

Educational Planning: Approaches, Trends, and Learnings A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

Dr. Mohammad Sadik

President, Lebanese – French University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Email:mohammadsadik2018@gmail.com

Abstract

Education is the cornerstone of any society which dreams to raise at the echelon of development path and become a developed society. Through education, societies invest in their most valuable asset – people. Across the world, there has been an effort to reform the education system and inculcate education planning in that. In this process, emphasis has been given to the three pillars to make education system responsive: improving equal access, enhancing quality and strengthening education governance. With this background, the research deeply studies the frameworks which have been evolved and implemented across the countries. Using these learnings study conducts a field study in the Kurdistan region to highlight the importance of education planning to improve the quality of education in the region. The study emphasized the role of governance and education planning is pre-requisite, not only at the national level, but it postulates at an institutional level too.

Keywords: *Education sector, educational planning, conventional schooling methods*

1.1 Introduction

Education reforms and the planning are at the core to improve the performance of the students by improving the quality of the schools (Patrinios et. al. 2013). Adhering with the rigorous academic standards, alignment with the standard course curriculum and assessments, and the possession of the right set of desired skills by the teachers are the basic ingredients of educational planning and reforms (Guha et. al. 2018). Educational planning in the Kurdistan region is new in the sense of implementation in spite of accumulation of knowledge, theories and huge experiences around the world in this field. The major reason which is identified is the existence of conventional schooling method which legitimates that every parent could contribute educational practices as brought up consequently. With this background, education planning creates a stellar standing and find a scope to do innovation with the planning and implementation.

The research is arranged in the following order; the study begins with creating a background of education planning. The second part deals with the statement of the problem. Followed by the problem statement in the third part study highlights the significance of the study. In the fourth part, it identifies the prominent role of education. While creating the background in education planning the fifth part presents the traditional quality framework of education planning. The sixth part is about the education planning in New-Classical Era where the study discusses it in detail the role of the institution in education planning. In the same section, it identifies the role of strategic planning where it also explains the pillars of strategic planning. In addition to that study also highlight the present trend of universal access to education and the role of technology. The seventh part deals with the education reform process in

Kurdistan, where the results from the primary survey have also been presented. The final part is about the conclusion of the study.

1.2 – The Problem Statement

The radical changes in the societies and the increasing complexity of the educational system have made educational planning an absolute necessity. In the contemporary world, every nation confronts with the challenges such as increasing population, increasing aspirations among different sections of the society, demand for high quality and subsidized education, dwindling resources, ecological imbalances and haphazard applications of scientific developments. These challenges look after to education sector to maintain the pace with the radical changes to address challenges. In order to address the challenges, education planning becomes imperative.

1.3 – Significance of the Study

Planning has been defined as a coordinated means of attaining pre-determined objectives. As the scarcity of financial and other non-material resources poses a challenge to education. Planning is a response to such challenges and explores the possibilities of alternative and optimum utilization of limited resources.

Education has been categorized as a public service which is demanded by the public and supplied by the government. For any government effort of such large magnitude as education, planning is absolutely necessary. Educational planning is one of the components of the overall national socio-economic development. The over-all planning has to provide the objectives of education and the financial resources to accomplish those objectives (Liu J. 2018).

1.4 – The Prominent Role of Education

It is evident that education is the most important human activity for many reasons.

(Brubacher, 1982) (See Figure 1 for a holistic picture). However, the most prominent one is knowledge. As Benjamin Franklin said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." Education gives us knowledge of the world around. Without it, we cannot convert information into knowledge. It also makes us capable of interpreting things rightly and applying the gathered information in real life scenarios.

Second, education leads to career progression. It is important because it equips people with the expertise that is needed to realize career goals. Expertise is an in-depth knowledge about a specific field and it is ought to open doors to brilliant career opportunities. People are weighed in the market on the basis of their educational skills and on how well they can apply them. According to the UN, education is linked directly to employment and work (UN Report, (2013)-p.49).

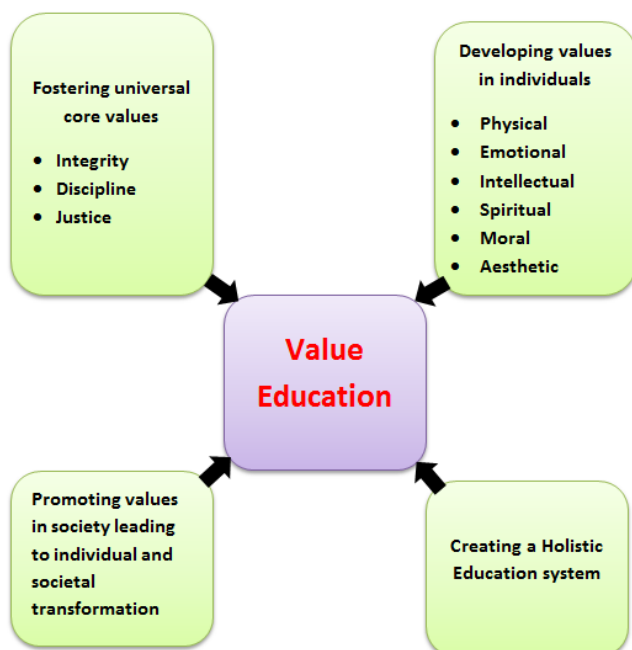
Third, education builds character. Education is important as it teaches people the right behaviour and good manners, thus creating a civilized society. It is the basis of culture and civilization. Education is instrumental in the development of our values and virtues. It cultivates to become a mature individual; individuals capable of planning for the future, and taking the right decisions in life. It is thus a backbone of society (Shores and Chester, 2008).

Fourth, education leads to enlightenment. Socrates referred to Education as "... The kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."! It paves the path to disillusionment. Education wipes out the wrong beliefs from our minds. It helps create a clear picture of things around and erases all the confusion. Education kindles the flame of curiosity and helps awaken the abilities to question, and to reason.

Fifth, and the more holistic, education allows a nation to prosper and grow. John Kennedy referred to the human mind as being the most fundamental resource of the

nation! For the progress of a nation, for the enrichment of society in general, education is important. A country's educated population is its asset. This contributes to the development of all sectors of the country such as industry, agriculture, environment, and others.

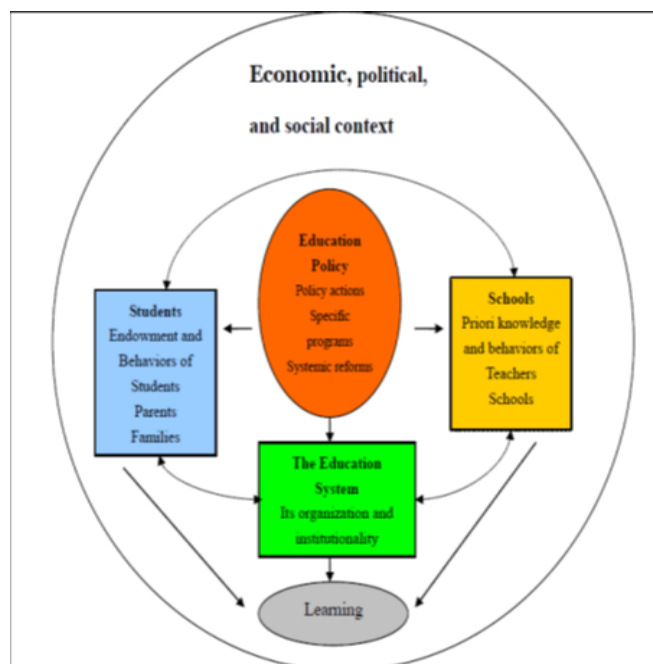
Figure 1: The Prominent Role of Education



1.5 – Educational Planning in a Traditional Quality Framework

The traditional quality framework considers the education system in a more segmented way with the lenses of micro and macro. To understand student learning performance, some studies examine the economic and financial factors (Hanushek 1986, 1996; Greenwald, Hedges and Laine 1996). However, on the other hand, other studies narrowed it down to social factors only to examine the students' educational performance (Hallinger and Murphy 1986; Alexander 2000). See Figure 2 for a comprehensive picture. Though the traditional quality framework produces a list of factors which affect the educational performance, dealing with them independently largely detached from the realistic complexities of education. Moreover, policies designed using the traditional quality framework When applied to diagnose educational problems and reforms, these amount to “treating the symptoms rather than the disease” prescriptions, and often do not make a difference in student learning achievement (Patrinos et. al. 2013).

Figure 2: Traditional Quality Framework



Source: Vegas and Petrow 2007: 66

1.6 –Educational Planning: In Neo–Classical Era

1.6.1– The Role of Institutions:

At an institutional level, schools and universities understand planning in a very specific way. University planning encourages students to be actively engaged, both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, as advisers have opportunities to talk individually with the students, they are in a unique position to help students from college experiences. Part of the school's role is to help students remain aware of how college constantly puts them in the way for new ideas and new opportunities, exposure to develop new interests or new ways to pursue them and understand the value of planning. A segment on educational planning needs to be designed to give students ways to think about planning. Normally, an academic institution takes into consideration the following objectives into planning:

1. To assist students in order to define their goals and aspirations.

2. To assist students to identify and value their emerging interests.
3. To assist students in order to think ahead and design their course of study in advance.
4. Allowing students in order to have direct communication with academic and administrative staff.
5. To assist students to understand that some experiences, like studying abroad, require advance planning.
6. Advising students in selecting proper courses, studying methods, how to work on research projects, career development, and job seeking.

1.6.2– Internationalization of Education and the Strategic Planning

As internationalization becomes increasingly integral to primary, secondary and higher education, it raises the question of institutional capacity and whether the educational institution (for instance a university) is, in fact, able to respond to the new challenges it is facing.

Strategic planning is often proposed as a key tool for a more rational and systematic approach to bringing about the necessary changes for greater internationalization in institutional direction and daily operations.

A lot of people in education are cynical about the value of strategic planning in higher education, believing that it does not fit with academic cultures and traditions. The argument is that when an appropriate model is adopted, it not only aligns with the specific needs and behaviours of educational institutions but also has the potential to turn what is often rhetoric into reality.

While it is true that the practice of strategic planning has been imported from the business world (which had adapted it from the original military model), it is essential to take the specific nature and modes of operation of an institution into consideration if strategic planning is to be accepted and embraced both as a concept and a system that can provide direction and facilitate progress.

There are two fundamental differences. One is that educational institutions have value systems guided by principles of long-term investment in educating people disseminating knowledge, unlike the typically short-term focus on financial results in the business world. Although it could be argued that schools, in general, are increasingly required to generate diverse income sources and demonstrate quality and sustainability of their operations to their "stakeholders", so even this difference might be less prominent in some countries nowadays. Nevertheless, it is clear that a strategic plan that is strongly linked to academic innovation rather than simply financial sustainability will have a better chance of finding support within the university.

The other major difference is that a business might choose to take a strong top-down approach to drive through decisions and directions, but the nature of shared governance in schools means that it is key in order to build consensus from the start to ensure involvement and commitment across the various faculties, schools, and departments. So while commitment will start at the top with the institutional head indicating the direction and articulating the desired future, it will be essential to bring the academic community on board from the very start. It takes much more time and energy to design a process that is both transparent and inclusive, but it is one that is more likely to succeed.

There is a much greater chance that the academic community will identify with – and be willing to implement – the strategic plan if they are involved in the process right from the start if there is flexibility for them to establish their own contribution and goals within the broader framework. This is a two-way process. While the leadership should provide space for diversity and distinctiveness, the faculties and departments should also recognize the need for vertical and horizontal interdependence within the institution. If strategic planning in all levels of education is designed and programmed carefully, it creates a space for collaborative implementation and becomes the "glue" that holds the internationalization process together. In other words, it can act to

empower the culture and enable a school to become the institution it desires to be (Hunter, 2013)

1.6.3 – Pillars of Strategic Planning in Education

Plans in education rely on three fundamental pillars and focus on three education priorities: improving equal access, enhancing quality and strengthening education governance. The pillars of education strategy relate to the fact that education has been a priority in all societies around the world. Education as a development priority has been the subject of extensive research conducted by the United Nations (UN) in its report entitled: Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the post – 2015 Development Agenda.

Each strategic priority has a clear set of key actions designed to bring about change, not only for families, schools and communities, but also at national and international levels. The strategy places particular emphasis on the need to eliminate gender discrimination, as well as focusing on other key challenges, such as the inclusion of marginalized children (Coldrake, Stedman, and Little, 2003).

1.6.4 Role of Governance in Higher Education

It is important to focus on the issue of “governance” in higher education. Coldrake, Stedman, and Little (2003) explain the differentiated structures of management of tertiary education across the countries including private not-for-profit, private for-profit, and public institutions. However, though higher education is highly differentiated across the countries (Altbach 2002), they do share a common heritage.

Managing structures themselves have become increasingly complex to establish a means of organizing an equally complicated system of intra organizational and governmental relationships. Whether college and university education, adult education, technical and vocational education, the complexities of managing education in today's world proves true at all levels of private and public education.

As universities have become increasingly interdependent with external forces, institutions are accountable to external organizational relationships such as local and federal governments, equally in managing business and corporate relationships. The nature of the managing relationships characterizes whether governance is corporate and business oriented or defined more by a collegial shared form of governance. "Governance" in this sense is discussed by Kezar and Eckel (2004), who define it at the macro-level of policy decision making. Kezar and Eckel (2004) suggest governance is a multi-level concept including several different bodies and processes with different decision-making functions.

Throughout the world, many central, federal, state, and local governments have begun to establish coordinating and governing boards as both buffer and bridge to coordinate governance and institutional management (Watts 1999).

With the complexity of internal structures, the external relationships between institutions and local, state, and national governments are evidently equally differentiated given the different forms of government in the international system made the concepts of governance for postsecondary education pluralistic. An external governing relationship depends much on institutions, government policy, and any other formal or informal organizational obligations. Generally, institutions are recognized as autonomous actors with varying degrees of interdependence with, and legislated commitments to the external stakeholders, local and national government.

Due to the influences of public sector reforms, several authors (such as Kezar and Eckel 2004) point out that next to the concept of shared and participative governance a new form of governance has emerged, i.e. corporate governance. Corporate governance of institutions that has increasingly become a more dominant approach to tertiary management. According to Lapworth (2004), the rise of the notion of corporate governance and the decline of the shared or consensual governance can be seen to be a result of the decline in academic participation, growing tendency towards

managerialism and the new environment where the universities are operating.

1.6.5 Universal Access to Education

One of the major issues concerning educational planning today is that of the universal access to education, especially for young people. Universal access to education is the ability of all people to have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their social class, ethnicity, background or physical disabilities. The term is used both in college admission for the middle and lower classes, and in assistive technology for the disabled. Some critics find this idea an example of "political correctness". In order to facilitate the access of education to all, certain countries have the right to education. Universal access to education encourages a variety of pedagogical

approaches to accomplish the dissemination of knowledge across the diversity of social, political, cultural, economic, national and biological backgrounds. Initially developed with the theme of equal opportunity access and inclusion of students with learning or physical disabilities, the themes governing universal access to education have now expanded across all forms of ability and diversity. However, as the definition of diversity is within itself is a broad amalgamation, teachers exercising universal access will continually face challenges and incorporate adjustments in their lesson plan to foster themes of equal educational opportunity. As universal access continues to

be incorporated into the U.S. education system, professors and instructors at the college level are required (in some instances by law) to rethink methods of facilitating universal access in their classrooms. Universal access to college education may involve the provision of a variety of different assessment methods of learning and retention. For example, in order to determine how much of the material was learned, a professor may enlist multiple methods of assessment. Methods of assessment may include a comprehensive exam, unit exams, portfolios, research papers, literature reviews, an oral exam or homework assignments. Providing a variety of ways to

assess the extent of learning and retention will not only identify the gaps in universal access but may also elucidate the ways to improve universal access.

1.6.6 – The Role of Technology

Educational planning today relies on technology and often pedagogy and technology are interrelated. It is important to understand that it is the pedagogy, not the technology, which is the key element in education. New technologies are unreliable, expensive, and something new that both teachers and students have to learn to use. In general terms, only when technology allows the user to reach an existing goal more effectively, should we consider employing it. From my point of view, it is a big mistake to put technology center-stage as we plan and execute educational reforms. Technology should rather be used in education only when is needed. After all, pedagogy constitutes the beliefs that justify instruction. Altbach (2005) refers to different methodologies in education in connection with the use of technology.

1.7 Education Reforms in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

To improve the quality of the education in the region it has always been multi-pronged initiatives from building new infrastructure to introducing a new curriculum to strategic planning and governance.

Ideally the history of education reforms in the region way back, however, the alignment with the western education and introduction of new curriculum started in 2008 with the support of UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. Since then the region has taken significant steps to improve the quality of education.

In this process, political leadership in the region has been an inspiration and recognized the dire need to address the quality of education. Iraq's former First Lady, Mrs. Hero Talabani in her speeches emphasized the need for education reforms not

only for the region but also for entire Iraq. While previously addressing the infrastructural obstacles she highlighted that rotational shifts in schools could negatively impede students' ability to understand and comprehend the educational material. She raised the questions on old curriculum that has not sufficiently evolved to meet the demands of the 21st century.

However, the Kurdistan Region Ministry of Education strives to reform the education system and develop a well-balanced curriculum that will be geared toward creating a productive and skilled new generation. English language classes in early grades and promoting creative thinking in classrooms had already been incorporated into school curricula. The education reforms in the Kurdistan Region has utilized the best practices of other parts of the world.

1.7.1 Education Planning Department

In a large number of developing countries, the Ministry of Education assigns a particular department to deal with issues in the educational system. Such department consists of committees and the primary focus is the strategic planning at all levels of national education.

In aligning with that the Education Planning Department in the region is entrusted with the responsibility to ensure the efficient delivery of sustainable and quality education throughout the education system, from preschools to tertiary-level institutions.

The department identifies a fundamental issue in educational planning in the Kurdistan region is the faculty development. There is an urgent need of qualified lecturers who can transfer the knowledge to the next generation.

Besides identifying the thrust areas, the planning department has given the following mandate in form of functions to improve the quality of education.

Functions of the Education Planning Department

1. Conducting research as a means of improving the quality of education and teacher training in the education system where necessary.
2. Detailed planning for the provision of accommodation needs at each level of the education system.
3. Annual participation in budget preparation for each sector of the education system
Developing proposals for capital investment.
4. Developing systems and procedures for effective delivery of school programs.
Engagement in the formulation of policies/initiatives.
5. Assessing and prioritizing the training needs of the education system.

Additionally, to monitor the progress experts have suggested the formulation of a separate committee called "Education Planners Advisory Committee"; this committee assists in enhancing the education system. The committee brings together individuals with varied experiences and a passion to enhance the education process. Research supports the idea that the independent monitoring and evaluation process of education is most effective and efficient.

1.7.2 Education Planning in KRI: A Field Survey Report

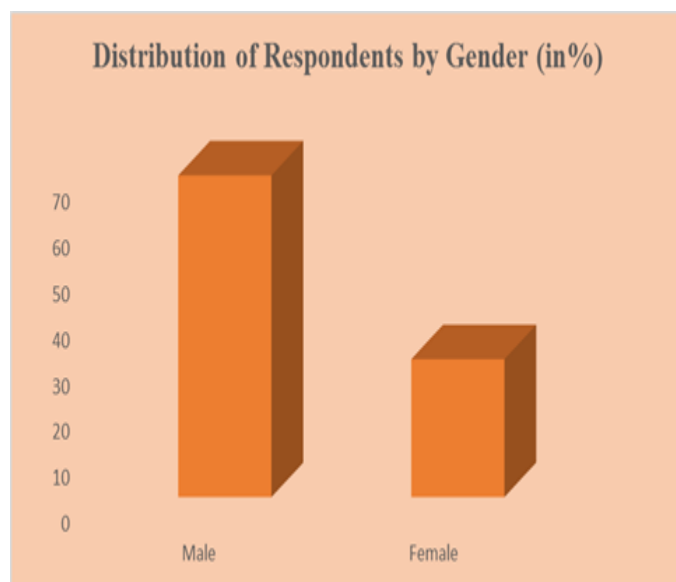
To know the views of primus stakeholder about education planning in the region the field survey has been conducted in December–January 2014. The focus group for the field survey was faculty members. As the primary stakeholders, they are not only the prime contributor to the success of education planning, in fact, their views and feedback can help to better design the reform process in the region.

While conducting the field–survey the study has focused on the following objectives:

- 1) To adumbrate the views about the importance of Educational Planning to proliferate education in Kurdistan Region at a national and institutional level, including public and private colleges and universities.
- 2) To capture the views on the role of international experiences to reform the education system.
- 3) To highlight the status of equal opportunity in education in Kurdistan

A field survey was conducted using the questionnaire. And while conducting survey we make sure that respondents should have significant work experience in academics, which on average was 5 years. We distributed a significantly large number of the questionnaire, however, we were able to receive 30 completely filled questionnaire. Our all respondents were Iraqi citizens, and their average age was 39.

Respondents Demographic Profile:



As the field survey was qualitative in nature. Therefore, without losing the essence of responses we comprehended and produced in a table format. The first column of table precisely mentions what has been raised during the discussion in a form of questions. And followed by in next column is the summary of their qualitative responses. This has been clear from the objectives of the study that the closed-ended questionnaire and quantitative analysis not been much beneficial to address the objectives of the study.

Academician's Views about the Education Planning in the Region

Topic	Summary of the discussion
How important is Educational Planning	<i>Educational planning is necessary at national</i>

<p>in developing education in Kurdistan Region?</p>	<p><i>and an institutional level, particularly in public and private colleges and universities. Educational planning should start with the commitment of the Ministry to move into a detailed reform which could be used for the next ten years.</i></p>
<p>Do you think it is necessary for the Kurdish Educational System to reform?</p>	<p><i>The Kurdish Educational system must comply with international changes and reforms in education. Developing countries –especially in Africa, Asia, and South America have already reformed their educational systems complying with the US or European standards.</i></p>
<p>In your opinion, which should be the fundamental expected results (objectives) of an</p>	<p><i>Public education in Kurdistan has been successful in general. However, private universities must set as</i></p>

educational reform in the Kurdistan Region?	<i>an objective the modernization of policies and regulations, focus on planning and quality assurance procedures and regulations. Quality assurance is the fundamental objective and challenge</i>
Do you think that both genders have equal access to education in Kurdistan Region?	<i>Yes, for the last five years the issue of gender discrimination in terms of access in higher education has been eliminated! Males and females have equal access in attending higher education.</i>
Do you think that private education in Kurdistan Region should be trusted for its quality?	<i>Yet, there is room for improving quality in private higher education. Universities must invest in technology to improve quality assurance systems and –also– hire professional educators with international</i>

	<p><i>teaching experience.</i></p> <p><i>Trust will result from the quality of graduates who will prove it by their successful carriers</i></p>
<p>How necessary is Teachers' Education and training as a determinant in improving education in Kurdistan Region?</p>	<p><i>Faculty Development is a fundamental issue in educational planning! For the region or Kurdistan, the necessity of qualified lecturers is urgent. Faculty training is still weak. Universities must invest in proper quality training and establish mechanisms on lecturers' training.</i></p>
<p>What does "quality education" mean to you?</p>	<p><i>Quality education is that of "producing" qualified professionals (graduates) with theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. It means educational curricula with</i></p>

	<i>international standards, qualified lecturers, emphasis on investment for research and technology, flexible administrative systems and well-defined policies.</i>
Who should lead the educational planning process in the region of Kurdistan?	<i>The Minister of Education and his cabinet of advisors who have global experience should lead the planning functions of educational reform. There should be channels of valuable information and input to the Ministry; thus periodic reports, meetings, and conferences must be more often organized.</i>
How important for educational planning –you think– is the emphasis on new	<i>It is absolutely significant for educational plans to involve today's technology. Offered degrees in IT, Computer</i>

technologies?	<p><i>Science and MIS are necessary. Courses offered in Computers Technology and lecturers with efficient experience in teaching IT courses are essential. In addition, lessons on technology should be more at the high school level.</i></p>
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1.8 Conclusion:

Education planning is the key to unleash the unlimited potential of the young population. Planning models have been evolved over the period to develop a holistic framework which can be contextualized according to local settings. However, in most of the settings the major challenge is at the implementation. The same is true for the Kurdistan region as well. Despite deeper realization at the top administration level, the pace is slow.

The Ministry's commitment is needed in order to move into more comprehensive and systematic reforms regarding the educational planning which could be designed for the next ten years. As it has come out in the survey and the ministry should realize the evolving role of new technologies in education and which can be catered by offering

degrees in IT, Computer Science, MIS, and GIS. Courses in computers technology and advanced programming skills are essential. Additionally, lessons in technology should be introduced at the high school level.

The private education institutions should get more autonomy to charter their own course of action under the guidance of ministry. However, their accountability should be ensured in terms of nurturing and producing highly competitive work–force.

Ministry may also consider constituting a committee of world–renowned academicians to usher the reform process in the region, and guiding to align the course curriculum with the international standard.

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