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PIDE's GUIDE TO POLICY & RESEARCH

SINGLE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

PIDE P&R

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Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)

Contribution

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PIDE Policy & Research is a guide to policy making and research. Each issue focuses on a particular theme, but also provides a general insight into the Pakistani economy, identifies key areas of concern for policymakers, and suggests policy action. The publication offers a quick orbit of the country's economy and is a hands-on and precise go-to document for the policymaker, businessperson, academic, researcher, or student who seeks to remain updated and informed. We welcome contributions from within PIDE as well as from any external contributors.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed by the contributors do not reflect the official perspectives of PIDE.

For contributions and feedback, please reach us at
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About **PIDE**

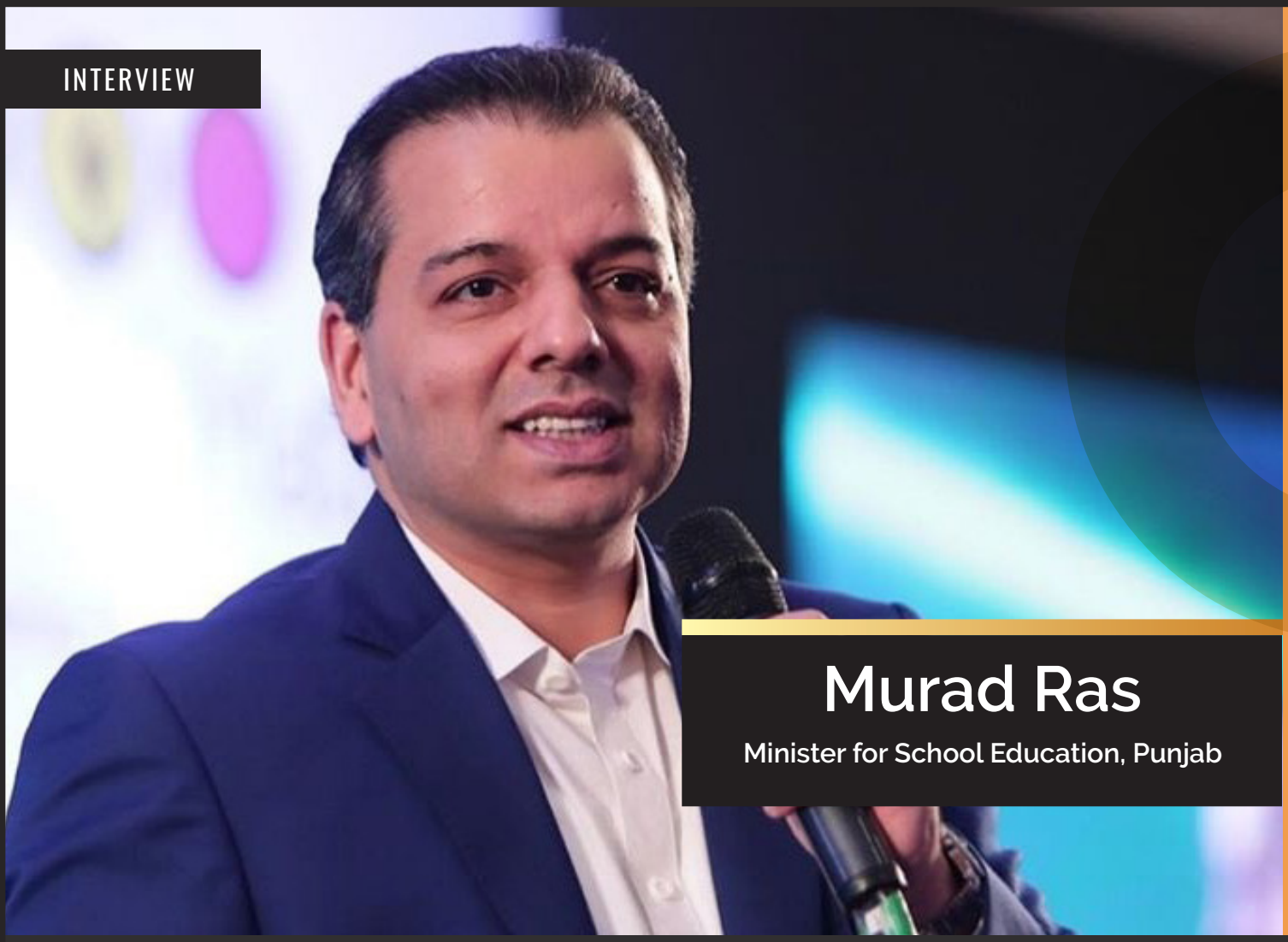
Welcome To Our Institute

The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics was established at Karachi in 1957 and in 1964 accorded the status of an autonomous research organization by the Government of Pakistan. It is devoted to theoretical and empirical research in Development Economics in general and on Pakistan-related economic issues in particular. In addition to providing a firm academic basis to economic policy-making, its research also provides a window through which the outside world can view the nature and direction of economic research in Pakistan. Other social sciences, such as demography and anthropology and interdisciplinary studies increasingly define the widening scope of research that must be undertaken for proper economic policy and development to have sound underpinnings. Over the past 61 years PIDE has earned an international reputation and recognition for its research. Our faculty is rich and our advisory committee consists of world renowned economists such as Nobel Laureate Robert A. Mundell.

PIDE is located at the Quaid-i-Azam University Campus in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The campus rests against the backdrop of the Margalla hills on the Potohar Plateau, within a short distance of the remains of Taxila, which once housed the world's oldest university. Archaeological remains discovered in this area show that it has been a center of civilization for some 5,000 years. The Institute, neighbor to several other academic outfits situated in this historic and scenic part of the green foothills of the great South Asian mountain ranges, is the hub of economic and social science research in this part of the world.

In November 2006, PIDE was granted the degree awarding status and hence our top priority now is to provide quality education which is affordable but of world class standard in this region along with a truly stimulating learning environment.

The advice of PIDE's International Advisory Board is also sought on various aspects of the Institute's academic activities. This Board comprises outstanding scholars (including Nobel Laureates) in the fields of Economics, Demography and Anthropology.



Murad Ras

Minister for School Education, Punjab

What do you think is the fundamental role of education? And is nation building a part?

I believe the most essential role education plays is to build strong characters. If a character of a child is stronger, he will grow up to be a nation builder and an empathetic person.

Is ensuring National Literacy the job of the government? Why and why not?

Since it is the fundamental right of every child, therefore it is essentially the Government's responsibility to ensure each child goes to school. Nevertheless, community engagement is an extremely important element for its effectiveness.

If the former, how would bureaucratic hurdles be overcome?

The role of Bureaucracy is to regulate and implement policies given by the political governments. Like all others, ask them for a timeline and ensure implementation.

If the latter, how would affordability be ensured?

Government school Education is free of cost and for Pvt schools, it is for citizens who can afford it. But then there are elite schools and schools for all sections of society.

What was your idea behind SNC? Why is it needed?

SNC is PMIK's vision of a naya Pakistan where all children will be taught one curriculum based on values, culture, creativity and critical thinking skills. It was much needed as we have witnessed anarchy, unrest in young minds who believe there is a visible class difference amongst citizens.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of SNC?

Strengths:

It will be a level playing field for all children regardless of their class differences.

It will focus on tarbiat, inculcate values, make them confident and responsible citizens.

Cons:
The only one I can think of, is the mafia behind stopping this.

What are the political incentives driving the push for the current SNC?
Majority of the population has already accepted the SNC and praised it. The percentage you see criticizing it is 2% who haven't bothered to go through it.There is only one push for us and that is implementing our PM's vision into reality.

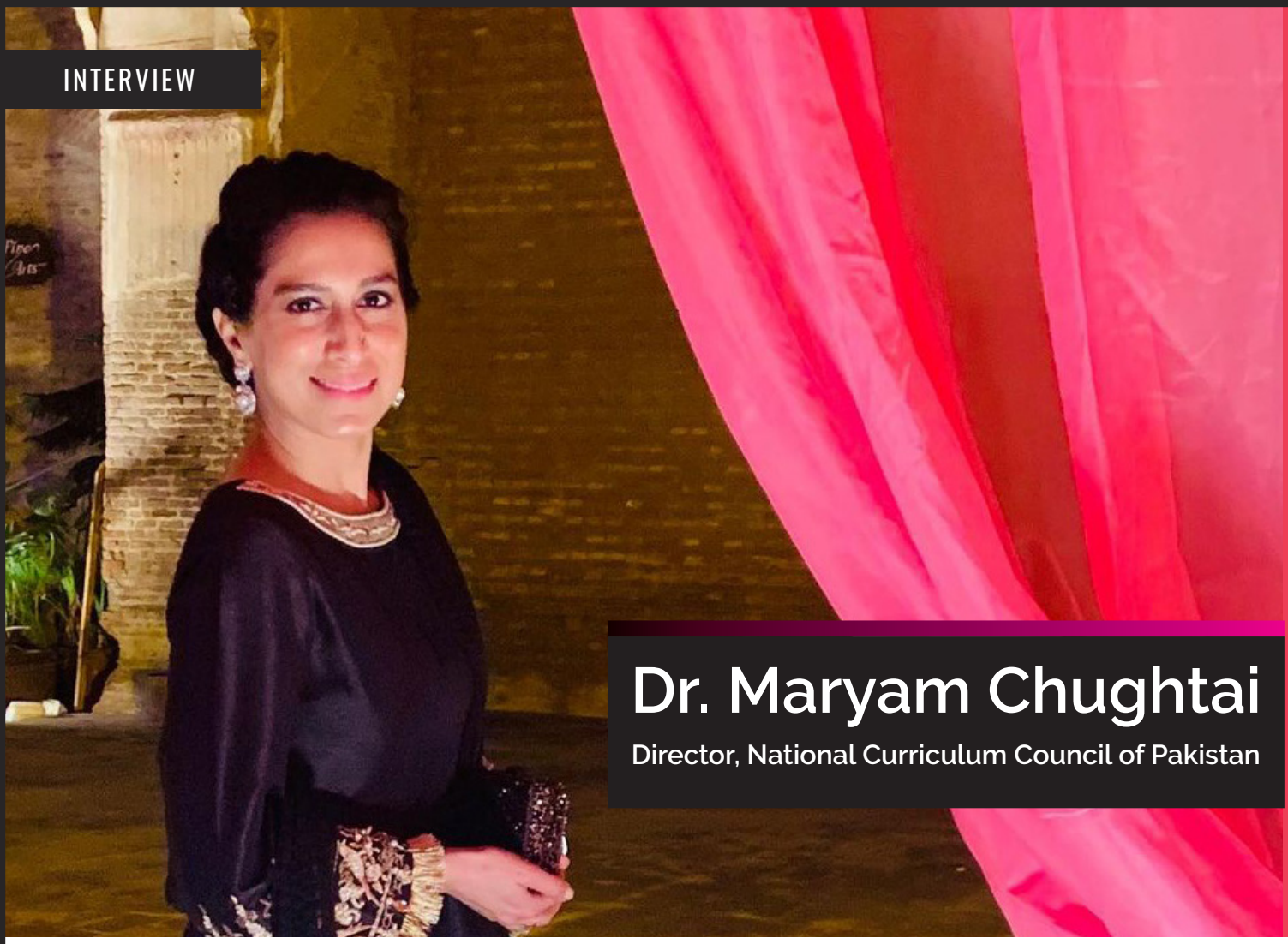
Is state intervention required in Education sector? Mao did it in China which resulted in "the Lost decade". Can Pakistan go down a similar route?
Without state, I don't see any other productive interventions to steer the Education sector. Punjab government is giving free Education, admission, textbooks and setting standards.

It is proposed that SNC is an equaliser between social classes? Agree?
Yes it is, and it will create a balance between all sections of the society.

Do you think National language is a good idea in the long run given the international competition?
The child's basic concepts have to be addressed appropriately in the language they speak widely and at home. The absence of which will be a rote learning system. The medium of instruction is Urdu so that they can comprehend the basic concepts better in their own language. Whereas, English continues as the medium of instruction, from Grade 6 onwards.

How have you plan to manage the capabilities of the teachers at school?
QAED is giving all public and private schools free online extensive trainings on SNC. Which will be ongoing.

Apparently its downgrading the expertise of the private sector rather than public schools, what's the verity behind it?
Please be clear on one thing. Education is the right of every child. Whether it is given by a public or a private sector school. Public and private schools are onboard on SNC and have had to make a lot of changes to their documents and trainings but all done willing which is a great step in the right direction. A large number of parents who have read it thoroughly, have also wholeheartedly welcomed it. Precisely why public and private school teachers are trained free and it will continue. No one is undermining anyone. It's a collective team effort of our education sector.



Dr. Maryam Chughtai

Director, National Curriculum Council of Pakistan

What do you think the fundamental role of education is? And is 'nation building' a part? Is ensuring national literacy the job of the government?

Nation building is not an essential part of education because number of education initiatives exists that are transnational or that are not at national level so we cannot say that those are any less initiative but building a sense of individual and collective is a big part of education.So, whether a country or multiple countries or a region like the EU for instance are building a sense of collective which is transnational they do; education does impart a sense of several different identities on to students. And I would say it is not an essential part of education but it is well recognized practice within education.

Yes, this is job of government as article 25A of our constitution which guarantees every child between the age of 5 to 15 a right to free and compulsory education is a good thing.

what about the bureaucratic hurdles in providing education?

In Pakistan like any other developing country and Pakistan being also a high population developing country there are several, dozens of implementation challenges, of which an inefficient bureaucracy is one of the main one and as you look at countering these challenges weather it the capacity of teachers or the broken assessment and examination system that is only promoting road memorization or its missing facilitates or it is an outdated curriculum, these are all some of the very big challenges of which bureaucratic inefficiencies is one and any kind of education reform program which does not also have a plan for successful implementation is, in my opinion, incomplete.

Before I ask you what is single national curriculum, what is your motivation to say yes to challenging thing?

I grew up in Pakistan, I went to United States for my higher education, I did my undergraduate, masters and doctorate from the US. I was there for 15 years but not one day out of those 15 years I feel that I did not want to return to Pakistan. My brothers have also returned to Pakistan after finishing their higher education. And we come from a patriotic family, so, I believe that this country has given me a lot, I have accomplished a lot at an individual level because I grew up here and I felt it was

responsibility to return and try and give back. So, when I returned my first project was to setup the School of Education at LUMS which had very successful launch and is doing well. They say opportunity knocks but you have to be listening. So, I was in a right place at the right time, so, when the opportunity opened up I felt this it was a calling and it would have pain or perhaps unethical to say no when you have such an opportunity to impact, when you have the training to have the impact from some of the best universities and instructors of around the world and then to sort of say no would have been, would have hit at my affiliation with the collective, which is Pakistan.

In your opinion, is the motive and idea of the government behind SNC what is its scope and how do you think that it can be the right thing to do at this stage?

Single National Curriculum is a name of a large scale education reforms exercise. They include reforms agenda of four parts; improving the core standards of education at every learning level, improving the quality of textbooks available to our children, improving the capacity of teachers who are supposed to tach this curriculum and reforming the assessment system which is currently based on road memorization and taking it towards a concept based learning. So, the goal of this initiative, this project, is to take a comprehensive and holistic view of education reforms and to start with that we switch the foundational piece for all of this work and the foundational piece is to identify the target, what is the destination we want to end up at which is setting of the core standards by subject and grade and learning level that we require every child in Pakistan to come up to. The next three parts of it, this is the easiest part because here you are setting as aspiration, it also quite difficult but compared to other parts this is easier. The rest of it where you have to align the rest of the sector according to these learning standards in true letter and spirit that is to intervene much harder but Pakistan is not the only country in the world with these challenges and with the will of civil society and political parties across different political ideologies I think it is very possible that over the next 8 – 10 years we can have this holistic education reform come to flourishing and give some real results.

Bringing private schools to them to SNC is actually downgrading them, rather improving the standards of the public schools, what do you think do you think this?

So the question was that private sector was already providing good quality education, what was the rationale behind bringing their standards down and not bringing up the standards of the low performing schools. Yes, that is what generally people are talking about. I just want to have your take on this.The government would have brought the standards down of good quality schools if it has restricted private schools that you cannot teach above these learning levels or these learning standards. If they have said that you can only teach a counting up to 1,000 to second graders and counting up to 10,000 to third graders because that is the level public sector is at. Instead, what the government did was, they said you have to teach at least counting up to 1,000 to this level at least counting to this number by the higher grade level. So, when you say at least, it means you can teach up to the million if you have a good school, smart children, good teachers, it's a minimum standard. And this idea of having core curriculum or a minimum standard is very well recognized idea around the world.

So, the 'at least' part is the backbone of this reform which has been taken up around the world, it's not like that the course standard topic is, you know, an alien idea or something. Now, this is what it would have been look alike if the government have brought the standards down, firstly, if it had not set a floor and it had set a ceiling that you cannot teach 1,001 above 1,000, that would have been bringing down. Secondly, what could have been happened that if the government had said that these are the standards and exams will be taken this year on these standards and the state will be conducting the exams. The exams system is not something that the government has gotten into yet. For instance, the elite schools were worried that they have to teach Islamyaat and General Knowledge in Urdu, plus government would have said that at the end of the year, the second grader will be examined on the second level Urdu standards and the third grader will be tested on the third level Urdu standards and the fifth grader will be tested on the basis of fifth level Urdu and Islamyaat standards. There is no such thing. In fact, second, third, fourth, and fifth graders are being examined on their schools' level by their teachers. Additionally, Punjab Education Commission has removed the of the examination of fifth and eighth grade, which was the practice in the past. So, if the government had gone beyond that we have introduced a minimum standard and we will be testing on these standards instantaneously then you are expecting something unreasonable. All I am saying that this is something that has been, I think the government could have, may be, communicated this better that these are the procedures that we would not be following and these are the steps that we will be following.

Is there miscommunication about the SNC?

Miscommunication is something that shows the wrong information, government did not say that the exams will be on these standards from the next year, oh! Sorry, that was a miscommunication. Government announced some minimum standards over and over again, ministers in KP, Punjab, and Federal; where these reforms are being implemented they said over and over again that these are the minimum standards. There was no assessment policy, so if those things were, you know, propaganda were spread around it that they are bringing the quality of education down then that propaganda does not stands in the face of facts because these are minimum standards. Yes, their implementation could have been better, there could have been things that could have been done better. But in a country like Pakistan with such a scale of the problems, it takes time to get things into the field and get them right, and government is very open to making the amendments.

Do you see any weaknesses of SNC?

Yeah, I mean, I think that the SNC needs to bring in more people to express their opinion because when the SNC was being made a lot of people participated but when it got realised a lot more people wanted to participate, so, I think that is definitely a learning that we can add more voices into the fold and secondly, the SNC, currently has been designed for up till fifth grade and there has been overloading. So, if we are going to certain amendments to it, I would like to move some of the content, all of which is now required into elective content because you want to give some more space to child and to school to add on to more personalized content, conceptualized content, contextualized content. So, critique of overloading I think is a relevant one and critique that has come around religion is not a critique of a curriculum document, it's not a critique of the standards so, it no standard in a Science curriculum that is talking about any kind of religious education. One set of textbook and the government has approved thousands of text books as, you know, across provinces as good textbooks they have NOCs. One set of textbooks has in some subject has content on religious personalities in Urdu and English, which is not religious instruction that teaches you the religious practices, which we call worships. It is just that if you teach about crusades you do not become Christian, you learn about Asoka you do not become Buddhist, so, if you learn about Prophet or a Caliph you do not necessarily become that religion, you do not convert to that religion. But even so, that critique on the textbooks and those textbooks can be looked at again also that if there is something that can be done. But I think the main concern is that we need more voices included, even more voices included some overloading of content needs to be reduced.

It has been said that SNC will equalizing all social classes, so, how do you see that?

I think socioeconomic disparity exists in every society. But in Pakistan this disparity exists to a very large extant and it can definitionaly be reduced, I think the SNC reforms can bring a more people closer to a better education than we are currently providing. I do not know how equalization is that easy or even possible in the most developed societies we have.

How do you think that government intervention was really needed in all this?

Well, I mean the government intervention for the last several decades have led to a very broken system, so, the question is not of government intervention, state health infrastructure and education infrastructure, it is like, if the state decided to fix its hospitals you won't call it an intervention. Or even, forget states' hospitals, let's say; the state set minimum standards for medical college across the country and said that whether you are a public or private or whatever medical college you cannot skip the subject of anatomy, you cannot skip surgery you have to teach these. So that would not be a; why would state intervention be needed. The state takes ownership of its education institution and the lack of an intervention in an intervention too.

Do you think that use of Urdu language in the curriculum is a very good idea in the long run?

Given that we want our students to participate in international conferences and international platforms. The policy is that half the subjects are in English and the other half are in Urdu or in the regional language. So, this question which was spread as another kind of propaganda that the Prime Minister is against English just does not hold in the face of facts because the SNC that he launched, launched half the subjects in English. So, just to say that he is against English is not based upon facts.

And the question of long term, the curriculum for sixth to twelve grade has not been released yet. And plan for that is to keep a very high priority on English, so, to assume that, people have been saying that all schools have turned into Urdu medium schools, is not correct. Schools have turned into a bilingual school, which is you and I are. If I started speaking in English or Urdu or a mix of both, you would understand. So, bilingual school is representation of who we are and many of our kids a multilingual. There is nothing wrong with making schools bilingual.

Will SNC be implemented in the madrassahs too?

Madaris have been asked to get registered. Multiple governments have tried to do and have not succeeded. But this government is making a push for it that not only do they have to register but they also have to follow the curriculum of a regular public school and if they want to teach additional content of religious nature, that is fine. It is the same things that you say to an elite private school that you have to meet a minimum standard it cannot be that you are a Madrasaa student and you cannot count upto 1,000 to a certain grade level above that it is fine. Mr. Muraad Ras also tweeted this that no one is exempt from this. So, this is for public, private and Madaaris.

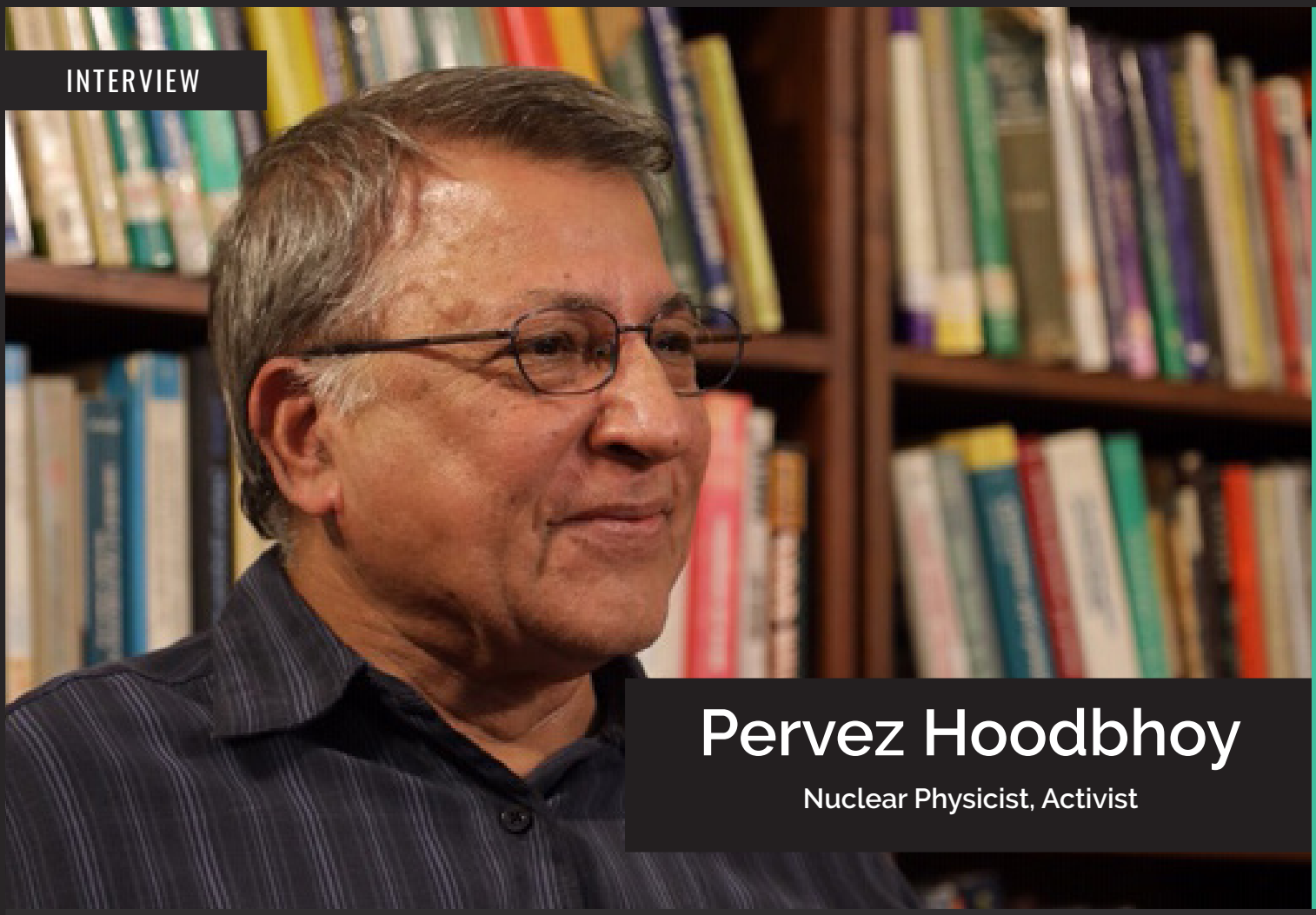
How are you planning when SNC launch in the whole country particularly in the rural areas where there are a lot of ghost schools? Are you planning to upgrade the abilities of the teachers as well and have an eye on the ghost schools?

Yes, like I said that this is a four prompt reform process and in that the capacity building of teachers is a whole domain, so, yes we plan to do that and how we plan to do that is by bringing in a lot of education technology initiatives to use resources in the classrooms. It will not fix every single classroom because many of our classrooms do not have the facilities or even electricity or internet but it will bring more teachers in the code of being able to deliver the quality education.

There has been lot of criticism on SNC, how do you cope to that? And what is your message for the people who criticize?

No, I appreciate that criticism. I try to listen for what they are saying rather than how they are saying it or who is saying it and I have learnt a lot from that criticism and many time the packaging may be rough but the message is good and I would like my critics to continue what they are doing.

Perfect! Thank you very much Ma'am.



Pervez Hoodbhoy

Nuclear Physicist, Activist

A lot of people claimed I shouldn't be asking you questions about SNC a topic that you aren't an 'expert' on - how would you respond to that?

I claim no expertise in anything and have never made any such claim. So ask what you want at your own risk. But, to be fair, most of those who are given unlimited access to the national media and freely dispense their views lack not only expertise but also common sense and decency. Of course I am a physicist first but as a citizen of this country I worry about my environment – not just my physical environment but also social and political. That's why even those who are non-experts like me sometimes speak out. When I see people in great distress, particularly women and poor people who've been left out of the mainstream of society, then I feel I should be worrying about things that lie outside of my own narrow area of physics. In fact I don't feel the least bit apologetic about it.

What do you think the fundamental role of education is? And is 'nation building' a part?

Education can lead to nation building and it is often used by nation states for that purpose but it is something that is much more fundamental. Education should be about building the capacity of a mind to comprehend the social and physical environment. In fact it is the tool by which we humans understand the universe. Through this apparatus we become capable of asking the right questions and knowing when the answer received is satisfactory. No, education is not about learning facts – although that is certainly a part of it – but about learning to deal with known facts. So, if nations are built as a consequence of this process then well and good. But the primary purpose of education should ultimately be aimed toward the individual: not for creating a political community.

Is ensuring national literacy the job of the government? Why or why not?

If by literacy you mean simple reading, writing and arithmetic then it is definitely the duty of a government to ensure delivery of those capabilities. To be remiss indicates failure to govern. This assumes that the government is really in charge of the country and collects taxes from the people or receives external aid for this purpose. But simple literacy is just the first rung of the education ladder.

Who should be granted the authority to decide the content, particularly in a country like Pakistan

which has a hybrid political system?

There are certain parts of education that are universal and uncontroversial. Across the world you see people generally learning the same things: simple addition, subtraction, multiplication, etc. and how to read and write in their language. Next come history and culture but things start to get sticky here because most societies are multicultural and then questions arise of what is to be taught. As we go to more advanced levels, education is required to respond to even more specific demands. The decision of what to teach is at one level an individual one: people learn according to their needs and seek out opportunities consistent with those. At a broad level, the ideal education should be to equip individuals with sufficient mental capacity so that 'traffic policemen' become unnecessary. This means exposure to a broad range of thoughts and ideas. In terms of religious faith this would take the form of studying various religions so that a student knows about the tenets of all major faith systems. I think religion should be taught as a phenomenon so that students can understand the existence of faiths other than their own. The government should not be in the business of deciding on behalf of the people what they should and shouldn't believe. Of course, kids will be taught at home – by their parents – if they feel they have a responsibility to transfer their personal ideologies on them. To my mind an individual's faith should be left for that person to decide.

What do you believe the language of instruction for education in Pakistan should be? English, Urdu, or the vernaculars?

It has been scientifically established that young children learn best in their mother tongue – i.e. whatever language is spoken at home. Naturally, it is much easier to communicate in that language and each of these languages is a repository of some historically formed culture. In my opinion local languages should be promoted and the state needs to stop denigrating and marginalizing them. However, most such languages have very clear limitations and one can only go so far with that approach. Of course, since Pakistan has a national language it makes sense to have most education in Urdu and then to gradually introduce English. But English should be taught differently from how it is taught now. School textbooks in Pakistan purporting to teach English appear to have been written by morons who have no pedagogical sense or even commonsense. You can see how stupidly the present SNC books have been written. What's needed is a scientific approach that focuses on a relevant, restricted vocabulary and gently introduces the grammar. I think there is no getting around the fact that we have to ultimately become bilingual: both English and Urdu. It's not just science and technology – which are 100% in English – that requires this but much else. New social concepts and the ideas that exist in the world today are being constantly invented and English is the primary language for this. The world for an individual unfamiliar with English is a much poorer one. I think it is the job of an education expert to determine transitional stages. Perhaps students should be started off with their mother tongue, and then – let's say at the age of six or seven – taught in Urdu and followed a year later by an introduction to English. This will be a path towards attaining life skills as well. By the time students are at university they should be perfectly adept at English. At this point, Urdu should ideally be dropped for purposes of official communication. But having said that, I give my own university lectures in Urdu to make them comprehensible. Do I enjoy that? No. All students say that my English is too difficult to follow fully, but quite a few students say this about my Urdu as well. That's because they haven't learned any language properly. Sadly Urdu has reached a plateau of development in all subjects. It has stagnated and words that were commonly understood 50 years ago are now unfamiliar. The vocabulary of the average Pakistani in any language barely exceeds 2-3 thousand. It should be many times that. The ability to express finer thoughts and purity of expression has disappeared. Paradoxically, even as the quality of spoken and written Urdu nosedives the number of people using Urdu keeps rising.

There is much talk about 'mainstreaming' madrassas - do you think the current madrassa system is producing graduates that can contribute to the economic growth of the country? If not, why not - and what can be done about it?

You have to look at history and the experiences of other Muslim countries in today's world to get to the answer. In a nutshell – it hasn't been done. The focus of madrassa education has always been religious instruction with a smattering of other things hastily thrown in with the hope of making the graduates employable. This rarely happen. I challenge you to show me a country where madrassas are producing graduates of any worth in science, technology, medicine, or any field of knowledge that is considered worthy of exploration today. This nothing new. Historically, madrassas have never produced scientists or thinkers of any worth. Their curriculum was largely religious although in better times there was a smattering of low level math and astronomy. If one looks at the Islamic golden age or at the major contributors to scientific and intellectual progress in those times – people like Ibn Sina, Al Farabi, Ibn Haytham, etc. – they gained little secular knowledge from the madrassas. In fact only a few were formally educated. As people of genius they were all self-learners and beneficiaries of the initial stock of Greek learning, thoughtfully translated into Arabic by the enlightened caliphs of the time. The intellectual elite communicated internally; madrassas were not high seats of learning. The situation of the subcontinent's madrassas was different from those in the Middle East or Spain. Indian madrassas were even more focused upon religious matters, especially after Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi. We should not forget the historical context. Mohammed bin Qasim came to Sind in 712, some 150 years before the beginning of the Arab Golden Age. In contrast to Arab Islam, Indian Islam never produced anything of significant scholarly value. Madrassas and rote learning killed the search for new directions. Then, as now, it is only religious questions that are debated endlessly. Remember that the basic purpose of the madrassa is to prepare you for the afterlife. That is why they have students learning and regurgitating religious texts. There is no concept of creating knowledge or getting jobs outside of

religious institutions. The highest aspiration of madrassa students is to become clerics: not scientists. We need to treat madrassas as a problem. We can't say 'this is a parallel stream of education' because it creates graduates that are unfit for modern civilization. This is not to say they should be closed down tomorrow because this would leave millions of students destitute. But we do need to treat it as a problem. We have too many children in this country who struggle to feed themselves and so are naturally sent to madrassas where they can hope to get something to eat. What is needed is a long term strategy for children to transition out of this system.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Single National Curriculum? Is it even necessary?

I don't see any strengths just weaknesses! We do not need a single curriculum – absolutely not. The diversity in this country is much too great for any single curriculum to work. The educational level of O/A level students, madrassa students, and students of private Urdu-medium schools are totally different. To have just one curriculum you would need to drag everyone down to the same common level – which is a prescription for disaster. The SNC's claim that it will level out the educational inequities in the system is plainly fraudulent and intended to deceive the public which hopes that this will do away with an iniquitous system. Simply changing the curriculum does not level the playing field. The education experience is predicated on several other things besides the curriculum: teachers, examinations, infrastructure, administration, etc. Focusing on only one component – a zero-budget enterprise – is merely a way of saying, 'You are all going to read the books prescribed to you. And there is nothing beyond that.' It does not resolve anything else.

How do you think access to education for girls in particular can be improved? There seem to be several sociocultural barriers to making facts about the female body known. How can they be addressed?

Obviously we must have more girls' schools and better infrastructure for them. That many do not have toilets is a real problem but this has a clear solution – build them! Making education relevant to female needs is much more difficult. Girls approaching puberty are scared away from school because of menstrual problems. They have to be told that this is perfectly normal and can be dealt with in a very routine way. For this they need to be educated about their bodies. We are so tabooed that this is not being done. Such barriers need to be dismantled. Unless we do so and include the human reproductive system as part of the curriculum we will keep multiplying the population by a factor of two after every 25 years. In schools our girls are not told how children are born. A lot of them actually find out on their wedding night!

How do you think critical thinking can be incorporated into the education system from an early age? Is that possible in Pakistan?

Difficult yes, but possible in some places. Basically we need to relax the constraints within the classroom. The teacher cannot be a dictator. We need friendly teachers, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. Loosen the knot on the classroom, foster curiosity and encourage students to ask questions. When I was teaching sociology at FC College, I would have 30% of the grade based on class participation. Every time a student would open their mouth, they would get one mark – regardless of the quality of their contribution. At the end of the semester we would total up their points. Somebody who absolutely refused to speak up would get zero, naturally. And to my surprise there were actually students who ended up in that situation despite the utterly simple criteria I had set. I would ask them why they didn't speak – to which they would say 'aadat nahi hai' (I'm not in the habit of doing so). What sort of early education must they have gone through to end up in that predicament? Teachers need to structure their classes so that a multiplicity of views are presented to their students – and then allow them to ponder and come up with their own thoughts and opinions and perspectives in an independent capacity. This fosters a culture of debate and the exchange of ideas which over the long run generates creative, critical thinkers.

What do you think are the political incentives driving the push for the current SNC?

I don't think this has to do with the PTI as a whole. It is Imran Khan. It has been his obsession since he underwent his lifestyle changes. Let me tell you a story. About 20-25 years ago he asked me to attend a meeting at his house. He said, 'Pervez, I built the cancer hospital – and I want to do the same for education.' It was me and a few others. In total it was 3 'pant-wearing' people and 3 religious conservative scholars. It did not go well at all. The moulvis saw modern education as a conspiracy against Islam and wanted to have nothing to do with it. This led to a heated argument and Imran was apparently neutral but was actually pitching for them. The point of the story is to say that it is not PTI – it is its current leader. He wants this. You might ask why, and this is related to his 'discovering' the faith to expiate his guilt for a racy youth.

Considering the vast majority of Pakistan's population is moderately/strongly religious, do you not think most parents see Islamic education as a fundamental aspect of good schooling for their children? If that is indeed the case, ridding the school system of 'religious studies' would probably trigger excessive backlash - how do you think the subject may be improved?

I think people at different economic and consciousness levels will look at it differently. Those who know something about

the outside world know it is very competitive. If you want a job, your kid has to be smart and know what is needed out there. This means savvier parents will give their kids a secular education with a little religion thrown in. The simple minded majority will go differently. This means a few Pakistanis will get educated well and be competitive internationally, but that number is small. Those who learn nothing in school can still get a job inside Pakistan because here it's connections that will get you one.

What do you think the effect of including religious beliefs/sentiments in other subjects (like science and history, and in visual depictions of clothing and household relations) will be - especially considering Article 22(1) of the constitution explicitly says that religious instruction will not be allowed for those that do not belong to said religion? How are these debates important and don't you think they take away from the content related issues?

It's completely unsurprising that the rights of religious minorities are being openly trampled upon and their kids are being forced to learn Islamic materials. This is a violation of the constitution but the constitution is regarded as a piece of paper here, there is nothing sacrosanct about it. Instead most people believe that Islam comes first and Pakistan (and its constitution) comes second. So they buy the line that Islam has to be everywhere – not just confined to Islamiyat. It extends into language teaching, history, geography, the sciences, etc. Pakistan first experienced this thinking under Zia and now we are seeing a continuation of that. Imran Khan is an extension of Zia ul Haq with a prettier face. If he could, he would get rid of every liberal in this country. The only constraint on him is exercising this option would stop aid and loans from the outside world.

One of the justifications that are presented for increasing levels of religiosity - not just in education but also culture and society in general - is that it is a rejection of colonial-era impositions: what is your take on this?

Yes, there is certainly that. We saw this much earlier at the time of the British. The East India Company made its way gradually into power, taking over India eventually. Then 1857 happened and the last Mughal king was removed. The British needed locals as government functionaries and hence people educated in a modern system. Most Muslims refused saying their religion had given them a superior way of life and secular education was therefore unnecessary. Hindus, on the other hand, asked for more schools and colleges to be built for them. The rejection of Western education and the insistence on Arabic and Farsi as the medium of instruction over English did not do much good for Muslims and so they landed fewer jobs. If you want to understand the difference between Pakistan and India in terms of current achievements in science and technology, the roots have to be found in the past. Rejection of something good and useful, even if it has colonial roots, is not a wise thing. You might get a feeling of liberation when you say 'we have rejected the English language'. But then what? Will Afghanistan be able to prepare its kids for the 21st century by educating them in Pashto and rejecting English as a farangi language? This would be a foolish decision.

It is said about the SNC that it is establishing a 'floor' for each grade level in the education system - what are your thoughts on that?

If Pakistan was Sweden, it may be possible. It won't work here. If you do put a floor on each grade level that floor would have to be very low indeed. No real skills would be imparted in that case. How are you going to put the floor between those studying in a village school and those at Aitchison or Beaconhouse.

How do you think we can rethink our education system and bring it in line with the modern world? Should we continue building structures and seeing the process as a logistical one? How can we introduce a sense of dynamism to the mix?

We need to incline ourselves philosophically with the ideas of modernity. What does that require? It doesn't mean you dress in a certain way, although that is part of it. Modernity means acceptance of the primacy of reason. That is how it happened in Europe and that is how it is happening across the world. China, Japan, India – and even Bangladesh – are heading north even as Pakistan heads south. SNC is geared to ensure that Pakistan remains an ideological state where reason is secondary and constantly denigrated. All the time we hear supplications to the supernatural, no calls for asking why something has happened.

There's this great song by Pink Floyd, The Wall Part 2 - where they go, 'We don't need no education, we don't need no thought control'. What is your take on the idea of schooling in general around the world as being a means of ideological propagation?

In much of the world, choosing your ideological affiliation is at least a half possibility. Not here. From the day the child is born, you are told you belong to a religion – which is the best in the world and which prescribes the ideal behavior for humans. When the child goes to school, this is reinforced. Right and wrong is based on an understanding purely that of Islam. This leaves no room for non-Muslims who are brushed aside by the majority under the claim that the country was not for them in the first place and that Islam is what Pakistan was made for. Everybody else better leave.

Education Beyond the Classroom: Arts and Culture

Abbas Moosvi

Say the word 'education' and a certain image comes to mind. Morning assemblies. Grogginess. Tables and chairs. A teacher, lecturing from the front. A blackboard. Books and stationery. Children in uniform. A formal structure to the process of learning is seen as both inevitable and necessary – fueled by the idea that obedience, discipline, and orderliness are the fundamental building blocks of a comprehensive education.

The Canadian band, Brad Sucks, commented on the phenomenon in one of its biggest hits, Dropping Out of School: "Stomach's turning, books are burning – I found better things than learning." The sentiment is illustrative of the general sense of unease and reluctance that children experience at school. It is no wonder, either, taking into consideration the generally constricted and hierarchical system that tends to prevail.

There are naturally two main responses to this: to rethink the entire education system, adopting a long-term vision for reform – and alongside that, to see formal education as one facet of a much larger project for personal growth and intellectual development. The former is political in its nature, with various incentive structures – most prominently the state deploying education as a means of ideological propagation – functioning to obstruct initiatives that seek drastic changes. On the other hand, the latter reorients the focus of education and learning to the individual: placing them at the helm and allowing them to decide, based on their unique temperaments and personal dispositions, what kind of information to expose themselves to.

This is where arts and culture, within a broader context of urban vibrancy, come in. Film, comedy, music, literature, theater, crafts, etc. are all entire universes within themselves. Historically, they have functioned to expand people's horizons, enhance their imaginative capacities, and overwhelm them with a sense of awe, hope, wonder, and excitement. In recent times, however, they have been pushed to the margins.

The sociologist, Max Weber, perceived modernity as an epoch of 'disenchantment' – a gradual decline of mystery and meaning in people's lives as science and technology demystified all aspects of existence. (Jenkins, 2000) Jean Baudrillard, one of the foremost thinkers of the postmodern tradition, takes this sentiment further. In his seminal book, Simulacra and Simulation, he describes technological advancements as leading to a general environment of unreality – where people's faces are turned into projectors for screens (due to their addictive nature), the content of which is essentially a simulation. However, rather than being a representation of reality – which was the case in bygone times – simulations are now 'simulacra', i.e. depictions that are presented as reality when they are actually fiction. (Baudrillard, 1994) A classic example is the news media industry, which is known for its hyper-partisan nature – cherry picking information and highlighting only those aspects that advance the sociopolitical agendas of their owners. The result of all this is a blurring of the lines between what is real and what is not.

Within this context, there is a grave need to adopt a skeptical approach towards technology and the internet – which are slowly but surely turning into cesspools of narcissism, toxicity, and petty one-upmanship contests. Although rich with educational resources, the internet cannot be navigated a la carte – one must necessarily be exposed to a plethora of distractions in the form of social media, advertisements, news alerts, and more. This means that for the average person, a substantial amount of time that could have been spent learning is squandered in the consumption of junk media.

Alongside this, a revival of traditional arts and culture ought to be pursued – not in the sense of romanticizing the past, but of reorienting the activity around real social interactions. This will involve radically rethinking urban spaces, whereby propertied interests are replaced with people as the highest priority. This will mean more pavements, dedicated cycling lanes, parks and recreation facilities, community centers, street vending zones, public transport, and much more. A culture of debate, discussion, exchange, and entertainment – once it gets off the ground – will naturally function as a source of rich learning for people, who will voluntarily engage in the activity as opposed to merely being a passive (and captive) audience in a classroom setting.

Indeed, arts/culture is a multimillion dollar industry around the globe – functioning to challenge the status quo and enriching the quality of people's lives by articulating complex, multilayered ideas in a manner that is both comprehensible to audiences/participants and resonates with them at a deep level. Furthermore, it has been established that 'people skills', or soft skills, are arguably just as important – if not more – than technical ability in determining one's life outcomes and financial success. This means that as people begin to incorporate arts and culture into their regular schedules, in which they set aside time to engage with others in a context that is mutually beneficial, they will slowly develop their emotional intelligence,

learn to express themselves better, and be more tolerant and accepting (even celebratory) of the vast internal variety that they see in their societies.

Gatherings of this sort are also opportunities for networking, whereby people gain exposure to groups that they may collaborate with in the economic arena – leading to growth and prosperity by leveraging one another's unique talents and resource pools. Furthermore, a gradual strengthening of civil society is likely to be observed through arts and culture – which have historically played a pivotal role in sociopolitical movements around the world, serving as the pulse and animating force for resisting oppressive practices and holding those in power accountable. This is because art as a whole can be seen as a question mark, forcing 'neutral' observers to confront uneasy realities – and to imagine new and better. The line between what is possible and what isn't, in popular conception, is blurred through arts and culture. It is the one space in which democracy blossoms: everybody has an equal place in the mix and can shape the collective consciousness as they please. (Moller, 2016)

The greatest thinkers the world has ever produced have not, in large part, credited formal education as the cause of their success – instead, the recurring theme among them is a facilitative environment which allowed them to think freely, participate in their communities, and be able to integrate into society at large. Far from the atomized, tech-driven lifestyles of today, a spontaneous sense of inquisitiveness within a larger context of societal vibrancy is what produces the best human beings: those capable of leading others. Exposure to ideas, new and old, is vital for this – and no grouping or institution outside formal structures generates those better than the arts and culture community.

In the words of John Keating in the film Dead Poet's Society, "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for."

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Analyzing the Pros and Cons of Single National Curriculum

Henna Ahsan

Pakistan has a variety of educational systems which further class differences and seems to be a big hurdle in bringing unity and harmony among the nation. One of these systems is represented by high level English medium schools in private sector whose fees on average ranges from 15 to 25K or even more. Other major chunk of the children goes to low fee private and public sector schools and finally a substantial amount of children studies in religious sanctuaries known as Madrassa. All these educational institutes have different environments in terms of curriculum, way of teaching, facilities and freedom. After spending 10 years, which is the average schooling time, in these respective institutes, it is hard to imagine that these children would be able to befriend each other or have an intimate and respectable working relationship whenever future brings them close. Therefore, any effort to eradicate these differences may be seen as an effort with a good intention and in the right direction.

We have about 22.5 million out of school children in this country and all governments have been doing efforts to bring these out of school children to schools. Incentives like total fee wave off, giving monthly stipends, free books and copies are some notable measures taken in this context. Single National Curriculum (SNC) is in fact a step ahead to this basic problem which means that along with doing efforts to increase children enrollment, government is now serious and taking concrete steps to increase the quality of education being provided. Through SNC government has provided some minimum learning standards for students of all grades and except for few books like Islamiyat and Urdu, private schools are at great liberty to design and draft their own books keeping in consideration the minimum learning standards. Regarding mode of education in these books' government, at present, intends to implement its scheme of teaching from one to three class in Urdu except Math and Science subjects and later this will be implemented from grade 1 to 5.

There are people who have apprehensions about this SNC, the way it has been carved out, about syllabus, about present faculty and about possible outcomes of SNC. However, most of these apprehensions and concerns could be summarized under below main points.

1. Asking private schools to teach Islamiyat and Social Studies in Urdu will be a big challenge for the children especially for children of 3 and 4 grades who have been studying these subjects in English.
2. Along with making Islamiyat mandatory for all grades, SNC has introduced lot of religious/Islamic stuff in Urdu, English, Social Studies and even in History books as well.
3. It is not the curriculum which lacked but the teaching capabilities of the teachers and teaching environment, especially of

the public sector schools, so this should have been the focus of government.

4. Just focusing on the curriculum and not on testing/examination system will not render any fruitful results.
5. The government instead of raising the standard of public sector schools is trying to lower the private schools' standard to bring all at one level.
6. Madrassas would not implement this SNC and will keep following their own agendas.

Now when we deeply scrutinize these concerns, we see that some are mere fears of doing an extra effort, some mere negative opinions and some are really genuine grievances. Though developed countries have been able to give a complete secular outlook to their educational systems but Pakistan being formed on the basis of religion has its own dynamics and limitations. Therefore, honoring the sentiments of people regarding ideological basis of this country there is no harm in mandating Islamiyat as a compulsory subject however increased religious/Islamic content in other books should be a matter of concern for people at the helm. Government has made arrangements for teaching Ethics to the Non-Muslim students in place of Islamiyat, however, what other choice these non-Muslim students have when they are forced to read Islamic content in other above-mentioned books. So, it is good that government seriously address this concern and try to make these subject specific books more secular that are equally acceptable to all citizens of the country.

Concern regarding capabilities of the teaching staff and teaching methodologies is a very genuine concern and perhaps one which should be given the most importance. If we observe our big cites, we see that most of the public sector schools have larger infrastructure than private schools and also teaching staff here has permanent and secure jobs with perks much better than private schools' teachers. However, learning outcomes and overall personality development of the students in these public sector schools is far behind than the average private schools in these areas. Further we see the trend very dominant, at least in cities, that even the extremely poor people prefer to send their children in private schools[1]. A study done by (Manzoor et al., 2017) show that the "quality of education" is one of the major factors for parents for selecting a private school over a public sector school . Therefore, government needs to take it very seriously and should have more emphasis on teachers training, school environment and also efficient use of technology by the teaching staff for imparting education in easy and interesting manner for the students.

Regarding madrassas, these are approximately more than 30,000 in number that cater to the educational needs of approximately three million children. However, education being imparted in these madrassas have been a subject of great debate due to these madrassas' affiliation and allegiance with particular religious sects. Now if we could have a curriculum that along with fulfilling the religious needs of these madrassas may fulfill their secular education needs as well then it would be a great step in the history of our country. Moreover, having a single national curriculum which will have great commonality of syllabus and contents will make these madrassa students not to feel alien about other children in the country and will also open new career avenues for them. However, critics are right in saying that mere introduction of the curriculum will not suffice the purpose and a strict surveillance and monitoring mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure things are actually happening on the ground.

Finally, if we do not have a right testing and examination system in place, we will never know how well our students are doing and do our efforts are reaping the desired results. If the examination system would be the same old which tested children memory rather any cognitive or intellectual abilities then there will be no benefit of introducing a better curriculum. Unfortunately, we do not see any substantive work and efforts done in this regard against this SNC exercise. So, it is necessary that government look into this important pillar of good education and try to revamp existing examination system to match the claimed learning outcomes of SNC.

[1]Hamad. Rasool, S. Ahsan. Safdar, A. (2017). "Determinants of Parental Choice for Public – Private Schooling of Children: A Study of Rawalpindi-Islamabad." MPRA Working Paper.

Single National Curriculum

A Step Towards Better Education

Hania Afzal

The single national curriculum is being considered a criterion for creating the equality between all individuals of society in Pakistan. It aims at providing an equal opportunity and fair chance for providing the children with the necessary education. The ultimate objective of national cohesion and integration will only be achieved through this. The people critiquing it openly haven't gone through the outline and structure of various courses that have been designed critically by taking on board the relevant stakeholders & panellists from all federating units, public sector, private sector, Federal Government Educational Institutions (FGEIs) Cantts & Garrisons, Deeni Madaris (Madrassahs), Cambridge University UK for English, Maths and Science, LUMS and AKU-IED.

People are talking about the right time for implementation of this program, but our right time was decades ago or "NOW" is the right time. Its never too late for a good change and transformation in every field comes through various challenges and criticism. It is the need of time that authorities should invest in teachers training and tools that will provide a direction to the private schools and educational institutions for smooth adoption of this SNC. We need to make this process easy, smooth, and accessible for every student and teacher engaged in this learning process.

In Pakistan, the major problem that we face is about the three different education systems in which the knowledge is being disseminated: public schools, private schools, and Madrassahs. There is a huge gap between them in terms of content and SNC will help in closing that gap by bringing equality across country. The global agenda regarding universal education learning and future is not based upon the ideology of a particular government as being thought in case of Pakistan.

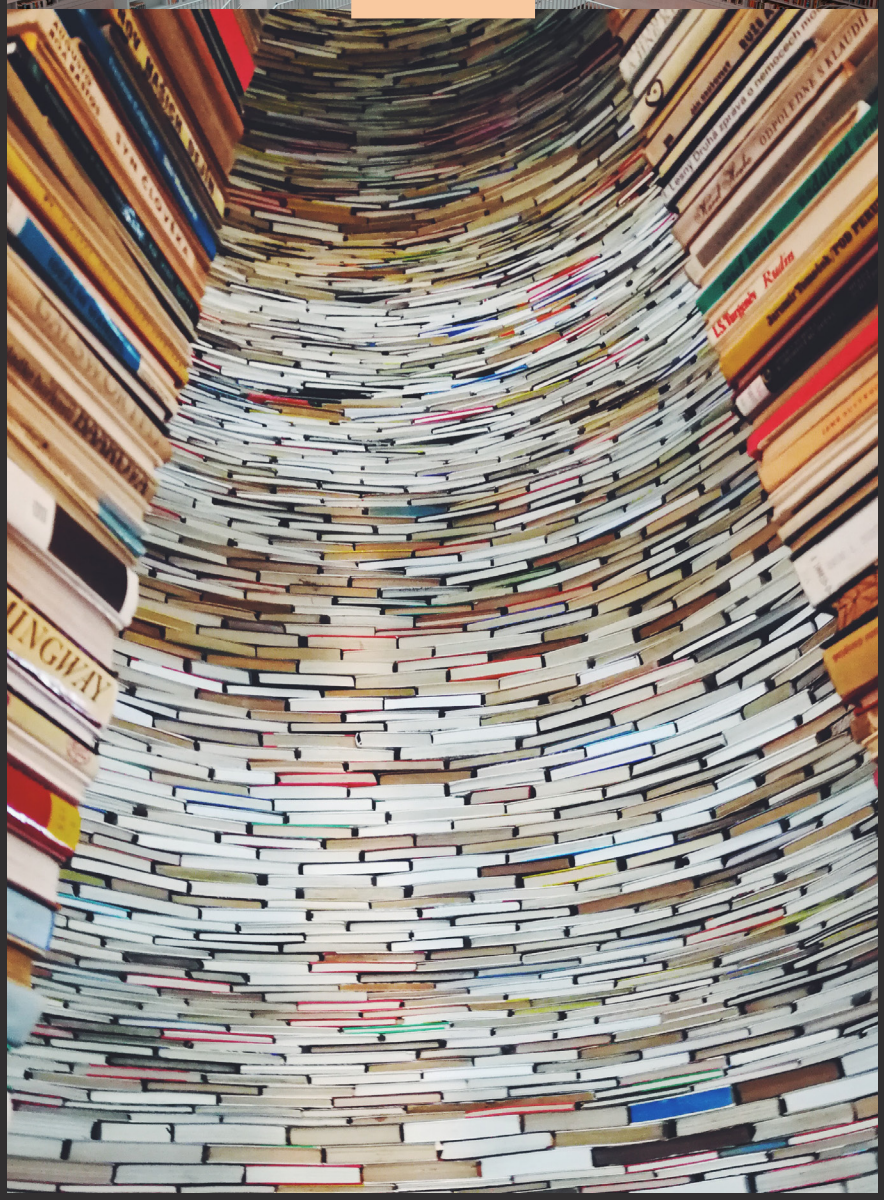
Global Strategists and policymakers are looking forward to work on making unified framework on impartial education. The world Economic forum Davos 2021 discussed in detail about education particularly focusing more on strengthening of foundational skills, maths,

One system of Education for all, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment so that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education. Single National Curriculum is a step in that direction

critical thinking, and occupational skills along with digital education for all. Why can't as a nation we accept it and help our children get used to it and our government to implement it successfully. We are still indulged in debates on petty issues of Language in which lecture is delivered and individual content. Instead of debating on such mentioned things, the focus of our debate should be on delivering the relevant education through upgraded technological tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives apart from the health situation, most important of them is education as schools and colleges got closed. One thing that most nations especially the developing countries realised the need of the Global Curriculum that helps in creating interconnected solutions. In this era of digitalization, it has become the need that every person may be provided with better ICT Facilities at their homes for prosperity.

Globally all the countries are making efforts to focus on technology led uniform educational programs that will address the challenges faced by individuals by facilitating the Fourth Industrial Revolution. If Pakistan wants to excel and be part of this global development, then it needs to take this SNC as a priority and we as a responsible citizens and nation must encourage governments perspective on SNC irrespective of our political preferences.



The Single National Curriculum
Strategies for Implementation

Farhat Mahmood

According to the latest Pakistan Education Statistics report , there are more than three lac educational institutions operating in Pakistan, out of which 62 % belong to the public sector and 38 % are in the private sector. Additionally, there are around 31,115 madrassahs. Around six lac people are associated with the education system in Pakistan.

The concept of Single National Curriculum (SNC) is not a bad notion because it can bring equality among students of Pakistan. However, despite extensive planning, the PTI government has by and large failed to implement it because a number of private schools still have not adopted the SNC, on the other hand public schools are clueless on how to teach the new syllabus considering their current capacity and resources, moreover, there is resistance from madrassahs as well. Therefore, in my opinion the main problem with this current SNC policy is how to implement it quickly. Here goes some of the implementation strategies.

No.1: Ban of NOCs

There is no doubt that private schools did not want to teach SNC which is why hundreds of them had already gotten NOCs from Punjab Curriculum & Textbook Board (PCTB) for not implementing the SNC. Now government must immediately abandon its policy of granting NOCs at any cost if it really wants to implement SNC in true spirit and must also cancel already issued NOCs. In this way the private schools with sufficient budgets and resources should compete with public schools on the grounds of quality education instead of curriculum differences and mode of teaching. If they get successful in this, people would still like to send their kids to private schools but at least they should reduce their fees to an average level and should also introduce the teaching of the same curriculum but in a more efficient way.

No.2: Capacity Building of Teachers

There is an argument that country need training of teachers first before the whole system could be introduced. Currently, the government is training 300 public school teachers who will become master trainers and train other teachers. In this connection, government should increase the number of trainees up to at least 1000 per month with major focus on training of madrassah teachers while there is no need to train teachers of private system with the assumption that they are already well equipped to teach SNC.

No.3: Mode of Teaching

There should be only four subjects to be taught from grade 1 till 5 that are Mathematics and three languages (Urdu, English and Arabic). From grade 6 till 8 six subjects should be taught which are Mathematics, Pakistan History, Islamiat, General knowledge, Computer Science and Business Studies. For grade 9 and 10 again two groups with arts and science options should be introduced. In general Mathematics, general science and social sciences subjects should be taught in English while all other subjects should be taught in the national language - Urdu as practiced by many countries e.g. China, Japan and Scandinavian countries. All this would require a more thorough curriculum development which could be done with the passage of time after implementing SNC.

No.4: 18th Amendment and SNC

According to the 18th amendment, education became a provincial subject which means that the federal government cannot formulate a new national curriculum, and then force a province to follow that. In this regard, Sindh is well within its right to reject and refuse the implementation of the SNC since the PPP is in power there. For this the PTI government should consult with the opposition and take them into confidence or even provide some extra incentives to implement SNC in Sindh province.

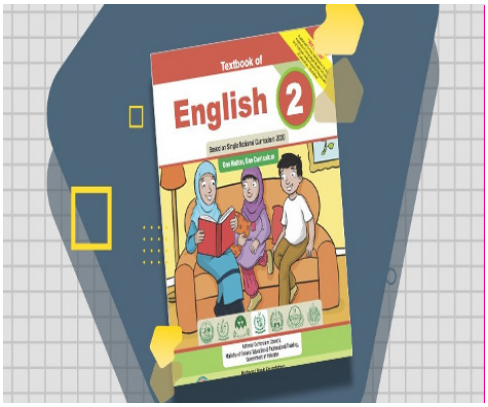
No.5: Teaching Methodology

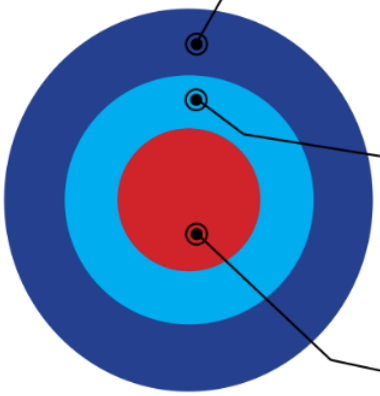
As a general principal, teachers should emphasize the educational importance of understanding, instead of giving too much importance to memorization skills. It is evident that active processing of information leads to learning. That is, students must construct their own understanding of concepts and relationships. Teachers can encourage this process by reducing the total amount of factual information students are expected to memorize, reduce the use of the passive lecture format, and devote

much more effort to helping students become active, independent learners and problem solvers. Collaborative learning activities, interactive models, educational games and establishing a culture of inquiry are crucial in this regard. In this way students will be impatient to study and really learn.

Since curriculum change is not something new in Pakistan's education system, therefore, I am in strong favor of implementing this new SNC policy immediately with the possibility of changing it in the succeeding years based on active feedback received from all stakeholders. I am confident that it will open up opportunities for students of lower strata of society by providing them an opportunity to compete with the elite in a level playing field.

Single National Curriculum





The whole education system revolves; What? Why? and How? The whole classroom activities and the entire school activities are based on the curriculum.

Course and syllabus are subsets of the curriculum e.g. the course of math contains set theory, algebra, and geometry and the syllabus comprises of the topics of subjects which to be tough in a particular school.

Textbooks are the particular books that include syllabus. There can be a number of books that comprise the respective syllabus.

Primary Education in Pakistan

Amir Hussain

Primary education is the first stage of free and compulsory education in Pakistan. It has five grades of formal education for children of 5 to 9 years of age.

There are four types of primary schools in Pakistan–public, private, religious and self-help schools. The medium of instruction is English and Urdu. It is rare to find any learning trajectory of children from the pre-primary stage of schooling despite implementation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2009. The policy defines entry age for pre-primary or Katchi as 3–4 years with one year curriculum, one dedicated teacher, and a separate room.

Due to the lack of resources, there are no separate teachers for Katchi grades in 95 percent public schools. Most public schools do not have formal Katchi classes taught. Provincial governments have recently begun introducing Katchi classes in some public schools as per their provincial education plans. These Katchis are in a multi-grade setting so the teaching is very rudimentary.

Some Raw Statistics

According to various domestic and international reports, Pakistan has a total of 150,129 primary education facilities. 131,376 (88 percent) facilities are public, while 18,753 (12 percent) are run by private sector. At the primary level some 5 million children out of schools, with a gender split of 60 percent (girls) vs 40 percent (boys).

18.751 million children in Pakistan are enrolled at the primary level; which can be broken down to 11.461 million (61 percent) and 7.290 million (39 percent) enrolments in public and private sector respectively. Segregating data on total enrolment in primary education, we have 10.471 million boys (55 percent) and 8.280 million girls (45 percent) respectively.

Pakistan has 324,561 public sector primary school teachers (77 percent) and 98,236 (23 percent) from the private sector. According to the latest available data (2018) Pakistan has 78 percent professionally trained teachers at the primary school level against a global average of 89.1 percent. If we break down this percentage on a gender basis, a bias is clearly evident. 89 percent male teachers have had some kind of professional training, while 68 percent female teachers have had similar training.

Education and the 18th Amendment.

Primary education in Pakistan was devolved as a provincial subject with introduction of the 18th Amendment to the constitution in 2010. Strategy formulation for post 18 Amendment provincial education plans covers:

- Universal access to primary education
- Curriculum development
- Syllabus planning
- Resource allocation
- School management
- Infrastructure improvement
- Quality assurance of access to primary education
- Quality assurance of access to measures to improve learning outcomes

The role of federal Ministry of Education is now reduced to assisting provinces with curriculum development, accreditation and R & D. Concomitant with the 18th Amendment, Article 25-A was introduced to the constitution. Article 15-A makes the state responsible for providing free and compulsory education to all children of the age group 5 to 16.

Pakistan is one of the lowest performing countries of the South East Asian region in terms of access to primary education, its quality and the learning outcomes. This despite its constitutional assurances to make primary education free and mandatory

under Article 25-A. Literature on the status of primary education provides substantial evidence of unsatisfactory performance compared to regional comparators.

According to an ADB sector assessment report (June 2019), "Pakistan spends just 2 percent of gross national product on education, which is a far lower percentage than in comparable countries of the region."
After the 18th Amendment, education became a provincial responsibility which expected more funding being available for primary education. However, additional resource allocation is not evident while capacity constraints at the provincial and district levels mean value for money in public expenditures on education is not materializing.

Sustainable Development Goal 4

Pakistan has signed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and Goal 4 of the SDGs relates to quality education and lifelong learning. Pakistan could not achieve the Education For All (EFA) agenda by 2015 despite invocation of Right to Education under Article 25-A of its constitution (Global Monitoring Report, 2015). In the region Pakistan ranked at the bottom with Bangladesh in the performance to achieve the EFA agenda. The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) shows that Pakistan lags regional countries (India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Malaysia) in competitiveness in provision of primary education services.

There is also a marked difference between urban and rural areas in terms of children's enrollment share between the public and private sector. Share of enrollments in private primary schools is much higher in urban areas–about 60 percent of total enrollments. Private sector includes low- to high-cost private and elite schools, stand-alone private schools, franchise schools, schools funded by government subsidies, and no-fee schools run by philanthropists and non-government organizations (NGOs).

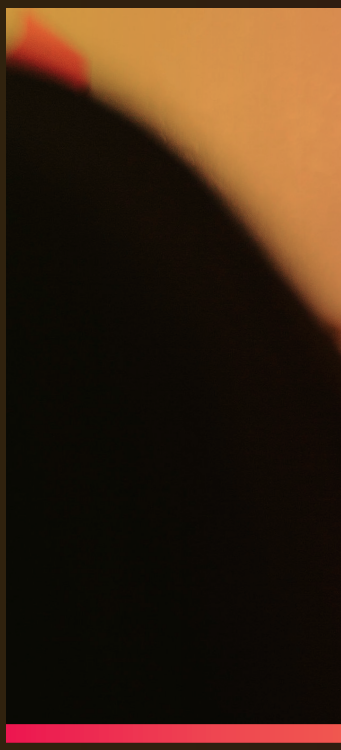
However, no well-structured private sector regulation mechanism is in place in the country. There is also lack of authentic information about enrollments, exit and quality of education in the private sector. The data provided here is based on the last private school census which, in some provinces, took place in 2005.
Enrollment choices at public and private facilities suggests a clear shift in trends from opting for private sector to public sector schools (Annual Status of Education Report – ASER-rural, 2014-19). The report shows that enrollment in rural areas public-sector primary schools increased from 70 percent (2014) to 77 percent (2019). There was also a sharp decrease from 30 percent to 23 percent in private sector share. This reflects persistent government efforts over the past six years to improve public-sector facilities, ensuring teachers' presence and merit-based recruitment.

Conclusion

The state of primary education in Pakistan is dismal. We need a radical strategic shift on multiple fronts – from improving outreach to the quality of learning outcomes. We have to focus on ensuring full enrollment of out-of-school primary children with a retention policy of all enrolled children. It is important to introduce an overarching national action plan that outlines enhanced responsibility of provinces to implement pre-primary education in the spirit of the national education policy.
Having a sound pre-primary education system to track and improve learning trajectories will improve primary level learning outcomes. This will require broadening and deepening reforms to reach the millions of children who are currently out of school.
An earlier version of this blog appeared as an opinion piece in The News International online (Available at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/684508-primary-education-an-overview)

Revamping Examinations

Muhammad Jehangir Khan



The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa exam boards have been in the limelight due to an apparent race of awarding unbelievingly high marks in the SSC examination. The continued debate over the issue on social media... The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa exam boards have been in the limelight due to an apparent race of awarding unbelievingly high marks in the SSC examination. The continued debate over the issue on social media compelled the Ministry for Elementary and Secondary Education in KP to take notice of the issue, constituting a committee to look into the papers of candidates who secured more than 1090 marks in the examination. The committee is mandated to assess the paper checking quality and the examination board's policy process to advise the way forward for future examinations in the province. These results are quite expected, and in fact, we are getting the fruits of what we sowed over time. For instance, the foremost and important issue in Pakistan's educational landscape is rote memorisation. We do not like change; otherwise, we can easily learn from international best practices. Instead, to assess core competencies, we assess rote learning, sticking to outdated methods of assessment. Questions in papers are repeated in each exam cycle, resulting in a market for cheap guides of each subject. This practice has further promoted rote learning alongside cheating in the examinations. As a consequence, we are witnessing inflation in student scores in examinations. In fact, BISE's evaluations or results are not representative and in sharp contrast to what our children score when they take independent tests of international standards. Pakistan participated for the first time in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019 in fourth grade mathematics and science study. TIMSS is a flagship programme of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Performance-wise, we stood second from the bottom. TIMSS assessment focuses not just on content knowledge but also on a range of problem-solving, application, and reasoning skills. Given that our assessment system judges rote learning instead of core competencies, it is high time to rethink and overhaul the whole examination system. Our examination system fails to test as most often students and teachers/invigilators collude to promote unfair means during exams. We can avoid such ills in the system by shifting to assess reasoning/ problem-solving skills instead of judging content knowledge. In addition, the capacity and role of the examination boards need to be evaluated and rethought to build back our educational system on solid foundations. Unethical practices such as cheating in the examination reflect the failure of the examination boards to conduct a simple task more fairly. How can they then be trusted to make responsible and informed decisions regarding other academic affairs? The focus should be on nurturing critical thinking. The policy should reform the overall assessment system to judge the core competencies instead of rote learning. We also need to look at how to bring back a learning environment to our schools in Pakistan. For instance, The National Education Policy (NEP), 2009 describes that the school learning environment is a missing element in most public sector educational institutions of the country. Per the NEP "in rural areas of Pakistan, a five or six-year-old child walks to the

school dreading what he or she would face...They know that they may have to sit on a cold floor in winters and a hot one in summers provided they are lucky enough to have a school building otherwise the tree is the only shade available to the children. "Toilets are a luxury and wherein some schools exist, the ratio is extremely poor. Library facilities are very rudimentary and teaching aid material is generally in short supply. Games, sports, and other co-curricular activities such as debating contests, drawing competitions, skills/arts and crafts training, and cultural activities that positively contribute to the overall development of school children are missing from most schools. School infrastructure facilities are highly inadequate". Focusing on improving these simple and basic issues in the system can mean a lot for transforming our education system in the right direction.

The article has been published in The News.

PIDE WEBINAR

Literacy, Development, and Philanthropy: Educating One Million Children

Preamble

In June of 2021, Alight completed a seminal development project on the education of out-of-school children in Pakistan – successfully managing to enroll over a million kids over 3.5 years with the generosity of the Education Above All Foundation in Qatar and the assistance of its various local partners. The objective of this webinar is to explore the EAC consortium's strategy in terms of social mobilization, technical innovation, stakeholder engagement, girls' education, capacity building, curriculum design, and non-formal schooling. It is hoped that this webinar serves to initiate a much-needed conversation on the state of literacy in Pakistan, charting a framework for its resolution through creative, transparent, accountable, and adequate development that leverages the best aspects of both the public and private sectors.

Key Messages

This webinar focused on different aspects of education in Pakistan that policymakers still neglected at many levels. Dr. Cheema explained the fact that Pakistan is 2nd largest by illiteracy index. Even in this globalized world, 10% of the population is unable to get an education. To make education better, we need to develop a national vision for it. We should focus on the quality of education provided. Further on, Mr. Abid Gill added that Pakistan has two significant issues: 62 million people can't read and write, and the other issue in Pakistan is the high literacy rate. 40% of the Pakistani population is literate and 60% illiterate. Of these, 51% comes under rural literacy, and the rural women ratio is 28%. To enhance the knowledge of our youth, we need to improve their skill set. The out-of-school ratio in Pakistan is 22.8 million. The main contributors in this ratio include the

- Individuals that suffer from disasters
- Refugees
- Individuals living in remote areas with no educational facility
- Mobility of females to go to school due to different cultural practices
- Minority groups and low-income families
- Child labor
- Health and Disability
- No internet facilities and irrelevant education

Mr. Adnan added that there is a link between GDP and education. With the decrease in GDP, there will be an increase in the illiteracy rate and out-of-school ratio. One way to overcome this illiteracy issue is by using digital methodologies; teaching the World Foundation is trying to overcome illiteracy using digital methods, primarily working in remote areas. Dr. Zahid said that Digital literacy in Pakistan is doing well due to affordable internet packages. For example, Allama Iqbal open university has introduced a virtual learning system by providing students with cheap internet packages to get 40-50 GBs in just 500 rupees. Tele-schools and programs on the radio pla-

yed a crucial role in the COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic boasted an overall online education system.

Dr. Cheema added that another issue is with conventional learning. 80% of the individuals employed have traditional learning. But conventional learning is not applicable for the future. We need vocational education to develop skills as we have already worked on accelerated learning, distant learning, and non-formal education. As GDP and development are linked with education, it's necessary to work with different stakeholders to make the system efficient and effective. Other programs like educating one million children constitute $300-$400 per child per year. With collaboration among Qatar programs, JICA, and the Government of Pakistan, we spend $100 per child per year, and later on, 10 lakh students come under the system. with these 10 lakh students, there will be a decrease in illiteracy along with many illegal activities like crime, robbery, etc. To make the system more flexible for girls' mobility, female teachers are hired to satisfy the parents. We collaborated with 41 stakeholders to execute this program efficiently. Those stakeholders include government and private institutes, intellectuals; tech companies; funding partners, etc.
If we solve the issue of out-of-school students, Mr. Abid Gill added that we need to bring time flexibility, course duration; new teaching methodology; uniforms, etc. There should be gender equitability; to fulfill the needs of different targeted groups; to recognize the prior knowledge of the out-of-school students to develop a new skill set; there should be competency; and it should be culturally suitable, relevant, and acceptable. Some major solutions that were worked upon include ALP (Accelerated Learning Program). In this, overaged children and those with no formal education are targeted. The project is for 30-32 months, wherein the end primary level equivalence certificate is provided. After graduating, these students can get into formal education, elementary education, and vocational training institutes. The ALP- Primary equivalence model saw that it is more efficient than the traditional models of 60-72 months.

To accelerate learning, Students having prior knowledge can skip the packages or a portion of it depending upon the knowledge they constitute. In the ALP Elementary method, the targeted individuals are primary graduates, but due to lack of schools, they could not study, and those who don't have access to formal schools. It's mainly a 16–18-month program. After graduation, a certificate is provided, which leads them to some future pathways like formal education, secondary education, and even vocational training.
Mr. Adnan shed light on how the world is using digital platforms. There is a concept of micro-school, where in one classroom there are 20-25 students using tablets and educational games to learn Urdu, English, and Math. There's no need for a full-time teacher in these classrooms, and you only need an attendant who can take care of things. The government also partnered to work in these schools. These techniques make students perform better than the traditional schools. There are five micro-schools in Karachi and Lahore. The cost per student is $55 per year, where 3-5 students share one tablet over 5shifts. This model is more cost-effective and efficient than the traditional models.

Dr. Zahid added that everyone is trying to work on their own to solve the issues, but governments need to play their role and work upon them. The Solution to these issues could be to look at national institutes of open schooling, which are community-based learning centers. The mandate of AIOU is an example of this which works on practical learning, as its an open school but still the number of out of school children increases. Free education is provided up to matric in GB, Kashmir; Interior Sindh; and Baluchistan. The disabled, marginalized, and transgender people are also provided with accessible education facilities. But after all, these governments should work upon something to facilitate the students. While building a school, the distance between two schools should be less to go to different schools quickly.

Mr. Abid Gill, in the end, added that we need educational reforms. Our focus should be on bottom-up approaches and decentralization of power and to use alternative methodologies. He further added that parents are not in favor of teaching their children. Either they can't afford it, or they believe that there is no use for education. So for this, we need two solutions: social safety programs and making education meaningful, so students can learn something that will benefit them, like vocational training. Dr. Cheema added that we need a national-level vision with human-centered approaches. Mr. Adnan said that with new methodologies, the most efficient is to include digital learning schooling for the students and support these programs. Dr. Zahid said we should also opt for alternate flexible educational reforms like open schooling, i.e., tele schools, radio classes, etc.
Dr. Cheema added on a question that asked what should be taught to students that we have to give vocational training, especially to the secondary level graduates, as most of them can't afford to go to universities. By this, they can have a proper skill set to earn a living and utilize their knowledge. Dr. Zahid added that we need to have relevance between universities and the market to overcome these issues. We need to research what the market demands so that the educational system can be reimagined and reformed.

IMF, Aid, and Development: A Historical Backdrop

Abbas Moosvi

Like clockwork, another IMF program beckons for Pakistan – yet again. With negotiations on 'terms' underway, taking place far away from any ordinary citizen of the allegedly sovereign nation may hope to peek at (let alone partake in), expectations of continued socioeconomic turbulence run amuck.

This is the 24th time Pakistan finds itself in this predicament. With an aggregate credit of $23,656,650 agreed to over the course of 63 years, it is safe to say that what started as a give-and-take relationship – at least on paper – has now evolved into one of dependency. (IMF, 2020) What's worse is that there is little to show for it. Indeed, "the main IMF conditions of currency depreciation, indirect tax, interest, utility and energy rate hikes and privatisation have failed to deliver sustainable growth or even fiscal or external deficit reduction over four decades." (Murtaza, 2021) The question, however, is whether this is due to problems in implementation – as is commonly claimed by the IMF and other international financial institutions (IFIs) – or that the proposed solutions/conditions were never all that well thought out to begin with. In order to understand this, it is worth placing the IMF into its historical context within the larger phenomenon of 'development' practice: tracing the various incentive structures animating its activities.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were created during the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, with the two-pronged objective of 'building back' after the war and 'assisting' developing countries in times of financial turbulence. Formal documents at the time emphasized a strictly 'apolitical' approach to these ends, placing 'experts' at the helm and adopting 'best practices' as the orienting force.

Within the following decade, however, it became patently obvious that these IFIs were largely only collaborating with countries that were not aligned with the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War – hoping to establish a US-led counterweight to the expanding superpower in exchange for financial loans and grants. A series of 'development' projects also propped up in colonies, particularly in Africa, whereby narratives of anti-racism and 'respect for all' were peddled by the occupying forces in hopes of saving face and retaining the territories during a time of declining credibility as a consequence of WW2. Even after anti-colonial movements in the third world, replacements for leaders came in the form of authoritarians (sometimes dictators) that were aligned – economically as well as geopolitically – with the interests of their predecessors. (Easterly, 2014) The overt power of colonialism, therefore, slowly shifted into the covert power of imperialism over the years vis-à-vis IFIs and large donor agencies – whereby post-colonial nation states developed a dependency on aid. This is largely because conditional agreements were based not on long term, structural reform that sought to correct systemic inequities in terms of wealth and power but rather short-term, cosmetic interventions to 'open up markets' – allowing for large multinational corporations to operate in the third world and minimize their costs through cheap labor, and to streamline the procurement of raw materials for production. Profits from these operations were, and have been, funneled back to the 'headquarters' in the West.

According to William Easterly, a former World Banker, 'development' has been characterized by three primary modi operandi: blank slate over learning from history, nations over individuals, and conscious design over spontaneous solutions. All 'underdeveloped' regions are treated as open playing fields, in which experts are expected to initiate the same set of interventions – building them up from 'ground zero' rather than based on their unique conditions. A top-down, decontextualized approach is thus adopted, which is naturally unsustainable. Furthermore, 'nations' are prioritized over individuals – which means that turbulence for people as a consequence of interventions is seen as collateral damage, necessary for the 'greater' good. As long as GDP rates are improving, it does not matter whether people have access to basic rights. In other words, narrow quantitative indicators are prioritized over qualitative ones which assess the actual living standards of the average person. Analyses of the distribution of power do not factor in. Finally, a lack of technical expertise in the sphere of policy was seen the cause of poor performance. The solution was to appoint academics and consultants to propose textbook solutions, who frequently checked in to make sure things were going as planned. This was always antithetical to historical success stories of development: which were based on the free exchange and interaction of people in a society, who learned from the experiences of one another and collaboratively generated the institutions and legal orders to formalize economic and political processes rather than adhering to the orders of external parties. (Easterly, 2014)

All this is even expected, as the profit model for banks in general is to generate income through interest payments – which will naturally prompt them to preserve and prolong credit agreements rather than assisting countries in paying them off. More broadly, the 'development sector' in the third world largely constitutes government agencies, as well as NGOs, consultancies, and even the corporate sector which are seeking personal wealth rather than the resolution/correction of systemic market failures. To truly overcome these would pose a threat to their interests – meaning that interventions are geared to generate PR content and create the impression of assistance (in hopes of further grants/loans), but this is largely based on scattered 'case studies' (which are frequently doctored) rather than actual structural change. In this way, a flourishing rent-seeking market has propped up in the developing world: whereby elites collaborate with IFIs and advance their interests in exchange for status and monetary rewards.

As Pakistan embarks upon its 24th IMF program, it is important to contextualize the phenomenon not in terms of the domestic politics between mainstream political parties, but within a larger – indeed, global – system of capital flow. It is no coincidence that the need for further credit arises every few years: and perhaps it is time to consider whether the nature of the programs themselves, and the 'structural adjustment' they emphasize, may be the very cause of the developing world's inability to pursue substantial reform and break out of the endless cycle of debt it is mired in. Rather than paternalistic attitudes about 'key stakeholders' (including IFIs, NGOs, entrepreneurs, etc.) behaving as 'allies' to the poor, who are seen as helpless individuals that need to be handheld and 'saved' from their oppressive states, there is a need for a conceptualization of development that is centered around the concerns of the working class. Global IFIs have been shown to work against this – evidenced by the fact that "workers in countries that implemented IMF agreements were 60 per cent less likely to be in a trade union after the programme, making them easier to exploit." (Selwyn, 2014) True, meaningful change can only come through bottom-up initiatives, led by ordinary people, whereby reform is pursued through a genuine democratic process centered around ground realities. There will necessarily be an organic political dimension to this process, in which competition for power will involve increasing numbers of contestants that can operate freely and appeal to citizens in however manner they see fit – without censorship or intimidation.

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