

## **SUMMARY of the Article “Dump all degrees?” by Pervez Hoodbhoy, Dawn [Published on December 9th, 2023]**

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Pervez Hoodbhoy delves into the evolving significance of college and university degrees in the context of the rapidly changing hi-tech landscape. While acknowledging the indispensable role of degrees, especially in professions like medicine and engineering, Hoodbhoy points out a paradox. The advent of AI and automation is diminishing the demand for traditional degrees, and influential figures like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel challenge the conventional value of higher education. Musk emphasizes specific skills and problem-solving abilities over theoretical knowledge, stating that college is primarily for fun and proving one's ability to perform daily tasks. Thiel goes a step further, offering fellowships for young people to drop out of universities and start their own businesses, claiming real-world experience's superiority. In the global job market, companies like Apple and Tesla are shifting focus from degrees to skills, learning agility, work ethic, and creativity. Hoodbhoy criticizes Pakistani universities for lacking genuine research output and producing graduates with insufficient skills, particularly in technical fields. Despite this, he acknowledges the persisting demand for degrees in the Pakistani job market, primarily due to familial connections and affiliations, rather than competence. The article suggests that degrees from Pakistani universities may lose value globally, and the writer advocates for fostering independent thinking and active learning from a young age as a way forward.

## **Easy/Short SUMMARY:**

The article explores the changing relevance of college and university degrees in the age of AI and automation. Influential figures like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel challenge the traditional value of higher education, emphasizing skills and real-world experience. Even global companies are shifting focus from degrees to skills. The writer criticizes Pakistani universities for a lack of genuine research and skills development but acknowledges the persistent demand for degrees in the local job market due to non-merit factors. The article suggests that fostering independent thinking and active learning from a young age is crucial for future success.

## **SOLUTIONS of The Problem:**

### **1. Emphasis on Skills Development:**

- Shift the focus of education towards developing practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity.

### **2. Rethink Curriculum:**

- Review and adapt educational curricula to encourage independent thinking, critical reasoning, and real-world application of knowledge.

### **3. Promote Learning Agility:**

- Encourage a learning environment that promotes adaptability, continuous learning, and the ability to acquire new skills rapidly.

### **4. Industry-Academia Collaboration:**

- Foster collaboration between educational institutions and industries to align curriculum with the evolving demands of the job market.

## **5. Encourage Entrepreneurship:**

- Promote entrepreneurial spirit by providing support and incentives for students to explore and start their own businesses.

## **6. Revise Hiring Practices:**

- Companies should revise hiring practices, placing more emphasis on skills, work ethic, and creativity rather than formal degrees.

## **7. Global Exposure for Students:**

- Facilitate opportunities for students to gain global exposure, ensuring they are equipped with skills that have international relevance.

## **8. Address Teaching Quality:**

- Improve the quality of teaching in universities, focusing on enhancing analytical, mathematical, and problem-solving skills.

## **9. Cultivate Critical Thinking:**

- Cultivate critical thinking from an early age, encouraging students to question, analyze, and apply knowledge independently.

## **10. Update Single National Curriculum:**

- Revise the Single National Curriculum in Pakistan to align with the principles of independent thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application.

## **IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:**

- **Notable Figures Questioning Degrees:**



- Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX
- Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal
- Narayana Murthy, founder of InfoSys
  
- **Global Companies Shifting Focus:**
  - Apple and Tesla no longer require a college degree for an interview.
  
- **Pakistani Universities Critique:**
  - Lack genuine research output and skills development.
  - Degrees often determined by non-merit factors like family connections, religious and ethnic affiliations.
  
- **Future of Pakistani Degrees:**
  - Predicted decline in the global value of degrees from Pakistani universities.

## MCQs from the Article:

1. **Who emphasized specific skills and problem-solving abilities over theoretical knowledge?**
  - A. Peter Thiel
  - B. Elon Musk**
  - C. Narayana Murthy
  - D. Pervez Hoodbhoy
  
2. **Which global companies no longer require a college degree for an interview?**
  - A. Microsoft and Google
  - B. Apple and Tesla**
  - C. Amazon and Facebook

D. IBM and Intel

3. **What does Narayana Murthy emphasize for primary and secondary school children?**
  - A. Memorization of facts
  - B. Independent thinking and active listening**
  - C. Religious and ideological indoctrination
  - D. Rote learning and unquestioning acceptance
  
4. **What is the primary critique of Pakistani degrees in the article?**
  - A. Lack of international recognition
  - B. Overemphasis on theoretical knowledge
  - C. Degrees determined by non-merit factors**
  - D. Inadequate focus on family connections
  
5. **According to Peter Thiel, what is more valuable than education?**
  - A. Formal degrees
  - B. Theoretical knowledge
  - C. Real-world experience**
  - D. College qualifications

## VOCABULARY:

1. **Indispensable** (adjective) (□□□□□): Absolutely necessary or essential.
2. **Topsy-turvy** (adjective) (□□□□ □□□□): Upside down; chaotic or confused.
3. **Paradox** (noun) (□□□□□): A seemingly contradictory statement that may prove true.
4. **Sceptical** (adjective) (□□□): Having doubts or reservations.
5. **Mavericks** (noun) (□□□□ □□□□): Unorthodox or independent-minded individuals.
6. **Stifling** (adjective) (□□□□ □□□□□): Suppressing or restricting.
7. **Rubber stamp** (noun) (□□□ □□□): A person or organization that approves or endorses something routinely.
8. **Founts** (noun) (□□□□): Sources or origins of something.



9. **Persisting** (adjective) (□□□□□): Continuing to exist or endure over a prolonged period.
10. **Cultivate** (verb) (□□□□ □□□□): Foster the growth or development of.

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Summaries of editorials and opinions distill the essence of complex arguments, enhancing your ability to dissect intricate ideas, extract core arguments, and recognize underlying themes.

□ Efficient Time Management:



CSS aspirants often juggle multiple subjects and topics. Reading summarized editorials and opinions allows you to grasp diverse viewpoints in a fraction of the time.

□ Diverse Perspectives:

CSS exams require a comprehensive understanding of various perspectives. Summaries expose you to a range of viewpoints on critical issues, helping you broaden your intellectual horizons.

□ Quick Updates on Current Affairs:

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The concise nature of summaries teaches you how to articulate complex ideas succinctly. This skill is invaluable when constructing well-structured and concise answers in the CSS exam.

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Analyzing succinct summaries equips you with the ability to distill your thoughts into concise, coherent sentences - a skill that directly translates into writing impactful essays and answers.

□ Practical Application in Interviews:

Summarized opinions give you a bank of well-articulated arguments that you can draw upon during interviews. This helps you participate actively in discussions, demonstrating your depth of knowledge.

□ Retaining Key Concepts:

Summarizing editorials involves identifying the core concepts. This process reinforces your memory and understanding of crucial topics, ensuring they stay embedded in your long-term memory.

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## [Dump all degrees?](#)

BY [Pervez Hoodbhoy](#)

Pakistani degrees will soon become trash in the global marketplace for jobs but there is a way out.

A COLLEGE or university degree — preferably the highest possible — is sometimes indispensable. Anyone treated by a degreeless cardiologist or neurosurgeon is either stupid or reckless. Flying in a plane designed by engineers who failed their math-physics qualifying exams puts your life at risk. High-level formal education will remain valuable both tomorrow and into the foreseeable



future.

But the topsy-turvy hi-tech world up ahead presents us with a paradox. AI is already displacing humans from many jobs. Setting aside Pakistan for later discussion, demand for college and university education — particularly in less than top-level technical fields — is already plummeting downwards. Key captains of global industry are openly sceptical about formal degree programmes.

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, places specific skills and problem-solving abilities above theoretical knowledge. He says that “college is basically for fun and to prove you can do your chores, but doesn’t necessarily teach you what to do in the real world”.

Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal, is famously offering \$100,000 fellowships encouraging young people to drop out of universities and start their own businesses. Thiel accuses American higher education of stifling creativity and independent thinking, and also claims that real-world experience is more valuable than education.

Pakistani degrees will soon become trash in the global marketplace for jobs but there is a way out.

These two American capitalists are mavericks known for extreme views. One is tempted to discount them as victims of the high pressure and chronic feverishness endemic to Silicon Valley. Nevertheless, others far away are also saying such things and so one must pay at least some attention.

More and more employers in advanced countries — and now even India — are looking mostly for skills, learning agility, work ethic, and creativity. Companies like Apple and Tesla no longer require a college degree for an interview. Most have devised their own tests for assessing a candidate.

One must not, however, rush to conclusions. Behind today’s high technology is the core knowledge transmitted and produced in a million university classrooms and laboratories around the world. High-class universities have historically been the engines of social change, founts of new ideas, and concentrations of high brain power. Musk and his arrogant ilk would be nothing without that.

Turning now towards Pakistani universities, let’s look at the present and future



worth of their degrees and graduates.

Research in these institutions exists only in name. Over the last 20 years, they have produced tons of so-called research papers and theses but not a single significant piece of new knowledge, invention, process, or patent that achieved commercialisation.

What about the value added in terms of instruction, knowledge transmission, and skill addition? Take engineering. Even top Pakistani universities produce graduates whose careers generally start — and end — in maintenance, sales, and management. Almost none do what's expected of real engineers, ie, conceptualise and design new technologies or make radical improvisations. Exceptions aside, the inferior mathematical, analytical and problem-solving skills of our graduates cannot handle unmet needs and challenges.

Here's a recent example. Some weeks ago The Black Hole, a science-centred organisation in Islamabad, initiated a stipend-incentivised high school math-physics teachers training programme. A total of 120 applicants from ages 20-32 took the entrance test. Candidates variously had BSc, BS, MSc and MPhil degrees from institutions in several cities.

Although test questions were set at 12th grade school level or lower, they did test reasoning capacity. Sadly, just 27 of the 120 graduates scored over 50 per cent. Those holding higher degrees did no better than the ones with lower degrees showing that real learning stops early on. When we interviewed the top 27 to check for conceptual clarity, only six could survive. Their superior performance manifestly owed to self-study, not to the institutions they had studied in.

Notwithstanding poor teaching quality, degrees from Pakistan's junk universities — which means practically all of them — will remain in demand. We all know the reason. A degree in the Pakistani context is basically a required rubber stamp after which family connections, religious and ethnic affiliation, and personal friendships determine who gets a job. Competence and ability are secondary.

In contrast, the global job marketplace wants real knowledge and skills. Wealthy parents understand this and try to send their children to universities abroad but the sinking rupee is making this more difficult. Plus the shrinking job value of overseas degrees will shrink further. What little overseas worth a Pakistani



degree presently has will soon disappear entirely.

So, what is the way out? For a brighter future, what path should your child follow?

Asked a similar question in the Indian context, Narayana Murthy, founder of the \$100 billion company InfoSys, responded without hesitation. What's needed, he said, is "to plant a seed in the minds of the primary and secondary school children the need for independent thinking, active listening, critical thinking, Socratic questioning, and relating what is learnt in the classroom to the problems around us".

Murthy is spot on. Think of it this way: your computer must first be booted, meaning it must first be loaded with the right instructions for the operating system (Windows or Mac) to start working. After the computer has learned how to learn — but not before that — the chips inside are activated.

For children, their brain circuits need similar activation. Once booted, the neuronal machinery inside can access the vast stores of knowledge in cyberspace.

Countless internet modules, whether for purchase or free, teach you step-by-step whatever subject or skill you want to learn. Your desire, and capacity to absorb, sets the only limits. Never before has it been so easy for an individual to rise to the sky starting from ground up.

The magical principle for success is only one: successfully learning how to learn. For this the child's mind must first be set free to explore and think. But in cultures where the primary goal of education is to hammer in an ideology, this is impermissible.

A religion-based curriculum inevitably rewards passivity and unquestioning acceptance. At best it turns out drones. Unfortunately for Pakistan, its Single National Curriculum guarantees that the future of our youth will become increasingly dimmer, not brighter. Their only chance lies in self-learning.

The writer is an Islamabad-based physicist and writer.

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