**Must education cost so much?**

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Usually, when I write about education, I argue that most countries should spend more on education, including Pakistan. Today, I shall do that, too, but then, seemingly contradicting myself, I also ask questions about how much money we really must spend on education, for a good basic education for all. We must begin a basic debate about the purpose and content of education, and how best we can organise schools, making them better and cheaper at the same time. But first, some arguments about the importance of education, after all it is a cornerstone in any society, hence, also for people’s and governments’ attention to it.

Pakistan does still not have universal primary and lower secondary education for all, as recommended by Muhammad Ali Jinnah “at the earliest possible time” in several speeches at Independence. He also spoke about the “right content” of education, stressing spiritual and moral aspects, and social and vocational aspects. Values and moral education were seen as essential to create a new and fair country for all, without religious, ethnic and other differences. In debates, education was often listed as a basic concern even above industrial and other development issues, or rather as a prerequisite for development in other fields.

[Biden asks $1.5T budget, raises non-defense spending](https://nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2021/biden-asks-dollar-1-5t-budget-raises-non-defense-spending)

Today, more than a third of children attend private schools in the country, if they can afford it. The rest attend government schools, religious seminaries, and self-help schools. Many pupils drop out of school before they have completed the full cycle, which in any case is very short, and the school-starting age is very low and children may not be mature enough to understand all concepts and issues they are taught.

It is important that all children in a country are given basic education, preferably with more or less the same content and curriculum for all, contributing to the country’s nation-building. It is good that Pakistan’s leaders now give more attention to education than before, and hopefully, the education budgets will go up, to be more than the meagre some two percent of GDP, which is amongst the lowest in the world.

Norway has one of the highest education expenditures in the world, about USD 20,000 per child annually at the primary and secondary level. Education costs at all levels, including tertiary, constitutes seven to eight percent of GDP. In poorer countries, education expenditures as a percentage of GDP is often low, from some two to five percent. However, as a percentage of government budgets, it may be high, even 30-40 percent in those countries which prioritise education. For countries with meagre education budgets, and also other countries, I would argue that they reallocate funds for education from their military budgets, and possibly from some extravagant prestige projects, and from a fairer tax system so that the rich contribute more. Western donors talk about the importance of education, but in Pakistan, for example, they do not help as much as they should, something I find difficult to understand and certainly unacceptable.

[Voting begins in NA-75 Daska by-election](https://nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2021/voting-begins-in-na-75-daska-by-election)

Sadly, the Western military alliance, NATO, has advised its 30 member states should spend at least two percent of GDP on the military, although NATO already spends ten times as much as Russia on the military. It was announced last month that Norway just passed the two-percent rearmament target. Although Norway can afford it, being one of the world’s richest countries, I am still against such high military expenditures. Even in Norway, it is easy to identify unmet education needs; psycho-social support, increased student allowances at the tertiary level, and better technical and vocational education and training.

All this said, arguing for more money to the education sector can also be questioned, at least at a theoretical level. I would today like to raise some opposite questions, such as: how much money should a country actually spend on education? Can we not find ways of educating children and youth which are better than today, but costing less? To teach values, moral and social issues, you don’t need to cost much money, does it? And also, is all the cognitive, academic content in education of today really needed? We know that students learn things that are outdated soon after they graduate, and much of the rest is forgotten, and it was often irrelevant in the first place. So, why do we go on spending so much money on it? What is important is that children and youth learn to socialise, work together, become good human beings, develop good working habits, and simply feel happy and become confident. They should be encouraged to learn more, not forced into stale learning situations, which many do not like, becoming losers at school and therefore often in later life.

[France: Le Pen confirms 2022 presidential run](https://nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2021/france-le-pen-confirms-2022-presidential-run)

The school should be a good place to be and a good place to learn. We should teach the children and youth some of the ‘tricks’ for how to live happy lives, and to solve problems on rainy days, which we all get. In spite of all the money we spend on education, in poor and rich countries, no system fulfils the requirements of the school teaching the children and youth the skills they need to live happy lives and be able to solve their own problems and move ahead from that. Thus, in many ways, education doesn’t teach the most essential.

No, I don’t really blame the teachers for the situation, but I would expect more from the teacher-students, teacher-trainers, and certainly the researchers in education, philosophy, sociology, economics and others studying the foundations of education and the practical implementation of it. They should lead the debate so that politicians, parents and others can understand the education sector, and so that we can develop alternatives to the current very costly and often irrelevant education systems the world over. We need a broad debate about what education really should be, what content to include, what work methods to learn, and how children and teachers can be able to enjoy every school day, becoming better human beings as individuals and in cooperation with others.

[Russia 'concerned' over foreign activities in Black Sea](https://nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2021/russia-concerned-over-foreign-activities-in-black-sea)

I don’t say that all what the schools teach children and youth is useless. But I do think much of it is, even negative for their development. Also, it takes away time and room for more important content and other work methods. I also think that the education costs have become too high the world over. I question the education content and the way education is organised. Cheaper might even be better. For example, could not children go to school half days, or every other day? Could also not local community organisations and workplaces in cities and villages offer some out-of-school activities and apprenticeships, where children could feel useful and learn at the same time? Education is not just to sit at a desk, listen to teachers, read books, look up things on the Internet, and the like. Education is indeed more, and much of it can cost less than today—well, teachers should be paid better all over the world, doing one of the most important jobs I can think of. Let us begin a broad debate about what education and schooling really should be.