

An Exclusive Interview with

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Minister of State for Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education, Interior and Narcotics Control

Question: The role, functions and responsibilities of Ministry of Education. What are the priority action areas of your Ministry for the development of education in Pakistan?

Answer: The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has many areas of responsibility. It is the parent ministry of autonomous Higher Education Commission of Pakistan which is responsible for setting up National standards in education for tertiary education and also distributes funding throughout the country to all Federal and Provincial charter public universities through a transparent mechanism.

The ministry also oversees important organizations such as National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), Basic Education Community Schools (BECS), and National Education Foundation (NEF) and together they run almost 20000 non formal feeder community schools and focus on literacy centers throughout the country which cater to around one million children and people every year.

The premier institute for policy making in Technical and Vocational sector is NAVTTC which is also placed under the ministry. Whereas National Training Bureau (NTB) works for promotion of technical and vocational education throughout the country working in sync with the provincial TEVTAS and other stakeholder. The functions include managing better trainings through Pakistan Manpower Institute (PMI), tracking Pakistan's talent through National Talent Pool (NTP), and maintaining liaison with UNESCO through Pakistan National Commission for UNESCO (PNCU).

The priority areas include making minimum standards in curriculum to be applied nationwide, creating synergy and promote inter provincial cooperation after 18th constitutional amendment to achieve MDGs and EFA goals.

Rolling out first ever Technical and Vocational Education policy for the country and revising and improving National Education Policy 2009 are also among top priorities.

Question: The key education reforms being undertaken by your Ministry for eradicating illiteracy from Pakistan?

Answer: The Ministry of Federal Education has developed a comprehensive National Plan of Action to achieve EFA and MDG Goals and follows on it along with all the provinces and areas quarterly. This is really moving things forward and for the first time in many years educational statistics are getting better. Our net enrollment rate (NER) has gone up from 68 to 72 percent whereas Literacy rate has gone up to 60 percent now which is truly commendable. The Ministry has finalized plans for launching a National Literacy Movement to create a National Movement and momentum against illiteracy



In my view, ICMAP members are the main architects for creating value consciousness to ensure cost competitive management decisions and to ensure appropriate pricing of products. This is absolutely essential if Pakistan's industry is to compete effectively in this era of increasing globalization.

Question: What is the current literacy situation in Pakistan? Some facts and statistics.

Answer: According to PSLM 2012-13 Literacy Rate in Pakistan is 60 percent; province wise detail is given below:

S#	Province/ Area	Literacy Rate
1.	Pakistan	60%
2.	Punjab	62%
3.	Sindh	60%
4.	NWFP	52%
5.	Balochistan	45%
6.	FATA	25%
7.	AJK	62%
8.	GB	44%
9.	ICT	86%



Question: Without investing in quality education, our country cannot achieve real progress and prosperity. What are your views and how we can learn from other countries having better literacy rates?

Answer: Quality education can play a vital role to take advantage of emerging opportunities to ensure sustainable development. "Education is a 'game changer' that can close biggest development gaps. Access to quality education carries benefits throughout life and across generations. It has positive impacts on reducing infant and maternal mortality; Increase poverty reduction and empowers women and youth. Just one years left until 2015 the deadline for both Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals, it's time to move forward." In line with the vision 2025 of Government gives importance to quality Education and says the vision of a 'knowledge economy' cannot actualize without promoting quality education in Pakistan. Formal and Informal Education plays a vital role in socio-economic development human capital is properly developed.

We can learn from our neighbors who have made tremendous progress in the field of Education especially from Sri Lanka and Iran. I personally believe that we should adopt program that were run in these countries through a mechanism of sharing best practices.

Question: Pakistan is much behind other countries in SAARC region in literacy level which is quite deplorable. Sri Lanka and Maldives are ahead of Pakistan with more than 90% literacy rate whereas India have over 60% literacy ratio despite its huge population. What are reasons and why Pakistan lagging behind?

Answer: There are so many reason of low literacy rate in Pakistan. population bulge, poverty and rising unemployment. Unsatisfactory enrollment and high dropouts greatly added to illiteracy. In Pakistan lack of awareness about the importance and significance of adult literacy is also very important factor. Another important and major reason is less investment in education. Currently Pakistan is investing less than 2% of GDP in Education. The sizing government realizes the importance and innovations in education and it has promised to increase education budget phases to 4% of GDP as UN Standards. The same has been promised in Vision 2025 in the following words.

I believe that through awareness campaigns, mobilizing political will of all parties and securing funds we can achieve our goal of 86 percent literacy in Pakistan.

Lack of Political Will, Leadership and absence of strong institutions in the past to address the issues of literacy and Education are also the hindering factors towards promotion of literacy.

Question: Pakistan is one of those countries which has highest ratio of workers' remittances from abroad. Does the Education Ministry has any plan to encourage the overseas Pakistanis to invest their funds in the education sector for which lucrative incentives need to be offered.

Answer: Pakistan is an investment friendly country and would welcome private investment from the expatriate Pakistanis in Education sector. I am going to Germany heading a high level ministerial delegation on an exposure visit to observe as to how the German Government handles the devolved education subject in close collaboration with sixteen states. During my visit I will meet Pakistani Diaspora and will encourage them to invest their hard earned money in Education sector in Pakistan.

Question: How do you see the role of ICMA Pakistan in promoting the professional education on management accountancy and how the Institute can help in supplementing efforts of the Education Ministry in tackling the social menace of illiteracy in Pakistan?

Answer: Professional Institutions play a catalytical role in the economic development of any country as well as in professional training and development of personnel. The Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Pakistan is an old reputed institution and one of the leading Management Accounting bodies in the world. It has played a vital role over the years in grooming up the new generation and providing competent professional accountants to strengthen the pillars of national economy. In my view, ICMA members are the main architects for creating value consciousness to ensure cost competitive management decisions and to ensure appropriate pricing of products. This is absolutely essential if Pakistan's industry is to compete effectively in this era of increasing globalization.

ICMA Pakistan can extend its professional expertise to the Federal Education Ministry as well as to the Education Departments in the Provinces in developing cost models for establishing a network of primary, secondary and higher educational institutions in the country in collaboration with the International donor agencies. I think that the involvement of Management Accountants would be quite beneficial in the cost assessment of different projects funded by the donor agencies. ICMA Pakistan can also assist the Federal Education Ministry in the development of research and human resource in the higher education sector of Pakistan.

The interview ended with a vote of thanks to **Mr. Muhammad Baligh Ur Rehman**, Minister of State for Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education, Interior and Narcotics Control, who spared his valuable time and gave his candid views exclusively for this journal. — Editor