive people.

The flaw mentioned above is on the focus of the policy makers. Each and every education policy showed some advancement in this regard. The education policy of 2017 presented a plan for tertiary education named as HEC Vision 2025. 'Undergraduate Education Policy 2020' was a practical step towards achieving the goals of HEC Vision 2025. It specially focused on the practical training of the graduates so that they might apply the acquired knowledge and skills to life challenges. It has set creativity as an objective of the higher education which can be achieved through practical command over the knowledge area. The policy presented guidelines for all types of the undergraduate degree. The degree programmes of BS 4 years (general education), Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Dental Surgery, Bachelor of Studies in Nursing, Bachelor of Architecture, Bachelor of Eastern Medicine and Surgery, Bachelor of Homoeopathic Medical Sciences, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Doctor of Pharmacy, LLB and MBBS have also been discussed in the policy (HEC, 2020, p. 2).

Transformation of the undergraduate level of general education started in year 2009 when Bachelor of Arts (B.A), Master of Arts (M.A) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc), Master of Science (M.Sc.) degrees were replaced by Bachelor of Studies (BS four years degree). The BS curriculum comprised five different categories of courses i.e. compulsory, general, foundation, major and major-elective. The first three categories were placed in lieu of B.A/B.Sc. level that is why these categories had general and foundation courses. While courses of the last two categories were to be taught during the last two years replacing the conventional M.A/M.Sc. level demands and standards.

A table is given below to show the breakup of BS curriculum: (HEC, 2009, pp. 9-13).

| Compulsory Courses | General Courses | Foundation Courses | Major Courses | Major-Elective Courses | Total Courses | Total Credit Hours |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 09 | 10 (to be chosen out of given 15 courses) | 09-10 | 13 | 04 (to be chosen out of given 10-12 courses) | 45-46 | 133-136 |

Table 1: Categories of the BS curriculum and their weightage in Credit Hours

This system remained in vogue for eleven years; from 2009 to 2020. It was not proved to be strong enough in training students on practical side. It has only one element for practical learning; the research project. But this element was not compulsory in all of the disciplines. Most of the disciplines offered two courses in lieu of the research project. Another notable point was that some disciplines offered research projects in groups. So its practical utility was not up to the mark.

In 2020, new policy was issued. The new policy focused on the practical aspect properly. It presented “Practical Learning Requirement” as major and compulsory section of the curriculum. The policy changed the previous categorization of curriculum. As discussed earlier, the BS curriculum was divided into five categories, this policy presented the courses in three categories. The education for bachelor degree was offered in two forms: BS (4 years degree) and Associate Degree (2 years degree). Curriculum for these degrees, comprised three major categories: 1. General Education Requirement, 2. Disciplinary Requirement, and 3. Practical Learning Requirement. The detail may be seen in the following table:

| Undergraduate Education Policy 2020 | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| General Education Requirement | | | | | | | Disciplinary Requirement | | Practical Learning Requirement | |
| Breadth Courses | | | Functional Skills Courses | | Civilizational Courses | | Courses | Practical work/ Lab/ Research work | Compulsory Standard Internship | Entrepreneurship/ Youth Club / Sports |
| Arts and Humanities | Social Sciences | Natural Sciences | Expository Writing | Quantitative Reasoning | Pak Studies | Islamiyat | 1.Optional 2.Major 3.Minor 4.Distribution | Experimental/ Practical/ Research work | Compulsory Practical work of 09 weeks or 360 hours | BS: 4 hours per week for at least four semesters |
| 02 Courses 06 Credit Hours | 02 Courses 06 Credit Hours | 02 Courses 06 Credit Hours | 03 Courses 09 Credit Hours | 02 Courses 06 Credit Hours | 01 Course 03 Credit | 01 Course 03 Credit Hours | 25 Courses 75 Credit Hours | Equal to 02 Courses 06 Credit Hours | Non-Credit | Non-Credit |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|-----------|------------------------------------------|--|--|----------------------|--|--|
| | | | | | Hour s | | | | | | |
| 13 Courses, 39 Credit Hours | | | | | | 27 Courses, 81 Credit Hours | | | Zero Credit Hours | | |
| Total Courses: 40 (Minimum) | | | | | | Total Credit Hours: 120 (Minimum) | | | | | |

Table 2: Break-up of BS Curriculum into categories and their weightage in Credit Hours

Undergraduate Education Policy 2020 introduced Associate Degree (AD) of two years duration. AD replaced the conventional BA/BSc which was running under annual system. AD ran through semester system. The curriculum and courses for AD were kept the same as the first four semesters of BS. Like BA/BSc, AD was also a combination of general courses, discipline-specific foundation courses and practical requirements (HEC, 2020, p. 8). It laid foundations for the main subject/discipline. In this system, the student had to decide his specific field of study after completion of 12 years of education.

Implementation of Undergraduate Education Policy 2020 was kept under observation. It was observed that it needs more practicalization of curriculum. For this purpose HEC issued another policy with the title of Undergraduate Education Policy, effective from 2023. The policy of 2023 strengthened the practical components of curriculum and modified the policy of 2020 with regards to categorization and implementation of curriculum.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 | | | | |
| Undergraduate Education (120-144 Cr. Hrs.) | | | | |
| General Education Cluster (30 CHs) | Disciplinary/Major (Min. 72 CHs) | Interdisciplinary courses (Min.CH s: 12) | Field Expe rienc e | C ap st on e Pr oj ec t |

| A H | N S | S S | Fu n. En g. & E W | Q R | Ide olo gy of Pa k. | Isl. Stu d. | I C T | Ent rep ren eur shi p | Civi c & Co m. Eng age men t | Major (Min.CH s: 72) | Minor (Option al) (Min.04 Courses =CHs: 12) | Courses Allied to the Major field (Min.04 Courses =CHs: 12) | Inter nship / Pract ical Wor k | Res ear ch in the Mai n Dis cip line |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 1 | 0 1 | 0 1 | 02 CH s (06) | 0 2 | 01 CH s (02) | 01 CH s (02) | 0 1 C H s (0 3) | 01 CH s (02) | 01 CHs (02) | 24 CHs (72) | 04 CHs (12) | 04 CHs (12) | CHs (03) | C H s (0 3) |
| 12 Courses, 30 Credit Hours | | | | | | | | | | Options provided a.Single Major (Min.CHs: 72) b.Single Major + 1 minor (Min.CHs: 72+12=84) | 04 Courses 12 Cr. Hrs. | Pract ical Wor k of 03 Cr. Hrs. | Prac tici cal Wor k of | |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| | c.Single Major + 2 minors (Min.CHs: 72+12+12=96) d.Double Major (Min.CHs: 144) | | | 0 3 C r. H rs. |
| Total Courses: 40 (Minimum) | | Total Credit Hours: 120 (Minimum) | | |

Table 3: Break-up of BS Curriculum into categories and their weightage in Credit Hours

Since the introduction of BS programme in 2009, the students were bound to complete four years of education to get a degree. If a student, due to some reasons, had to discontinue the study after 2 years, 3 years or more than 3 years, he would get no degree and his educational qualification would be counted the same as 12 years education. This flaw was incessantly under sharp criticism during the period. The new policy of 2020 settled this flaw and introduced Associate Degree on completion of two years successful education. The policy 2023 addressed the issue by clarifying the system of entry and exit within the policy document which allowed the students to get an Associate Degree by fulfilling the criteria of passing 4 semesters with minimum 2.00/4.00 CGPA (HEC, 2023, p. 10).

DISCUSSION

The most important contribution of the policies of 2020 and 2023 is the shift of paradigm towards practical training. It is a bitter reality of the Pakistan's education system that it has focused on cramming and memorizing. That is why the education here failed to equip its product with skill or practical exposure and professional command. So, the new policies has to pay attention on this aspect. Undergraduate Education Policy 2020 states:

An important objective is to make the undergraduate degree a terminal one, for which experience in a practical work environment and engagement in extracurricular activities is an invaluable complement to a student's academic training (HEC, 2020, p. 12).

While Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 emphasized on "application of academic knowledge to effectively respond to real life entrepreneurial and industry challenges and requirements" (HEC, 2023, p. 1). To translate this objective into reality, the policy has added two practical components of "Field Experience" and "Capstone Project". Both these components are compulsory for all students and carry credit hours and gradation. It is worth-mentioning that these items were first introduced by the policy 2020 but were not ignored in the field due to non-credit components. Another course, Entrepreneurship, has been included in General Education category

‘to equip the students with the knowledge and skills necessary to start, manage, and grow their own ventures’.

It is a well-known fact that modern era demands economic well-being from education. The system of education with strong professional preparation attracts the masses most. Pakistan, being a country of poor and low income people, cannot bear the education without job. That is why job is becoming the centre of the whole system. Linkage of curricula with industry/business and absorption of graduates in the job market is focus of the new trend (Pakistan, 2017, p. 77). Conforming to this scenario, Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 is an endeavor to transform the system towards comprehensiveness and practicalization.

FINDINGS

The new Undergraduate Education Policy has aptly focused on the practical learning requirements. It will turn the trend, to some extent, from general education to job-preparative education. In this regard, the main features of the policy are as under:

1. Curriculum of BS is mainly divided into five parts: General Education Cluster; Disciplinary or Major courses; Interdisciplinary courses; Field Experience; and Capstone Project. It means that one third of the curriculum is for practical preparation for job market.
2. The practical learning components have been placed in three areas of curriculum: 1. Course on ‘Entrepreneurship’ in General Education; 2. Field Experience (6 to 8 weeks field work which will be graded by a faculty member in collaboration with the supervisor in the field); 3. Capstone Project (to be graded by the supervisor/ faculty member).
3. UGE Policy 2020 introduced Practical Learning Lab (PLL) that consisted of three areas out of which the student was to join one according to his own needs and aptitude.
 - i. Entrepreneurship Lab (lectures, teamwork, proposal writing sessions, competitions, presentation sessions, fundraising events, start-up events, and marketing events)
 - ii. Youth Clubs (Green Clubs, Drama Clubs, Book Reading Clubs, University Magazines or Newspapers, University TV or Radio Stations, Debating Clubs, or Student Associations)
 - iii. Sports (any sport training and practice sessions on regular basis under the supervision of Director Sports) (HEC, 2020, p. 13).

But it was a non-credit activity that is why it was not properly followed by the institutions. UGE Policy 2023 changed this segment into field work and allotted credit to it, so that it may be implanted in letter and spirit.

4. Apart from the particular section of practical training, the section of Disciplinary Requirement includes Lab work, Field work, Research assignments which lead towards practical, logical and scientific mindset. It inculcates the students with objective approach in life, and prevents them from believing superstitions and hearsays.
5. Section of Disciplinary Requirement has some psychomotor type courses and practical, too.

CONCLUSION

Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 has rightly focused on the strengthening of practical aspects of Undergraduate curriculum as it is the demand of the day. Most of the students at the graduate level hope for the better position in the job market, but the Pakistani education was a failure to guide the students in this regard. The policy, for the first time, declared professional/practical training mandatory for each student so that he/she may get awareness and some practical experience of the job market. By this he/she will not only know his/her own worth but he/she will also know about his/her future role. It will lighten his/her way and will provide confidence to his/her personality. So, it is hoped that the policy implementation will produce better human resource for the job market which will result in the advancement and prosperity of society and nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are given on the basis of findings of this research:

1. Policy provisions must be truly incorporated in the curricula of BS level.
2. A strict evaluation mechanism for these practical aspects should also be devised and followed, so that the students may have no chance to avoid or shirk it.
3. Coordinator and supervisors of practical learning requirement should be appointed at institutional level. Students will report their progress to their supervisors who will convey the same report to the coordinator on monthly basis. Coordinator and supervisors will join heads if there arises a problem.
4. Areas for practical training should be mentioned in the curriculum of each discipline so that all the stake holders may be well aware of those. Thus they would be able to choose an area of their own interest which will resultantly increase the chances of better practical training.

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