



EDITORIAL

HEC's Curriculum Reform Is Necessary — But Useless Without Better Faculty

HEC's newly notified computer science curriculum adds fourteen specialization tracks in AI, cybersecurity, and cloud computing — but the same document quietly admits universities may redistribute courses "based on teaching staff availability," which is the whole problem in one clause.

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Introduction

On 14 October 2025, the Higher Education Commission notified a revised Computer Science curriculum: fourteen specialization tracks spanning artificial intelligence, data science, cybersecurity, cloud computing, robotics, and quantum computing, developed with the British Council, PSEB, P@SHA, and dozens of academics over a five-day national review. Every public and private university offering the degree must align with it from Spring 2026. On paper, it is exactly the kind of modernization critics have demanded for years — industry-driven, globally benchmarked, built around mandatory internships and outcome-based education rather than a syllabus that hadn't moved since the last revision cycle.

Buried inside the same curriculum document, though, is a sentence that undercuts the whole announcement: universities may redistribute courses across semesters "based on factors such as teaching staff availability and other facilities." That is HEC itself acknowledging, in the fine print of its own reform, that the specializations it just mandated cannot be delivered everywhere as written — because the people qualified to teach quantum computing, robotics, or applied AI simply are not evenly, or in many departments even thinly, spread across Pakistan's higher education system.

"A syllabus is a promise. Faculty are what keep it. Right now, HEC is rewriting the promise while the people meant to keep it are heading for the airport."

What the Reform Actually Changes

To be fair to HEC, the reform's substance is genuinely sound. Mandatory internships, industry-recognised certifications, capstone projects supervised by employers, and a 24-credit-hour specialization block are all reasonable responses to years of complaints from software houses that graduates arrive unable to do practical, current work. The problem was never the intent. It is that a curriculum document can specify a course called "Applied Machine Learning" in an afternoon; it cannot conjure, in the same afternoon, the PhD-qualified instructor capable of teaching it well to a room of sixty students.



The faculty this reform depends on are, right now, the least incentivised group in Pakistani academia to stay and teach it. Salaries under the Tenure Track System — the programme specifically designed in 2002 to attract competitive, PhD-holding faculty — have not been meaningfully revised since 2021. An assistant professor earns roughly PKR 175,500 a month, an associate professor PKR 263,250, a full professor PKR 394,875 — in dollar terms, about \$634 to \$1,426, before a tax burden that has risen nearly 81 percent over the same period while inflation peaked at 38 percent. The last TTS recruitment drive was in 2020. No new cohort of top-tier faculty has entered the system since, even as the curriculum they are meant to deliver has been rewritten twice.

Key Findings & Impact

Nearly 4,000 TTS faculty members are affected by the salary freeze, according to figures presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, and a task force led by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal has already recommended aligning TTS pay with a 35 percent competitive premium — a recommendation that has sat unimplemented for months. The Express Tribune has reported that the 2026-27 federal budget is unlikely to include any relief at all. Meanwhile, Pakistani PhD students continue to win scholarships abroad in large numbers — including nearly 58 percent of a recent Erasmus Mundus cohort — proof that the talent pipeline into research careers is intact even as the system built to employ that talent at home is not.

The practical consequence shows up exactly where the curriculum reform needs it not to: in specialized electives with no qualified instructor, quietly dropped or taught by whoever is available rather than whoever is competent; in class sizes that grow because departments cannot replace the associate professor who left for the Gulf or Europe; and in a widening gap between what a transcript now promises — an AI or robotics specialization, HEC-certified — and what a graduate can actually demonstrate in an interview. Curriculum reform without faculty investment does not fail loudly. It fails quietly, one under-taught elective at a time, until the credential and the competence it is supposed to represent drift far enough apart that employers stop trusting either.

What's Next?

The fix does not require a new commission or another five-day review — it requires the government to act on recommendations it has already received. Implementing the Ahsan Iqbal task force's proposed 35 percent TTS premium, clearing the backlog with APTTA on allowances rather than a diminished one-time adjustment, and resuming TTS recruitment that has sat frozen since 2020 would cost far less than the reputational and economic damage of graduating another five cohorts through specializations no qualified faculty member is actually teaching.

HEC's curriculum team deserves credit for producing a document that finally looks like it was written for 2026 rather than 2016. But a curriculum is a promise about what a graduate will know, and the only people who can keep that promise are standing in front of the classroom — underpaid, untenured in practice if not in name, and increasingly likely to be teaching from Toronto or Dubai instead. Pakistan does not have a curriculum problem anymore. It has a faculty problem wearing a curriculum's clothes, and no amount of syllabus redesign will fix it until someone finally pays the people meant to teach it.

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