

Revisiting Pakistan’s Education System: Addressing the Key-Flaw

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Abstract

Pakistan Education System is not according to the Constitution of Pakistan 1973. It is molding youth in divergent matrixes that cause injustice and disappointment in society. Therefore, it a barrier in achieving the goal of national harmony and social cohesion; and also, it is one of the contributory factors in dispersing the nation from its ideals. This paper discusses the key flaw in the educational structure of Pakistan, and suggests the ways to achieve the goal of “uniform, equitable and effective system of education” through a “national education system” as ensured in the Constitution of Pakistan.

Keywords: Education System; Constitution; National harmony

Pakistan’s Education System has been attracting scholars and researchers from all over the world after the event of 9/11 in United States. A large number of studies highlighted the need for reformation in overall system of education in Pakistan.¹

Presently, Pakistan’s educational landscape presents three parallel streams: public schools, private schools, and Madrassas. These educational streams have further sub-streams: elite and non-elite schools. Elite schools cater to economic elite of the society, which is in minority, with high quality education. Whereas, non-elite schools are low-quality public and private schools, serving to the children of lower middle social class, which are in bulk.

Majority of non-elite schools are incapable to produce proficient graduates who can win high competitive positions in society; and thus, their vertical social mobility remains just a

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dream. Contrarily, elite schools are entirely different in their curriculum, textbooks, exams administration, teaching-modes, and resources etc. The graduates of these schools achieve high-end jobs of society, because their training and grooming is better, according to the demand of market.

The major difference in the performance of graduates of different educational systems is their proficiency in the use of English language. Generally, elite schools in Pakistan are affiliated with foreign universities (like Cambridge University UK) where medium of instruction is English. Following the patterns of foreign universities (including their syllabi, modes of teaching and exams etc) the use of English remains no more a problem for students. However, non-elite schools follow local system of education, and use Urdu (or regional languages) as medium of instruction. In these schools, the use of English is a problem for students and their teachers. Since, superior jobs in society are associated with proficiency in English language: therefore, most of the best jobs go to the privileged class of society.

Number of studies has shown how the effects of modernization in South Asia, as by-product of colonialization process, were absorbed by a minority segment of population that became a privileged class of society.² Further, in the post-colonial era, English remained associated with power structure in society.

The third educational stream within the education system of Pakistan is 'Madrassa'. It performs differently in social divide. It produces such type of graduates which are absolute out of the race in competitive economic market, because they have no skill to perform outside the realm of religion. They are prepared just for religious social roles, and accordingly they fail to avail economic opportunities present in the general market of society.

It means that educational curriculum and the medium of instructions of different educational systems mark socio-economic classes of their beneficiaries. This difference is also a source of variation in their attitudes. Accordingly, the worldviews of students from different categories of educational institutions is polarized. This polarization is, actually, a threat to national harmony and social cohesion in Pakistan.

In order to deal with the problem, the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) is the best guide. The Constitution leads to eliminate educational inequalities and consequently social injustice. Articles 29 to 40 of the Constitution help out to device a frame of education for Pakistan. These articles condemn the class-based educational structure in the country. The Constitution

ensures a “uniform, equitable and effective system of education”.³ It entrusts responsibility on the state to devise a comprehensive ‘national education system’ sharing the ideals and goals of Pakistani society.

In this regard, National Education Policy 2009 has recognized the role of education in social cohesion, justice and economic growth. It suggests that “education must enable the individuals to increase the earning potential”. This also highlights that Madrassa students need to be fit for economic market of the country. However, the policy document is silent regarding how three streams of education in Pakistan can be merged into one comprehensive national system of education.

The fiscal budget of Pakistan is also not education-friendly. Normally, the share of education fluctuates between 2.0 percent to 2.5 percent of the total budget. In this regard, Pakistan is far behind other developing states, even in the region. This, actually, indicates that ‘education’ does not exist in state-priorities of Pakistan. Since education is key factor behind the achievements and advancements of developed societies: therefore, Pakistan also needs to re-visit state-priorities, and increase the share of education in fiscal budget. In this regard, Madrassa, being a part of comprehensive education system of the state, would also need a fixed share in educational budget.

According to 18th amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, the responsibility of education has been shifted from federation to provinces. Although, this educational autonomy to provinces has created hurdle in devising a uniform comprehensive national educational system in the country (as has been prescribed in National Education Policy 2009); however, measures can be taken at federal government level. For example, a National Education Authority can be established with the mandate to implement the policy options given in National Education Policy 2009;⁴ and to devise uniform school curriculum for all provinces. This uniform curriculum would also be followed by all madrassas in Pakistan.

Possibly, there may be some resistance, or reluctance, from madrassa-side to become a part of mainstream educational system. In this regard, it is important to understand that madrassa exists within the polity of Pakistan; and being a social institution, it is part of the state. In this frame of reference, all madrassas are supposed to follow the law of the land, and respect policies of the state. If government decides to merge all educational streams into one national educational system: madrassa has no justification to

refuse. State should ensure its writ, in this regard. The madrassas, however, could be allowed to offer courses based on religion in addition to the national curriculum requirements.

However, at the same time, it is also important to address the fair apprehensions of madrasa establishment; and to win their trust (because, presently, there is a trust deficit). State cannot close madrasas because 2.5 million students are studying there, along with all those facilities that government cannot provide in the context of prevailing economic conditions. Thus, madrasa can just be upgraded to make it a part of national education system.

For 'national education system', it is suggested that till grade 12 (intermediate level), there must be a compulsory uniform curricula comprising on socio-cultural/religious and scientific knowledge. For religious information, only agreed-upon contents may be incorporated by bypassing sectarian tendencies. After qualifying secondary school education, the students may have options to move to any professional educational field like engineering, agriculture, medicine or religion etc. All institutions of professional education should work under observation and control of the state.

Notes & References:

¹ Peter W. Singer, "*Pakistan's Madrassahs: Insuring a System of Education Not Jihad*" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001). See also Tariq Rehman, *Language, Education and Culture* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Matthew J. Nelson, "Muslims, Markets, and the meaning of a good education in Pakistan", *Asian Survey* 46, no. 5 (2006): 699-720; S. Farhana Kazmi and Tahir Pervez, "Socio Economic and Cultural Perspectives of Terrorism in Pakistan and the Madrassa (Mosque) Students", *International Journal of Academic Research* 3, no. 2 (2011).

² Uzma Anzar, "*Islamic Education: A brief history of madrassas with comments on curricula and current pedagogical practices*" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003).

³ Government of Pakistan, "*Constitution of Pakistan*" (1973).

⁴ Government of Pakistan, "*National Education Policy*" (2009).