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Need to shift focus from brick and mortar to quality of education: report

ISLAMABAD: Politicians seek to please their constituencies by building universities rather than focusing on the availability of eligible professors or quality of education.

This was highlighted in a research conducted at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). The study was led by Dr Nadeemul Haque, PIDE Vice-Chancellor Dr Mohammad Jehangir Khan and Fasiha Fatima.

According to the report, in Pakistan, it has become commonplace to think of universities as buildings without professors. Professors are serious scholars with international recognition and important verifiable fresh ideas in their discipline's discourse. However, in our country a professor is a graded official with several publications leading to no discourse. We value all PhDs equally and measure publications by their commercial value rather than the quality of ideas.

"It is high time we should reassess our higher education strategy, the report stated, adding professorship is imperative for excellence in learning," the report said.

During the study, researchers visited the Higher Education Commission (HEC) website to get the list of approved higher education institutes (HEIs) in the country. The findings revealed that universities or (HEIs) lack professors which can negatively impact learning and human capital accumulation in the future.

It was noted in the study that a total of 21,024 faculty members are in each HEI of which only 5.8pc are professors. The number of professors in the social science discipline is only 114 (0.54pc).

To put things in perspective, the research highlighted comparative trends. Compared with universities in the United States, United Kingdom and Korea, Pakistani universities have

fewer number of professors in other disciplines as well as in the social science discipline. There are about 33.85pc professors in other disciplines and 18.62pc professors associated with social science at Yale University, USA. There are about 45.75pc and 54.15pc professors in all disciplines in Harvard and Stanford University, USA, respectively. Furthermore, there are about 32 and 45.34pc professors (in all disciplines) at the University of Bristol and London School of Economics UK, respectively.

The report emphasised that there is an urgent need to focus on employing eligible professors in Pakistani universities. It recommends that it is important to jumpstart our 231 universities. Perhaps a better approach than the one we are using might be to develop a large professor hiring programme. This should mean hiring foreign professors at market value to spend time in Pakistani universities. — Staff Reporter