

Why Can't Pakistani Children Read?

The Inside Story of Education Reform Efforts Gone Wrong





Available From:

ASIA PROGRAM

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004-3027

www.wilsoncenter.org

Cover image: Girls sit outside at a government school in Peshawar because there is not enough space in the classrooms. When a teacher is asked, "Is there anyone who says we don't want our daughters to study?" she says, "No, they all come. Parents want their daughters to go to school." According to an analysis by Adam Smith International, government secondary schools for girls in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, the province that Nobel laureate Malala Yousufzai is from, are enrolled at capacity. Photo by Nadia Naviwala.

All photos appearing in this report were taken by Nadia Naviwala.

Preface

In Pakistan, millions of children are not in school. And yet, millions more *are* in school, where they must suffer through the effects of a broken education system. Even after many years of being in school, most of these children struggle to read and learn. After decades of building schools and enrolling children in them, the international community has been forced to confront the reality that schools in Pakistan—and elsewhere—are not delivering education, or even literacy.

The Wilson Center’s Asia Program, recognizing the immense challenge that Pakistan’s education crisis poses to the country’s development, has focused on this issue for many years. Its products include a book in 2005, a major conference in 2014, and an in-depth report by Nadia Naviwala called *Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story*. This report, published in 2016, shed new light on the challenges in Pakistani schools and sought to explain why so many have misdiagnosed the crisis.

Three years later, Naviwala, a Wilson Center global fellow and former public policy fellow, has produced this important new study, which picks up where her previous one left off. It highlights what has gone wrong in a country home to one of the largest externally funded education reform programs in the world—and where local government financing far exceeds the amount of that external funding. It addresses fundamental questions, such as why so many Pakistani children don’t learn and why so many of their teachers can’t teach. It also shatters myths about girls’ education and education budgets.

Part deep analysis and part investigative journalism, the report is based on visits to about 100 Pakistani classrooms; discussions with government ministers, other senior officials, technical experts, and international donors; and interviews with teachers and students. Above all, the report highlights the world’s collective responsibility for the failures of an education system shaped by a well-meaning, but flawed, decades-long effort to reform it.

The Asia Program is delighted to publish this timely and important new study, which we hope will contribute to the longstanding and ongoing debate about how to address one of Pakistan’s most fundamental and vital challenges.

Michael Kugelman

Deputy Director, Asia Program
Senior Associate for South Asia
Woodrow Wilson Center
July 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Note	1
The Problem	4
Quality	10
English-Medium	19
Reading	32
Girls	40
Inheritance	52
Ignorance (A Photo Essay)	63
White Elephants	66
Solutions	68
About the Author	79

Author's Note

This report picks up where the last one, “Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story,” left off. I sought to understand why children in Pakistan cannot read a sentence after years in school. This situation persists despite Pakistan having some of the largest aid programs in the world and the best experts that money can buy.

While the last report relied almost exclusively on data and interviews with experts, the ideas in this one have been shaped through observation and conversations in around 100 classrooms in 28 government, public-private partnership (PPP), and NGO schools across Pakistan. Both formal and non-formal schools were observed. This report also leverages data – Pakistan has mountains of it and it is mostly underappreciated – and interviews with current officials.

The initial research for this report was done as part of a study for Room to Read, which is based in San Francisco, California. However, continued research and this report were not sponsored or requested by any institution.

This report cites cases, research, and models from organizations that I work for or have worked for. These organizations are well known: The Citizens Foundation (TCF), along with Room to Read. They are discussed in this paper because they have, or are innovating around, many of the challenges described. Both organizations raise the majority of their budgets as core funding through private philanthropy – from individuals, companies, foundations, and schools. This volume of giving indicates trust, usually by people who have seen the work directly or know someone who has, and allows the organizations to sustain and adapt focused programs over long periods.



A TCF school. TCF's founders started with a promise to not build poor schools for poor children. This shows up in the architecture – the founders included Pakistan's leading architects – as well as efforts to deliver quality education.

TCF “may be the largest independently owned network of schools in the world,” according to the Economist, with 1,500 schools across 700 remote rural and slum communities across Pakistan. It is remarkable, however, that what may be the world’s largest school network and the largest private employer of women in Pakistan was built for out-of-school children, is sustained by large-



A library class in a government school in Dhaka that is partnered with Room to Read.

scale philanthropy, and is not an international initiative but completely local.

The problem described in this report – that children cannot read after years in school – is a widespread, global problem. The situation is only worse in Pakistan because of the use of foreign languages in education. Room to Read works with government schools around the world to change the way literacy is taught and make school libraries functional, so that children love reading and make it a lifelong habit. I observed this model in government schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where Room to Read has been working for many years. It has also worked in Cambodia, Grenada, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia.

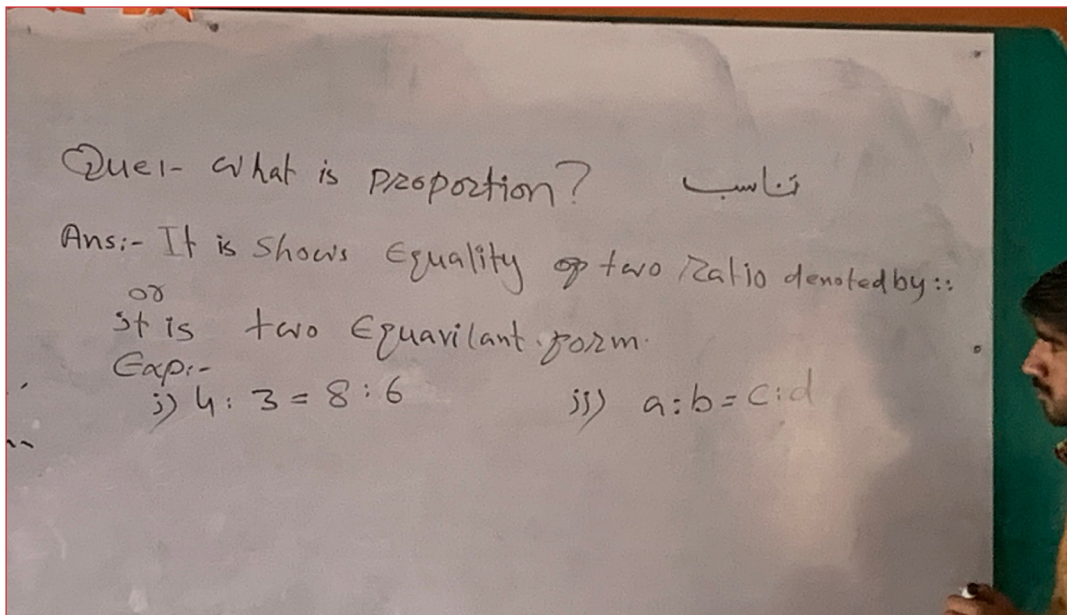
A thank you is due to Adam Smith International for sharing its analyses and staff who gave interviews. Thanks also to Abdul Lateef who provided research assistance and Nadeem Hussain. The biggest thanks is for the Sindh Education Foundation staff and others who drove me long distances to visit schools and waited patiently when I spent an hour in each one.

A takeaway from this report might be the importance of classroom-level observation, and how insufficiently it has shaped reform efforts. This must change. Koen Geven, an education economist who is part of a World Bank team developing a tool to score teacher effectiveness, captures how observation in Punjabi classrooms can be a revelation, even after decades of technical assistance and reforms.

“When we looked at our survey instrument and the data we already had available in Punjab, the government had much better data. There is a lot on absenteeism and literacy and numeracy. It was an opportunity for us to think through what would be the added value of a survey in Punjab? We spent a lot of time sitting in classrooms in schools in urban and rural Punjab and thinking about what we should be analyzing. We saw a teacher standing in front of the classroom and they put an example – a very basic division problem, maybe four divided by two, on the white board. The teacher did the example in front of the classroom. Then asked student one to come in front of the classroom and do the same exercise, then erased it from the board, then asked student two, three, four, five to basically do the same exercise. By then 10 or 11 minutes had gone from the classroom. And we just thought that if a teacher does this in a typical Punjabi classroom then I can imagine why kids aren’t really learning. So that’s why we starting thinking about what actually are the teaching practices in these classrooms. Whereas previously we were looking at how much time are teachers wasting by not being in the classroom or by asking kids to get their pencils and books out of their bag. We weren’t really looking at what is the quality of teaching.

“If you look at the LEAPS survey or what the government is collecting or the Roadmap [DFID] was looking at, they weren’t really interested in any of those things. There was some interest

in improving teacher quality, but in a more abstract way. There was some interest in improving basic learning outcomes but rather through scripting what is going on in a class or occasionally measuring what's happening. And a lot of focus on improving the infrastructure of the classroom. But we felt that there is something missing in that puzzle, also in the attention of policy makers because you can imagine that there's a ceiling of the quality of education you can achieve with that Roadmap agenda. So we have the teacher in front of the classroom and we have a classroom that looks good in terms of its infrastructure and kids are actually showing up to school. But you might still end up in a situation where kids are showing up every day but they're not really absorbing what's going on. I think that's a good enough justification to do what we were setting out to do."



As donors and governments arrive on the question of quality, many people have their pet solution. Usually it centers on teachers and is simply "teacher training" or more sophisticated like Geven's project. For others, it is ed tech, scripted lesson plans, model curricula, or school leadership. For TCF, quality education has five components: (1) getting language right through mother tongue and multilingual education, (2) textbooks with structured (not scripted) teacher guides, (3) defining and measuring, then enabling and incentivizing improving teachers' content knowledge (their own knowledge of the subjects they teach) and pedagogy, (4) defining and measuring, then enabling and incentivizing principal's school leadership abilities, and (5) assessments that test conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and creativity because teachers ultimately teach to exams.

According to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province Finance Minister Taimur Jhagra, "The challenges of our education system are very different from the world that our experts are living in. I don't see this as the politicians' fault. There is an administration of tens of thousands of people overseeing this who have not got this right, overall across the country. There is any amount of money and expertise that has been pumped into this from NGOs and development partners, and our schools are nowhere near where they should be."

One final note: Unless otherwise stated, all quoted comments from individuals in this report come from interviews conducted by the author.

The Problem

In a village on the edge of Peshawar, there is a school that is part of the government's Girls' Community Schools (GCS) program. Within the boundary wall of the property, there are two rooms and two teachers for 120 students. Half of these students are in kindergarten and they take up one room. There are so few students in grades three, four, and five that they sit together in the other room. The other grades have spaces outside.

While the school is newly established and teachers say there will be more students as the kindergarteners progress through the grades, the pattern of enrollment is similar to what one sees across Pakistan. Eighty-four percent¹ of children in Pakistan enroll in kindergarten. This is a "huge Pakistan success" and a "developed country level of participation in pre-primary," according to Ed Davis, who served as senior advisor on education to the British government's



Department for International Development (DFID) in Islamabad from 2016 to 2019. According to official enrollment statistics, 67 percent stay enrolled till grade five, but these numbers are likely inflated when attendance is taken into account. The register shows 34 students in grades three, four, and five, but we see only 18. Of 10 students officially enrolled in 5th grade, only two are present.

The GCS program has been a source of pride for the KP government. These schools are faster and cheaper to set up than government schools, which take years to build. Students in GCS schools outperform students in government schools in Urdu, English, and math according to sample-based assessments conducted by the education department in 2018.² In recent years, the government has accelerated the establishment of GCS schools, enabling the government to respond to the demand for schooling for girls. Surprisingly, one-third of the enrollment is boys, so the school is actually co-educational. The schools are supposed to take place in women's homes or other community spaces that can be borrowed at no cost, but teachers often end up pooling money to rent space because demand is so high.

Although GCS are non-formal, there is little difference between GCS and many formal government schools. GCS teach the same curriculum and textbooks as government schools. And like many government schools, the school is “multi-grade,” meaning two teachers must teach kindergarten to grade five at once. The only significant difference is the lack of government-constructed buildings, although many formal government schools also lack buildings.



The problem is that only one child in this school – one of the two fifth graders present – can read. He reads haltingly. Some reasons for this are immediately obvious: the children speak Pashto but they are only taught to read Urdu and English. In this school and two other GCS schools, the children do not understand basic Urdu, such as, “Since when have you been studying at this school?” Translation is required to communicate with them. Stunningly, these children have textbooks in *four* languages that each have unique scripts: Urdu, English, Pashto, and Arabic.

The classroom has an LCD TV and a laptop for a distance learning program done by a celebrated “edtech” or education technology social enterprise. The program was set up in these schools thanks to over \$750,000 from a donor-funded education innovation fund.³

At another GCS school, a few minutes before the schools gets electricity at 10:30 am, a disembodied voice comes on screen from Islamabad to teach math and science to grades four and five. The screen shows images of several other GCS classrooms that are being taught at once. After several minutes of sorting out glitches such as one classroom saying that they cannot hear – similar to what people in developed countries reliably experience at the beginning of most Skype calls – the teacher’s voice says that she will give the class a quiz as promised the day before. A test appears on screen in English with the following questions:

Questions for grade four students:
Lungs absorb _____ gas from the air.
Movement is produced by muscles and _____.

Questions for grade five students:
Insects and worms are the sub groups of _____.
Non-flowering plants are generally grown in _____ places.

The voice explains the questions in a mix of Urdu and English while the schoolteacher⁴ circulates and translates the instructions and the test into Pashto. The children, unphased, dutifully copy the English into their notebooks. When the quiz is scrolled down, the voice from Islamabad says, “We weren’t able to cover this yesterday but remember I told you to go home and memorize it.”

The justification for this program is to build critical thinking and conceptual understanding in science and math because teachers lack capacity, in terms of their own knowledge of these subjects and pedagogical ability. But it appears that children are just memorizing sounds in English that they do not understand.

A randomized controlled trial conducted by the program shows that children who receive the program perform slightly better than those who did not, but these results don’t mean children are learning. The tool used for the baseline and endline has fill-in-the-blank questions in English exactly like the ones that the teacher is asking children to memorize. An external evaluation of the program shows that it has no effect or negative effects. According to the funder, there are limitations in the reliability and validity of both reports, so observation and common sense should guide judgment of the program. Before impact, the design of the program needed more careful thought.

Even without the ed tech program, the quality of learning in this school would not be better. Children’s textbooks in KP are all in English. This is happening in schools all over Pakistan as schools shift to using textbooks that are in English in response to parental demand. Teachers and students cope in different ways. In the better schools, when asked about the meaning of an English paragraph in, say, social studies, students can read the English and then explain the gist of it in Urdu, which they have written and memorized alongside the text, based on what the teacher has told them. But they cannot explain what individual sentences mean. In Sindh, children read the English with its Sindhi translation out loud in class so rapidly that it is impossible to tell the difference between the two languages. In these cases, the translation is only as good as the teacher’s English. Both teachers and students have figured out some vocabulary and can guess the meaning of text. But the vast majority of students and teachers do not speak English, so students can only memorize the shapes and sounds of the text. According to a survey by the British Council, 94 percent of English-medium private school teachers in Punjab do not speak English.⁵

Back in Islamabad, when the ed tech company leaders are asked how they deal with the challenge of language, they insist that the children speak Urdu.⁶ If the children do not speak Urdu, it is the fault of the teachers who speak Pashto in class. They eventually said the language problem is the government’s to resolve – they are just following the government’s curriculum in which all textbooks are in English. These attitudes are typical: field and school level staff regularly stated that children “knew” Urdu and English and could read even after it was demonstrated that they

could not. In interview after interview, ministers, administrators, and faculty were not alarmed when told that 3rd graders in schools could not read sentences. Rather, there was denial or confusion.

The understanding of what “reading” is was also murky. Teachers, school owners, and field officers did not seem to register that children should be able to read an unseen text after years in school, or that reading implies comprehension. High-level officials treated the language issue as a simple inconvenience or a minor, technical issue while they grappled with bigger, vague questions of quality. One senior official who acknowledged the problem of language punted it to politicians to resolve – politicians who recently converted textbooks to English.

But in visits to over 100 classrooms, the pattern of illiteracy was consistent and its outcomes have been established in the data. Even where there is stronger governance, thanks to PPPs or reforms, and infrastructure has been fixed, most children cannot read, some struggle, and the few who can read do not comprehend what they are reading.

The most rigorous data on the problem comes from Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tests conducted in 2013 by various local subcontractors led by Management Systems International (MSI) and School-to-School International (STS) and funded by USAID. In EGRA tests, students in each province were tested on their ability to identify letters and their sounds, read familiar and nonsense words, read passages, and do reading and listening comprehension. The test was done for Urdu in all provinces, but there was an additional Sindhi test in Sindh.

When asked to read a 60-word passage in Urdu, third graders were able to read around 25 words correctly. This “reading fluency” score is a percentage of correct words out of 60. Reading 25 out of 60 words would result in a score of 42 percent. The scores by province were:

Province	Score
Balochistan	42%
KP	46%
Punjab	45%
Sindh	40%
Sindh (Sindhi)	37%

But comprehension was very low. When asked five questions about the passage, students struggled to answer a single question correctly, scoring 13 to 19 percent. With a Sindhi passage, children in Sindh did only marginally better. They could, on average, answer one question correctly. Despite having the poorest governance, Sindh might do better on these tests because children were more likely to be tested on their mother tongue or familiar languages – Urdu in Karachi and Sindhi in Sindh. This suggests that getting language right can make up for failures in governance, in terms of performance within the overall system.

Province	Score
Balochistan	13%
KP	13%
Punjab	16%
Sindh	19%
Sindh (Sindhi)	22%

Combining these two scores for fluency and comprehension, the reports estimate that only 4 to 12 percent of 3rd graders in Pakistan are fluent readers relative to other children in their province *and* understand 80 percent of what they are reading. Among 5th graders who are tested on the same 3rd grade level passage, only 18 to 26 percent are fluent readers relative to children in the province *and* understand 80 percent of what they are reading.

Province	3rd Graders	5th Graders
Balochistan	10%	24%
KP	12%	18%
Punjab	4%	26%
Sindh	10%	25%
Sindh (Sindhi)	9%	21%

On listening comprehension of Urdu, children were asked three questions. If they got one question correct, they would score 33.3 percent for getting one out of three questions right. Across Pakistan, scores ranged from 19 to 32 percent.

Province	Score
Balochistan	19%
KP	17%
Punjab	29%
Sindh (Urdu)	32%
Sindh (Sindhi)	41%

There are three consistent and surprising findings on these tests separately conducted in every province.

First, girls perform significantly better than boys, especially on reading and comprehension, except on the Sindhi test in Sindh where the results are mixed.

Second, children who read the Quran at home also do much better than those who do not. This is probably because the Quran is the text with which children are most likely to get reading practice at home – storybooks for young children in Urdu and local languages are rare, and most parents are illiterate anyway so reading habits are not developed at home. However, it is typical for children to learn to read the Quran in Arabic after school, although they do not have comprehension of what they are reading. When Arabic is written in religious texts, children’s books, or for learners, it is always written with vowel marking, making it very phonetic and easy to read. This is not the case with Urdu, which drops vowel markings. This is discussed later in the paper.

Third, even though textbooks and testing are done in Urdu, very small numbers of children speak Urdu at home. Below is data on the percent of Pakistanis who speak Urdu as a mother tongue according to various sources.

	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics	EGRA (MSI)
Balochistan	1%	1%
KP	1%	5%
Punjab	5%	21%
Sindh (Rural)	2%	-

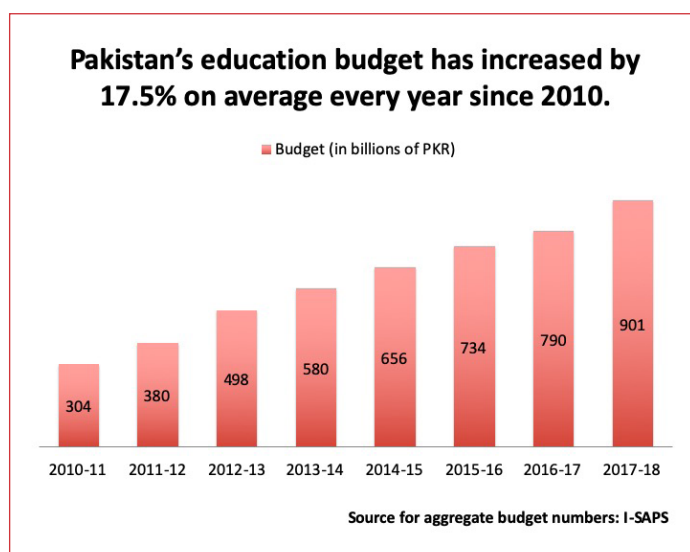
In a recent survey by the World Bank that was representative at the provincial level for Punjab, only 13 percent of families of children in school reported that they spoke Urdu at home.⁷

English is spoken in less than 1 percent of homes, although it usually does not register at all on surveys.

Quality

As the global discourse around education has shifted from “access” (getting kids into school) to “quality” (the realization that schools may not deliver education) in the past few years, the stated priorities of education leaders have also shifted. Quality has finally become a buzzword in Pakistan, although the problem has been apparent in schools around the world for decades.

The realization internationally that schooling does not equal education coincides with progress of large-scale education reforms in Pakistan. In recent years, stronger governments have figured out how to make schools look like schools by forcing teachers to show up, doing enrollment campaigns, and fixing infrastructure. A success has been a shift to merit-based hiring through an exam, stemming a practice by which politicians doled out teaching jobs, which are still permanent government jobs, to political workers. On election day, schools (still) become polling booths and teachers become polling agents. Because teachers are unionized and protected by politicians, even a minister for education could not fire a teacher for not showing up to school. Teacher absentee rates were 40 percent in Punjab in 2005.⁸ Because teachers’ salaries have been far above the market (roughly ranging from \$200 to \$1,000 per month compared to \$25 to \$50 per month in a private school)⁹ teachers could pay someone to show up in their place and then move to a larger city like Karachi, Dubai, or London.¹⁰ According to Dr. Kaiser Bengali, an economist and governance expert who has advised several governments, the outsourcing of teaching jobs to permanent substitutes was commonly known as “the visa system.”



The indicator of the success of reforms has been enrollment rates. Determining whether they have stagnated or increased in Punjab, where reforms have been the longest running, has become the subject of data wars between donors. The World Bank maintains that they stagnated after 2008, citing net enrollment rates (NER) for 6 to 10 year olds.¹¹ DFID correctly argues that many overaged and underaged children are excluded from the NER. Their contractor Nielsen has collected data to calculate a participation rate and demonstrates that more children are in school. In this period, Pakistan’s education budget more than doubled from 2010 to 2016

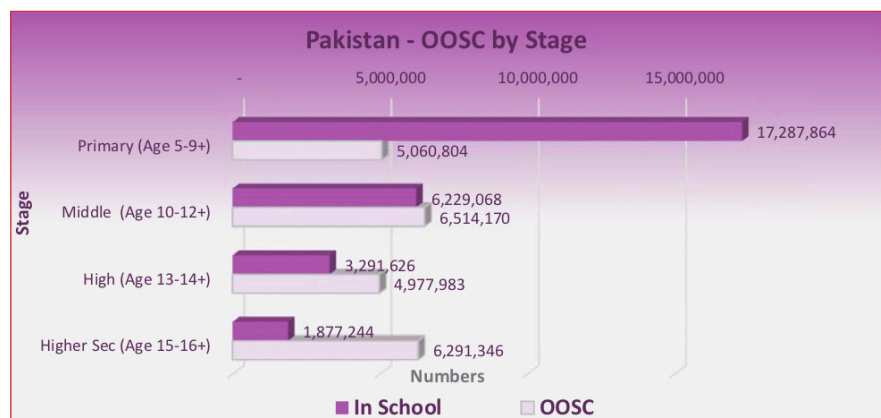
from \$3.5 billion to \$7.5 billion¹² – it octupled in Sindh – and the country has been the largest recipient of DFID aid in the world.

This technocratic debate over enrollment rates has led warring reform leaders who cannot agree on it to the same conclusion, and that is probably why the debate has been left unresolved. Among those who believe enrollment rates have stagnated, even though schools have been made functional, it seems that the only way to convince parents and children to enroll is to get schools to provide education. Among those who believe that enrollment rates have increased, what have we really achieved if children can't read a sentence after years in school? If we are stuck on the problem of literacy, then the system is far from achieving education.

Broken Promises

Given campaigns and technocratic emphasis on out-of-school children, the most stunning fact is that the vast majority of Pakistani children aged five to nine are enrolled in school. The number 25 million was popularized by Alif Ailaan, a DFID-funded education campaign, in its report “25 Million Broken Promises” as an estimate of the number of out-of-school children in Pakistan. The most recent, updated figure is 22.5 million. However, only 5 million of these children are primary 5-to-9 year-olds. The remaining 17.5 million or 78 percent of Pakistan’s broken promises are 10-to-16 year-olds – the kind of children that well-off Pakistanis in large cities see washing cars and selling pens every day. Their problem is very different from that of the five-year-old. A 13-year-old who has dropped out of school, perhaps because there was no teaching or learning happening, is too far behind to re-enroll. Schools will not accept him. Pakistan has not set up large-scale remedial programs to give these children who are the majority of out-of-school children a pathway back to schooling. In most cases, there is nowhere for them to go since 70 to 90 percent of Pakistani schools are primary schools, depending on the province. Pakistan also does not have basic literacy and numeracy programs for these children and adults, recognizing that millions of its citizens will not opt for schooling, and perhaps reasonably so if it is failing to provide education. Despite the scale of the problem and the hype around it, people have failed to identify its true contours.

The justification that Alif Ailaan gave for conflating primary and secondary-aged children is that it enabled them to arrive at “the highest estimate of the total number of OOSC. Given the gravity of the problem, we must err on the side of caution and not risk adopting a lower estimate.” So the number was not necessarily selected because it was the most sound, but because it generated the most alarm. The out-of-school adolescent deserves alarm, but Pakistani politicians and the public imagined that their crisis centered on small children even though, as stated earlier, these children enroll in school at “developed country levels.” The attention it drove to primary school enrollment was convenient though because that was in line with donor-backed



reform programs. For many years, schools in Punjab had enrollment targets that were very high for kindergarten and first grade. The targets were so high that teachers unofficially complained that so many children did not even exist; this was probably because a lot of the target population was enrolling in low-cost private school. The targets tapered off in the higher grades, where increasing numbers of out-of-school children are, probably because these children would have to be enrolled in kindergarten or primary anyways.

It is no surprise that most of Pakistan's 25 million broken promises are still broken. Our failure is not our solutions, but how we have defined the problem.

The Crisis of In-School Children

If we focus just on the children who are primary aged and out of school, the number is 5 million. Next to them, there are 17 million who are in school. These children are largely in school and illiterate. If there is one crisis around primary education in Pakistan, then it centers on them. Without fixing this problem, it is hard to understand why we are enrolling children in schools. With increasing talk of 21st century skills and moving away from textbook learning, it is possible that children would acquire greater creativity, conceptual understanding, and communication skills outside of a heavily disciplined, dull, textbook, and rote-based classroom where they will not even learn to read. Many children will run away during the school day or drop out, simply because it is so disengaging. Ishrat Hussain describes the psychological effects of schools in Pakistan: "Right now we are not looking at this cognitive and psychological development of the child that is very critical for his future behavior as a professional. If you are subdued[,] if you are withdrawn [and] disinterested in what is being taught because you are not able to follow and you don't want to take any initiative because you feel that someone will cut you and put you down, you will never be a good professional[,] you will never be creative, you will be a follower rather than a leader."

If children are out of school, their skills will never be recognized in the form of a degree. Degrees bring dignity even if they do not imply education or a job. Thus, Pakistanis are faced with the dilemma of a degree without education, or education – through unstructured play and life experience – without a degree.

Hussain calls this view "analytically correct" but "we are a credential-based society. A certificate is [a] meal ticket for you. If you are interviewing, a bachelors will get preference over matric. As long as your job market is completely based on credentials, you cannot afford to have this [disregard for degrees]."¹³

This raises questions about international advocacy campaigns that urge schooling. The premise of these campaigns is that parents are ignorant and must be made to understand the benefits of schooling. There is a place for these conversations – parents who are not used to schools functioning or teachers teaching may not understand the value of schooling when a new, better-governed school opens in a community. But there is also a place for respecting the decision that parents and children are making. If we had understood the problem by listening to those experiencing it, rather than going with our assumptions developed in Western capitals, then we might have been further along in fixing it today. The problem is not a lack of demand for education, but rather missing supply. And changing the experience of being in school might convince the remaining 5.5 million primary-aged, out-of-school children that spending their day in a school building is worth their time.

Deliverology Tackles Quality

These realizations were occurring amongst donor officials and technical experts in 2015, during the research for my last report, “Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story.” With backing from DFID and the World Bank, Punjab had begun working on a range of efforts to improve quality of education by doing the things most people would think of when confronted with this problem. They invested in teacher training, something which technical advisors called the most expensive aspect of reforms¹⁴ and a “black hole.”¹⁵ They also worked on revising and improving textbooks, an aspect of reforms that is so sensitive that interviewees preferred to not talk about it. They also set up a task force of “district teacher educators” (DTEs) who would visit classrooms regularly, observe teachers, and offer feedback. The DTEs were ultimately disbanded for having very low capacity.

Most interestingly, they began testing children, as a way to create accountability and to measure and track progress, which is at the heart of “deliverology.” This is a term coined by Sir Michael Barber, formerly a partner at McKinsey and the author of “How to Run a Government: So that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don’t Go Crazy” and “Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders.” To carry out deliverology, Barber calls for the set up of a “service delivery unit,” which is a high performing unit, possibly staffed by McKinsey or other consultants, which is attached to the chief executive and mediates between that executive and the bureaucracy. Targets are set and measurements are introduced. The service delivery unit is then able to support the chief executive in holding the bureaucracy accountable for achieving targets. Deliverology is the organizing principle of reforms in Punjab and KP in Pakistan – the two provinces where DFID works – although it was only fully implemented in Punjab under Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. There are also dozens of service delivery units around the world.

A high-level partnership between Sir Michael Barber and Shahbaz Sharif initiated DFID’s Punjab education reforms in 2010, which became DFID’s single largest program anywhere in the world. They worked in tandem with the World Bank, which had been working on Punjab reforms since 2003 (the World Bank says that enrollment gains took place in the period before DFID’s involvement and stagnated after).¹⁶ DFID and the World Bank transferred direct budgetary support to the Punjab government as they achieved reform targets, based on the Punjab government’s reform plan, which was developed with technical assistance from DFID. The World Bank is currently implementing its third Punjab reform program, which means that the current phase of Punjab reforms will have been on a consistent track for a decade. This is not typical of aid programs – USAID programs typically last for three to five years. The stability of reforms even through changes in government and cooperation among stakeholders has been unusual in Punjab, and a huge benefit to the progress of reforms.

In 2014, the chief minister’s Roadmap team adopted a Quality Wheel that had six points: a streamlined curriculum for grade-I-V; high quality textbooks adapted to local context; integrated teacher guides with scripted lesson plans; improved training, mentoring, and motivation of teachers; better management and monitoring of schools; and finally assessments that are independent, periodic, and aligned to curriculums.

To measure quality, reformers introduced two types of tests for third graders in Punjab: a monthly literacy and numeracy drive test (LND) and a “six-monthly assessment.” The LND is administered on tablets by monitors who visit schools monthly, originally to check if the teacher is there, the number of students enrolled, and the state of the infrastructure. The LND test comprises four

questions on Urdu, English, and math. It is administered to four grade three students, randomly selected by the monitor, in every school, every month. The six-monthly assessments of literacy and numeracy are independently administered to a provincially representative sample of students every six months. Both are fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice tests. Ironically, children in Pakistan are so good at memorizing long passages from their textbooks and regurgitating them for tests that multiple choice is often referred to as a better way to test critical thinking and conceptual understanding.

According to Ed Davis, DFID's former senior education advisor in Islamabad, DFID has been able to achieve a 22 percent increase in the six-monthly assessments over three years through a suite of efforts and materials provided to teachers including 20 literacy lesson plans, 20 numeracy lesson plans, a *Kitaabcha* (little book) with additional teaching and learning materials, monthly LND testing, and a weekly "lit-num" hour dedicated to teaching the lesson plans in the six months leading up to the test.

"What is looking promising – and we've got a bit of evidence from the Punjab Education Support Programme in Punjab here – is really structuring the teaching process. [These are] detailed, scaffolded lessons. So [telling the teacher] 'This is what should be happening at this point in the lesson,' 'Test students' learning by doing this,' or 'If you've got a group that can't do this, manage the differentiation by doing this.' Literally taking the teacher through the lesson step by step. That may be behind the big learning gain in grade three in Punjab in literacy [and] numeracy. The baseline in 2015 was 55 percent average in English, Urdu, and math. The end line in March 2018 was 77 percent."

Data in Punjab is often criticized as unreliable. Former chief minister Shahbaz Sharif kept the bureaucracy under such enormous pressure – with consequences – for achieving numeric targets that school and district-level officials had an incentive to fudge numbers. But over time, processes have strengthened. To meet enrollment targets, teachers sometimes made up students.¹⁷ PITB ultimately linked enrollments to National ID card numbers, so fake numbers or fake birthdates could not be entered. They also linked school enrollment to registrations for the terminal Punjab Examination Commission (PEC) exam that students take to graduate from grade five. Fake students would ultimately have to show up for the exam or be shown as dropouts. In either case, teachers would be answerable.

According to a technical advisor who provided analytical support on data and program implementation related to quality interventions, the chances of collusion are very low on both the LND and six-monthly assessments. The LND results are independently audited by third parties and the variation has been very small, he said. He also describes the six-monthly assessments as being carried out and scored by independent third parties, with no involvement from the government. Another consultant, however, questioned the independence of the data because "the same companies [Adam Smith International and McKinsey] that were developing these strategies were the ones testing them – by developing tools, contracting data collection, and analyzing the raw data – and reporting in to the CM saying we've made progress."

The technical advisor points out though that correctly understanding the significance of the data is more important than debating whether it is valid, robust, or representative, which "we can debate to death." He explains:

“The thing is you’ve got an independent measure. It works. It shows progress, but we need to be very careful in terms of how we showcase that progress. It’s not an increase in the quality of schools. It’s an increase in performance on a small subset of SLOs [student learning outcomes] critical for literacy and numeracy. And those are grade one and two SLOs being tested at the end of grade three. So keeping all that in mind, the 20 percentage point jump is not crazy. When you portray it as, ‘Oh, the schools have increased in quality by 20 percentage points in three years, that seems crazy.’ But if you think about what the test actually shows and what has gone into it, it’s not as unbelievable.”

Teachers know what will be on the tests, by design, because it is given to them in the *Kitaabcha* and through repetition over years. The advisor says that the biggest gains occurred in the third year of the test, when teachers were also given “specialized lesson plans” and a dedicated lit-num hour set aside in schools to teach them. Over three years, the test has also become predictable because teachers and students have learned the item bank. As one teacher in a Lahore school commented, “It’s the same content [year-after-year]. There has been some change but not much. It’s the *Kitaabcha*.”

The technical advisor argues that results in Punjab were driven by combining “accountability” with the tightly scripted lesson plans. A lot of money has gone into funding lesson plans and training with limited results for years, because the accountability piece was missing. Measurement and accountability are the key difference that deliverology makes when it is applied to a problem. In this case, one of the tests – the monthly, tablet-based LND test – was the accountability tool to drive results in the other, the six-monthly assessment.

“The LND was purely an exercise that got a teacher sitting in Rajanpur worried about teaching the student because someone comes in with a tablet, takes four or five random students out, and makes them do a test. The ONLY thing that that test is supposed to do was to drive behavior, in the sense that there’s someone who comes to the school regularly and tests children and then goes away and then you get a score based on that. So ‘we need to start teaching children because someone’s watching.’ That was the accountability part.

If you google LND tests, you get ‘how to improve your LND test’ and other hits. That’s how much the SLO thing permeated into the teachers and the teaching cadre in Punjab. All of that happened because there was this – it’s a blunt tool – but there was a tool which was used to assess learning in every school in Punjab.

The results are actually less important. There is no analysis being done on the LND scores showing ‘we should change teaching this way.’ It’s not robust enough for that. It’s too narrow. So you won’t be able to get anything out of the data. [If in] the LND data there’s 10 or 20 percent collusion or there’s cheating, it doesn’t change the outcome.

Purely and simply – it serves no other purpose – it’s just the act of showing people that learning is important for the government and someone will come in and assess learning. And that had value. The value is shown by the sort of jump that you saw on six monthly scores.”

The problem is that this does not add up to quality, or even literacy. Through repetition, children can be taught to recognize words but this does not mean that they can read.

“Reading is not an SLO that has been prioritized in [a] six monthly assessment. It’s different components of reading but not reading proficiency. For example, word recognition. Now I think a grade three student is supposed to have x number of words in their vocabulary ideally. You could teach them the x number of words and they would recognize those x number of words doesn’t mean they’re really proficient in reading. That’s the criticism - when those results are taken as holistic improvement in quality, that’s not really true. But what those just represent is a step change in what was. So while this is a good foundation, a lot more needs to be put in to actually get to the point where the child is actually reading or becoming an independent learner and actually can read an unseen passage. But when it comes to taking the child that actually knows 20 words and helping them put them together into a sentence, that’s more technical, that requires more teaching. That’s going to be challenging.”

In one Lahore government school visited, grade three students were hard at work. The teacher explained, “These days the LND test is happening so I am having kids practice for it.” The children could actually easily read material from their textbooks that they had not yet covered, which children in other parts of the country had more trouble doing. But upstairs, in a fourth grade class, another teacher who had previously taught third grade shared her frustration with the LND test:

“If there are benefits then side or bad effects are more. In Urdu children have gotten lost in *hoon*, *haan* [selecting the grammatically correct gender of words]. You should do a written test instead of the LND. Teachers will then know it’s proper. With the tablet, kids are on finger or touch. A kid can also get confused and put it on the wrong thing. Kids don’t have an option to correct it. Teachers are now just focused on that [LND test]. No science, math, or Islamiyat besides what’s on the LND. For grade 3, they’re not concerned with writing or reading properly, or the rest of math. Multiplication tables just go up to 5.¹⁸ They should either do this properly or end it. This could be improved by asking children to write something to demonstrate what they know. Something creative. Their Urdu or English grammar would improve that way. When you correct it then the child will understand their mistakes. In the beginning of the year, they should give teachers a syllabus and say that’s where test will come from. They can test every three months based on the semester system. Rather than every month hanging a *talwar* (sword) over the teacher. Once the test is done than the kids also relax because now they don’t have to do anything else. Once they get to grade four, they have forgotten everything. In grade three they lose their reading power. In grade two they are fine. But in grade three their reading and writing becomes poor. If they want to do it, they should do it in a better way or just end it.”

In another government school in Lahore, which has a strong principal, a big red-brick campus, and classrooms for every grade, third graders were getting a relatively impressive lesson in the sound that is made by combining two consonants like *ph* in Urdu (like ‘sh’ or ‘ch’ in English) and *ph* words. This may have been the only such lesson observed out of visits to classrooms in 28 schools across the country. While this is good, anyone would admit that third grade is too late to learn the basics of reading. Meanwhile, in the same school, in a packed classroom, a kindergarten (*katchi*) class is reciting the alphabet by rote. It seems that these students will have to wait three more years to learn to read, and if they are lucky to have a good teacher who is under pressure to show results on the LND.

Punjab’s testing regime has introduced its own incentive, which is to increase scores, by design. And in that, a 20-percent increase is progress. But teachers can achieve it in different ways. As Davis points out, everything that has been provided to teachers so far are “inputs,” but we have not yet figured out how to change what happens in the classroom – which is where the key to

quality lies. He says, “The inputs are of value if they are used in a different way. They can make up for deficiencies. Like a good textbook that is pitched right for the kids can make up for ineffective teaching because the kids can access it and teach themselves effectively and work through the textbook. But that’s not solving the root problem of low levels of capacity in instructional leadership, planning, and teaching the classroom. That’s the bit we’ve got to get right in Pakistan.”

Teachers and students can use new inputs in the “old” ways, such as by using memorization and repetition to increase test scores. As one YouTube lesson on “LND English” explains:



“There are two ways to teach this. One is the way teachers teach this in school, which is [telling students], ‘When you see ‘I’ you select ‘am’ after that and when you see ‘he/she/it/someone/something’ you select ‘is’ and when you see ‘you/they/we’ you select ‘are.’ I don’t think this method is correct. The child can just learn it by rote without knowing anything. He will just see a word and write the correct word next to it but he doesn’t know what any of it means.”¹⁹

The video offers an alternative “translation” method which is to provide a set of English vocabulary words with their Urdu translation and show how the words are ordered in sentences, so they can teach the words with meaning to their students. There are mistakes though like “I am boy.” There are also many grammatical errors in the *Kitaabcha* – ironically in the grammar being tested in other sections. In the reading comprehension questions in the May 2018 version of the *Kitaabcha*, there are questions like “How many story books has Badar?,” “What does Ali has?,” or “Who does play with dolls?” There are limits to how well English can be learned or taught if it is not taught by an English speaker.

For now, the numeric indications of progress on LND appear to be as far as reformers have gotten, and other provinces are likely to follow suit as quality becomes the buzzword driving the reform agenda. As one consultant told the author, “You will never fatten a pig by weighing it again and again. Yet, that’s what we are doing.”

Everyone, after all, needs to show results. Like the political system they are trying to affect, donors have their own political incentive to be able to showcase progress in foreign capitals. Governments also need talking points, and individual heroes inevitably emerge who claim credit for engineering the system. But the consequences – good or bad – are for the education system and the children in it. As the technical advisor explains, “The criticism is that it’s basically an approach which is focused on driving up those numbers, those particular numbers. The rationale would be that we are okay doing that and de-prioritizing other things because the capacity of the system is low.”

Even if this much is accepted for the progress that it is in a difficult, gargantuan education system, the bigger problem is that nobody knows what comes next. How do you achieve education beyond literacy? It’s likely that the teaching methods and test-taking skills that are being incentivized through the six-monthly assessment counteract the skills that need to be developed between teachers and students for real learning to happen later on. Salma Alam, founder of Durbeen, which is working on reforming teacher education and schools in the public sector, comments on how standards and expectations for teachers have generally shifted, including through the phenomenon of ed tech:

“The idea of a teacher-proof curriculum keeps coming back. You’ve made sure that whether it’s a human teaching it or a dog teaching it, you’re just limited to a set of instructions, like baking cake. Do A, then Do B, then do C, then learning happens. Even if I hadn’t trained as a teacher and didn’t know the complexities of it, it feels unnatural for you to expect that that’s how human beings learn. If you reflect on your own process of learning, has it ever been that? It’s never that. It’s so much more complicated than that....But teachers are being spoon-fed. Go in the classroom, do this and assess this, and this is the exam at the end of the day.”

The technical advisor sums up what has been achieved and the challenge that lies ahead:

“The model as it was implemented in Punjab can’t go beyond say grade three or grade one or grade two SLOs because then teaching or what happens technically in the classroom it becomes more complex and would have to be adapted accordingly.

We’ve made teachers responsible for learning, but how do they teach? What are the things that are required in the classroom to support the teaching and learning process to actually help them perform? That’s the part that’s missing. We’ve introduced the accountability. It’s top of mind, the advocacy is there, but there are limitations as far as the support is concerned. We’re asking the same teachers and the same system to deliver at a much higher level.

There is limited school-level support to bridge that capacity gap. There is the traditional approach of CPD [Continuous Professional Development] or better teacher training. But we’ve had teacher training for 15 years. There is limited evidence to support that teacher training in Punjab’s context has had a significant impact on student achievement; despite the training programs, learning levels remain low. And I think Punjab had something like the most number of teacher training hours in the region. It’s a crazy number. You’ve got teachers that are trained, you’ve got textbooks that have been revised, you’ve got teaching material there, but the children are still not learning. So then what, what’s missing? What is the support that they require to finally start teaching? No one has a good answer to this question. And I think that’s a question that’s for the next five years.”

In what may be the largest education reform program in the world, it seems we have only figured out how to teach to the test.

English-Medium

While Pakistanis recognize that government schools do not deliver quality, this recognition focuses on symptoms without addressing the causes that are embedded in the design of the system.

There is an understanding that a child who goes to a government school will not have a chance in life, in terms of a job or being perceived as an equal. On one level are questions about whether government schools function at all the way they should, judged in terms of whether teachers are showing up and if they are teaching. Parents know if teachers are simply hanging around the school – arriving late, drinking chai, asking for foot massages and desserts, making children clean, and leaving early – rather than teaching. In a multigrade situation where there are one or two teachers for children of varying ages, there are obvious questions about whether teachers can manage the class and be effective. Forty-three percent of government primary schools in rural Pakistan are multigrade.²⁰ The cues for quality are so obvious that they are visual, and lead those who can to opt for low-cost private schools instead. A stunning 40 percent of children in Pakistan go to low-cost private schools that charge as little as \$2 per month in a village. This compares to the government's stated cost of \$20 per month per enrolled child, and an actual cost of \$35 per month per child, since many children are enrolled on paper and do not actually show up to school.²¹

Once schools are functioning, the proxy for quality becomes English. Low- and mid-tier private schools in Pakistan emblazon “English-medium” on their gates. They use textbooks that are in English, which children learn to repeat and copy into their notebooks. Parents believe that English is the key to their children's future because it is the language of the global and Pakistani elite. English is, at the very least, synonymous with education. Officials believe that the demand for English-medium has fueled the exit from government schools. This has justified the conversion of government schools to “English-medium,” again meaning that textbooks are in English.

The belief that government schools should be English-medium has also been popular among the elite who believe that it is key to ending the class divide. At the 100 days policy launch for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which took place before it was elected in 2018, the only thing that former KP chief minister Pervez Khattak could say about his party's achievements in education reforms was that it made government schools English-medium. It is telling that a politician can score political points with a statement like this, which is divorced from the reality of the average Pashto-speaking child in his province:

“In education, do you realize that the child of the poor studies in Urdu and our children study in English? Did we ever raise this question? How unfair are we being? It is PTI that realized it and children in KPK are studying [in] English till 4-5 grade now and when the child hits 10th grade there



This is a government school adjacent to an elite urban neighborhood, Defense Housing Authority, in Lahore. On arrival, kids were found playing outside. The head teacher was dressed extremely casually in clothes that would be worn at home. He said it was break time, but it took a long time to settle and organize the kids into their classes – as if kids were not used to it. Some kids stayed outside. In class, only one student could read. He had come from a private school. Although this was a boys' school, it had female students and they had recruited a female teacher so parents would feel comfortable sending girls to school.

will be a revolution as they give competition to the rich. No one cares what happens to the poor; no one cares about the future of the poor person's child. All education talk is just rhetoric and no practicality."²²

Atif Khan, the minister for education in KP from 2013 to 2018, explains the PTI's position, which reflects the thinking of Pakistani elites:

"It is a perception in Pakistan that to get ahead in higher education or for jobs, interviews, or to go outside of Pakistan, it matters if you can speak and read English. Government schools had a problem that English was taught after 5th grade, and those kids had problems throughout life. Obviously if one kid [who goes to a private school] has the opportunity to study English from kindergarten and another [who goes to government school] from 6th grade, there will be a difference between them. So because of that we decided to make it all in English. We knew there would be problems in the beginning and there were, but if we have continuous teacher training then it will be okay like it is in private schools. In any case, English is an international language. Wherever you go, it is good for you. So I think people were happy with this, despite the problems."

The PML-N also made government schools in Punjab English-medium. When a former advisor to Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N leader and former prime minister, was sharing the reform program for Islamabad with the author a few years ago and was asked why they couldn't switch books back to Urdu, he hesitated to answer and then admitted that "it would come at too high a cost to the political party."



The problem is that “English medium” is a misnomer: it refers to the language of textbooks, not of instruction. Most teachers in Pakistan do not speak English; the same goes for students. A survey by the British Council found that 94 percent of teachers at English-medium private schools in Punjab did not speak English.²³ English-medium in these schools refers only to the language of the textbooks, and when handed books in a foreign language, teachers and student recite and copy text without comprehension, in the same way that many Pakistanis learn to read Arabic in order to recite the Quran. English-medium, which has been treated as a solution for education in Pakistan, is intimately tied to rote learning. As long as books are in English, critical thinking and conceptual understanding are not possible.

Ironically though, many “innovative” programs aimed at developing critical thinking are in English, especially those that use technology.

Reality dovetails with imagination in another way. Regardless of the “medium” of the school, children have books in many languages and it can vary school by school. For example, English is in English, Urdu is in Urdu, and Pashto, Sindhi, or Arabic are in those languages. There is some anarchy in the number of language textbooks children might have. In KP, textbooks teaching spoken Arabic vocabulary were observed in primary schools, although a minister and curriculum department officials denied that the book existed. Arabic officially starts in 6th grade, and on the first day of class children are confronted with a full paragraph in Arabic in their textbooks. Sindh has introduced Chinese in recent years.

Schools in Punjab were given an option to use English or Urdu textbooks. Books are not structured to teach those languages the way second languages are normally taught by building vocabulary and through practice under the guidance of a fluent speaker. Instead, children are given full paragraphs of text. They learn to recite passages with its translation or the gist of the passage, depending on how much the teacher herself understands. Meanings can be guessed by putting together words that become familiar over time. There is no attention to whether students can independently read or comprehend all the languages they are given, as long as they can copy and recite them.

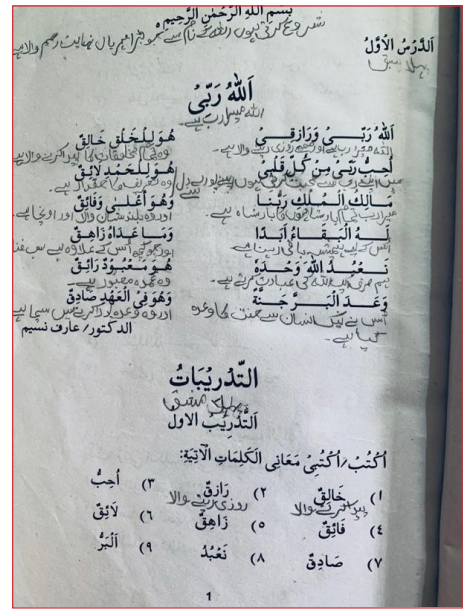
The language question applies to math, science, and social studies or Pakistan studies. While the last



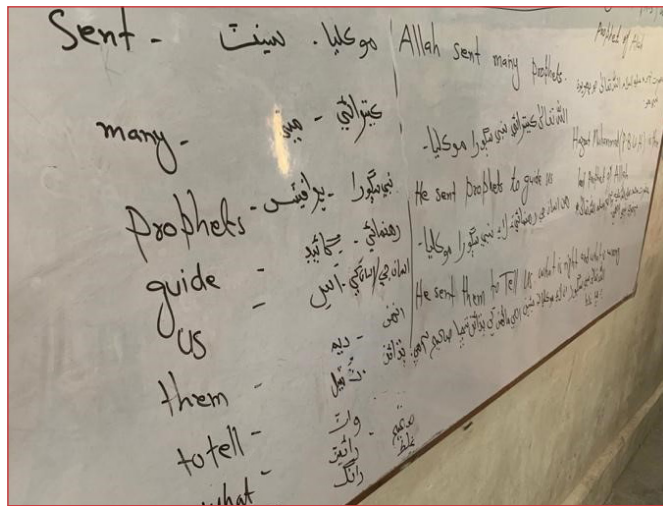
Arabic textbook in KP primary schools.

generation learned science and math using textbooks in Urdu, the trend now is for science and math to be taught using English textbooks. There are complaints that Urdu words for scientific terms are long and difficult. Ironically, these words are borrowed from Arabic, which was once the language of the world's leading scientists.

Most confoundingly, students who do not understand English prefer to have science and social studies textbooks in English. In a classroom in Karachi, when a 9th grade class was asked if they would rather have textbooks in English, Urdu, or another language, almost all students said English. When asked why, one student said, "I want English books because I want to speak English." A girl in the same class was asked to read a passage from her textbook. It stated, "After the War of Independence in 1857, Muslims of the sub-continent became victims of atrocities of the British." She did not, of course, know what "atrocities" meant, but she insisted that it was better to have English books. Her reason was that "Urdu has hard words like 'sultanate.'" "Sultanate" is also an English word, but she may have meant that Urdu has complex formal vocabulary that is either hard to read or understand. In the same school, third graders were learning economics – the principle of scarcity – through translation of their English textbooks.

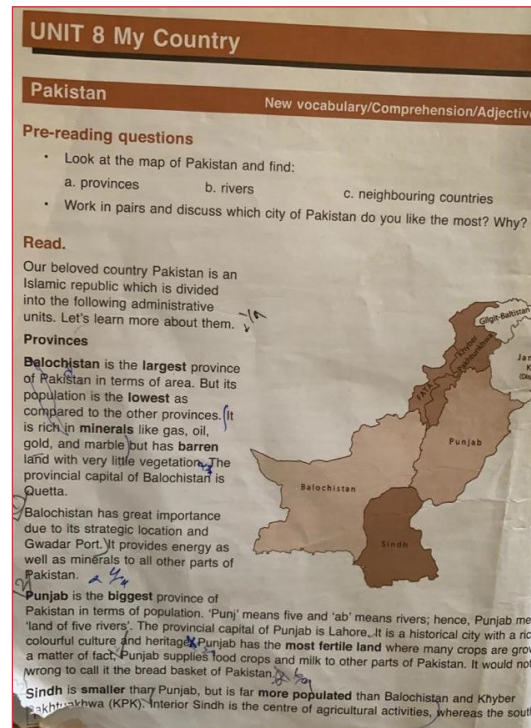


On the first day of Arabic, 6th graders are confronted with full text. The student has written the translation for every line in Urdu based on the teacher's instructions, and she will probably memorize both the Arabic and Urdu.



Top: To help students read their English textbook, a teacher has transliterated every word into Urdu script. After that, there is Sindhi translation or transliteration.

Right: A teacher called on students asking them, in English, "Can you tell me something about our beloved Pakistan?" The question seemed impressive, but the students simply recited the stilted textbook language to the right word-for-word.



In interior Sindh, there were similar conversations. Students usually spoke in Sindhi, and teachers provided translation into Urdu for the author. Students never spoke English.

Researcher to classroom: Which language is easiest for you to read?

Most students raise their hand indicating Sindhi. A few raise their hand for English, and even fewer for Urdu.

Researcher: Your math and science books, which language should they be in?

Almost half of the students raise their hand for Sindhi, a few for Urdu, and most of the hands shoot up for English.

Researcher: Why?

Student: If we read English then we will learn English.

Teacher: They are enthusiastic about English.

Student: I understand English. It is very easy. Easier than Sindhi.

Researcher: Do you speak English?

Student in Sindhi: Sometimes I speak English. English is my favorite.

Researcher to Class: Why do you prefer books in English?

Another Student: We read Sindhi anyways, but if we read English then we can learn a new language. English is our favorite language. We read all our books in Sindhi, but in English we enjoy it. It's our favorite.

Researcher: Why?

Student: We speak Sindhi anyways. But if we read English we will learn something new.

In another classroom at another school in Sindh:

Researcher: Do you think it's difficult when your science book is written in English?

Students: No, miss.

Researcher: But do you all speak English?

Students: Yes, miss.

Researcher: If your science book was in Sindhi would it be easier to understand?

Most say it would be easier in English.

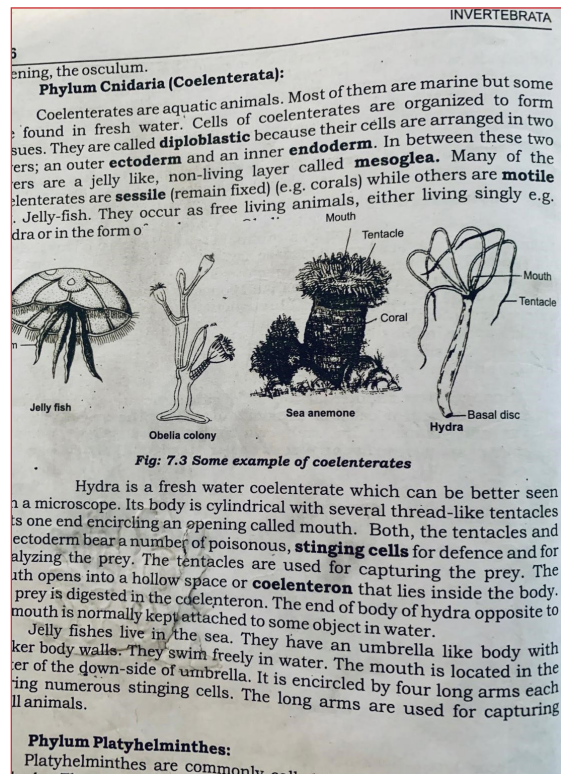
Student 1: It would be easier in Sindhi. Sindhi is easy.

Principal: His parents are teachers, that's why he says Sindhi is easier.

Researcher: If your science book is in English, would you understand it all, without your teacher explaining it?

Students: We will manage to translate it from English but we cannot translate it from Sindhi.

Principal: Their letter identification has become very good. Of course, Sindhi is our mother language. In our schooling system these days there is a focus on English. Things are backwards. And only kids whose parents are focused on Sindhi will say they prefer Sindhi. These days, it has become easier for kids to read English. The problem is that the identification is good, they can read the word, and if they know the word then they will manage to figure out the sentence.



What appears to be happening in Pakistan is that children understand and speak one language, usually their mother tongue like Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Seraiki, or Hindko. That language is spoken in class, but textbooks are in another language, Urdu or English.²⁴ Children struggle with reading and comprehension in both languages. Although they say they understand and find it easier to read English rather than Urdu, data from ASER and LND tests suggests the opposite. English does not even show up on most surveys of languages that children speak at home. There are reasons why Urdu is challenging though, especially when complex words appear in the text without being introduced first as vocabulary. Children are also enthusiastic about English and they, along with parents, teachers, school administrators, and officials, seem to think that memorizing translations and copying English texts is the way to learn the language.

No one is alarmed by this linguistic chaos. It does not come up in discussions about education. It is so normal that school-level officials overlook it and so bizarre that higher level officials and commentators have trouble accepting it as a problem, assuming that there is a method to the madness. The method is the assumption that this is how foreign languages are learned, and English must be learned, because what is education without English?

If a child could escape schooling with comprehension, if, somehow, she learned to read with fluency and had textbooks in languages she understood, the higher education system would filter the child out. Higher education is universally “English-medium,” again meaning that textbooks are in English although classroom teaching happens in Urdu and other languages. Students also must write papers and complete exams in English. For most students, the key to survival in this system is to have enough of a grasp of English that one can copy it. The result is rote learning, at best, but more often plagiarism to produce papers and cheating on exams, possibly with help from teachers. School administrators do not mind these necessities. It is common for professors and department heads to have plagiarized their dissertations.

Shahid Kardar, a former governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, speaks about the challenge of getting talented students who do not understand English through Beaconhouse National University where he is vice-chancellor:

“To be a good artist or actor is about having the requisite talent, nothing to do with your socioeconomic background. So some kids come from these [underprivileged] backgrounds [on scholarship]. Some come from Balochistan. And they have severe difficulties in articulating their thoughts in writing even in Urdu, let alone in English, the latter being the language of instruction at the University level—because the theory papers/examinations are only in English. Understandably, a lot of these children who came from the ‘matriculation/intermediate stream’ of education [having attended government or low-cost schools], and whatever the quality of their abilities in Urdu, at least they sat their exams in Urdu. At the higher education level, *Islamiyat* and Pakistan Studies are compulsory. So we as the university decided, look these are compulsory, this is the background they have, we don’t want the poor kid to go through this in English. So we said you can sit these two exams in Urdu. Obviously they were delighted. We couldn’t do that in the case of other courses. I understand when it comes to History of Art for example, this can’t be done in Urdu. I’m sorry [I told the kids]. My colleagues also agreed with me. We would grade them obviously without mentioning the language of ‘instruction’ [language of the exam]. But the representatives of the Higher Education Commission conducting a review of the quality of education that we impart were critical of the approach that he had adopted and categorized it as not acceptable. So we’ve had to discontinue the policy to allow them to sit some exams in Urdu.”

But even among the privileged students, he says, “One is shocked by their lack of ability to communicate their thoughts in writing. They have difficulty articulating their thoughts in a structured manner, both in terms of content and the sequencing.”

The education system is rigged against children by setting an impossible condition on education, social mobility, and equal opportunity. The condition is English, and the onus is on the underprivileged classes to achieve it without ever being taught the language or being exposed to it. The path to English that they are given is a road to nowhere: children will not learn English by copying it from textbooks. And yet, this is what most leaders demand that children do for at least ten years by enrolling in school. As for the languages children speak at home, the message to students is clear from the day they step into school: their intellect is worthless if it is expressed in the language they speak; to even be recorded in their notebooks, it must be written in a language they do not know. In the quest to mimic the sounds and forms of English and even Urdu, education is lost.

According to Taimur Jhagra, KP’s Minister of Finance, who was a partner at McKinsey working on Punjab education reforms for several years,

“Our regional languages are important. We are probably one of the only societies in the world that actually chooses to stigmatize its own culture. No one even speaks or writes in Punjabi. But as Pushtoons we feel very proud about language and everyone speaks it. But most likely we can’t write it because it’s not taught. So even if you said teach people in Pashto, [we couldn’t because] we’ve ignored the languages for 70 years.”

Jhagra leans on his Urdu, which – like many urban and privileged Pakistanis – he speaks, reads, and understands, to figure out how to read Pashto using context clues. Pashto’s written grammar is different from Urdu and it has different characters. But a child who speaks only Pashto has to jump over the hurdle of learning Urdu without comprehension and, in the unlikely instance that she succeeds, then work on transferring that knowledge to figuring out Pashto text. It would make more sense to allow Pashto-speaking children to acquire Pashto literacy directly rather than through a foreign language.

What is stunning is that leaders, reformers, and the chattering classes have failed to take note of the hopeless bargain that the school system presents to children. It is so sinister that some would suspect it is deliberate. Converting textbooks to English and Urdu strengthens the class system by obliterating education; if the aim for schools is to make a dent in it, then the onus is on the elite to create systems that accept the country’s linguistic diversity rather than discriminate on the basis of it. As Kardar says, “If Urdu were to become the official language – all laws were in Urdu – then things would change. Can you imagine if laws in England were in Latin? I keep hearing about inclusiveness, but how can we be inclusive? The only way is to change the incentive structure and disincentivize English.”

Benevolent elites who demand that government schools must use English textbooks – blind somehow to the reality that teachers do not speak English and children have no exposure to the language – have stuck children in a game they cannot win. Education is roadkill.

The quest for quality without making schooling intelligible to teachers and students raises questions about the quality of reforms themselves. While testing grows as a way to measure quality, questions that consistently stumped technical experts leading reforms were, “What language are the assessments in?” and “If children cannot read, or comprehend the languages

they are reading, how are they taking tests?” For example, if children are asked a word problem such as “Condensation occurs in the water cycle when the clouds pass through ___ region,” and they get the answer wrong, how do we know that the child could not read the question, could read it but does not understand English, or struggles with science? Conversely, if children are getting questions right on a test written in English but we know they cannot read or comprehend English, then how are they taking tests? The situation suggests a lot of rote learning and memorization so children can recognize the right answer on multiple choice and fill-in-the blank questions, or collusion between teachers and students to figure out the answers to questions together.

Perversely, when students fail, teachers are faulted for failing to deliver on the mysterious notion of quality, which entails getting children to demonstrate critical thinking and conceptual understanding in a foreign language that teachers do not know themselves.

In conversations with senior officials, following up discussions about “quality” with questions about language and literacy created some confusion. Language has been treated as a skippable inconvenience. It has been shelved as an old and unresolvable political thorn. English is the answer to Pakistan’s Pandora’s box of linguistic diversity – because “if textbooks are not in English then will they be in Urdu or regional languages like Pashto and Punjabi or one of many languages spoken by small minorities?” Atif Khan explains. “The problem was that we had Pashto and Urdu, so we made it all English so there is only one [language].”

There are 72 living languages in Pakistan, although 61 may be a more realistic number of languages spoken since some languages are the same but have different names.²⁵ Hywel Coleman, a scholar on education and language who has done studies for the British Council in Pakistan, cites Paul Lewis,²⁶ who groups Pakistan’s major languages into seven macrolanguages, each of which has over 1 million speakers. Collectively, these languages are spoken by 85 percent of the population, or 135 million people. A macrolanguage is defined as “multiple, closely related individual languages that are deemed in some usage contexts to be a single language.” Coleman suggests that Pakistan start with mother tongue instruction in early education in these seven languages, and then move to other minority languages over time. ²⁷ Research and global practice agree with him: early years education must be in the mother tongue. Once a child learns to read, write, and speak one language well, then they are cognitively equipped to learn other languages.

Like many issues that are deemed politically impossible in Pakistan until they happen overnight, recent events suggest that attitudes on language can change. While the PTI made textbooks in KP in English in their first term in power, the new PTI governments that took office in Punjab and at the federal level in 2018 are ambitiously pursuing a shift back to Urdu textbooks. According to Punjab’s education minister Dr. Murad Raas, whose office is, with some significance, not in the education department but in the Punjab Curriculum and Textbooks Board:

“How can you teach a child in a foreign language? Teaching science in English in primary school is just foolish. We are printing books in English and in Urdu. The English books that we send out for free, the kids dump them in the dumpsters, then go buy the Urdu books from the market because they want to learn in Urdu. They cannot speak or learn in English. We are wasting millions of rupees. This is how much damage we are doing. We’re going back to Urdu and that’s the way it’s going to be.”

The federal education minister Shafqat Mahmood is pursuing a “uniform” curriculum, meaning that all schools will study the same core subjects under the same assessment system,²⁸ ideally

using the same textbooks in the same language. While he has his own notions about what the uniform language should be, he plans to convene a National Curriculum Council that will develop a consensus around it. He says:

“The elite private schools will become the medium that the National Curriculum Council decides. There are 400,000 [students] who go to these elite schools. There are 22 million other people who are studying in this country, and they are studying Urdu and they are studying all sorts of things. If it is revolution to get the elite to study your national language then so be it, let it be the revolution. But I’m not going to decide that, it’s going to be decided by the National Curriculum Council. My feeling is that the first five years should be Urdu. And then from 5th grade to 10th grade – or whatever [years] the experts decide – you teach English as a language. But Urdu has to be your unified language.”

While Urdu is better than English, mother tongue still appears to be a bridge too far. According to Mahmood, “English is not anyone’s mother tongue. Neither is Urdu but at least its closer to Punjabi and it’s become a language of communication.” Punjabi is not taught at all in schools in Punjab, and the government is not considering introducing it for early years education. While Urdu is regarded as a language of common use in Pakistan, there is a tendency for those in major cities to overestimate its usage and the extent to which schoolchildren understand it.

In a school in the center of Peshawar that has classrooms and teachers for every grade and a kindergarten classroom decorated for early childhood education, complete with colorful round tables, second graders struggle to read an Urdu sentence from their textbooks. The line says, in Urdu, “Father and aunt take the children to the park.”

The following conversation takes place in Urdu, until the end.

Researcher: What language do you speak at home?

Boy: Pashto.

Researcher: Do you speak Urdu?

Boy: A little.

Researcher: What is the best thing about Peshawar?

Boy: *Silent, smiles shyly.*

Researcher: What do you like about where you live?

Boy: *(struggling)* I... There is a road...

Researcher: What do you do after school?

Boy: I go home.

Researcher: And then?

Boy: I study.

Researcher: Do you play?

Boy: A little.

Researcher: What do you play?

Boy: A few people play.

Researcher: What do you play?

Boy: *Takes a breath as if to say something, then turns away, shakes his head, and rubs his eyes.*

Researcher: Tell me in Pashto.

Boy: In Pashto? After school, we play hide and seek.

The boy can express his thoughts in Pashto and his eyes light up when he speaks. In Urdu, he shows visible frustration because he cannot express what he is thinking.

The 5th grade English class is being taught in Pashto, which is typical of English classes since teachers don't speak English. They are learning, "A festival is a celebration." One by one, students stand up and repeat this sentence as they are called on by the teacher. The teacher tells students about the holy month of Ramadan and the occurrence of Eid.

The first line in the students' textbook is "Prophet Muhammad SWT is the last prophet Allah. He was born in 571 AD." Five out of six students could not read the sentence. They all got stuck on the word "prophet," although some still knew what it meant. If they got as far as "AD," they pronounced it "add" and did not know what it meant. The one child who could read and understand the first sentences – perhaps having memorized it at some point – could not read the sentence that followed: "His father died before he was born."

In a neighboring girls school, girls are taking an exam. Among the questions, 3rd graders memorized how to write a sick note requesting permission from the headmistress to be absent from school. One girl has written,

"Madam
With due respect it is stated
Gam ill to day There for, can not
Cometo school. kindly grant me leave
For one day Thank you
Yours obediently Name – Saleha –

She cannot read or pronounce the words she has written, or explain their meaning. Another student has fewer mistakes and can read and translate words, but it is still clear that this text has been memorized to be reproduced on the exam. Years later, employers will complain about graduates like these who cannot write emails.

The following conversation ensues with the teachers about the various languages that are being "taught" in the school.

Teacher: Only secondary has Arabic. They learn about Pakistan's provinces, poems like we have in English. [They learn] about Pakistan like historical places and do [written] exercises.

Researcher: Can anyone speak Arabic? I haven't met anyone who speaks Arabic.

Head Teacher: I'm not sure if the teacher can speak [Arabic] or not – maybe [she can] if she meets someone who speaks Arabic.

Researcher: If a student is reading about Pakistan in Arabic, what are they learning?

Teacher: "Pakistan is our country, Quaid e Azam [Jinnah] made it, there are four or five provinces." It's the same thing translated into Arabic.

Researcher: Why?

Teacher: Maybe because there is a sanctioned post for an Arabic teacher. She [the teacher] studied Arabic to become an Arabic teacher. There are advertisements. People are recruited for this.

Researcher: Ok, so basically they have English, Urdu, Pashto, and Arabic. Are there any other languages going? Chinese, French, Turkish?

Teacher: No, no that's enough languages.

Researcher: Do kids know English?

Teacher: Yes, they do. Routine sentences they can use.

Head Teacher: It used to be that you would learn A for Apple starting in grade 6. Now mashallah kids' books are in English from KG [kindergarten].

Official (who speaks fluent English): I started [English] from grade six.

Researcher: When books were in Urdu, was it easier?

Teacher: It was easy.

Head Teacher: It was easy. For the kids and teachers it was easier.

Ishrat Husain is an esteemed economist and former dean of the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi. In recent years, he has changed his opinion on the use of English textbooks in Pakistan after studying the practices of other nations that have progressed, and also the struggles of students at higher educational institutions in Pakistan in comprehending content delivered in English. Nobody forces an alien language on children, he says. He calls language a key area where education reform is needed. He says, "At least in the early childhood phase – pre-K, KG, and primary – your medium of instruction should be your mother tongue. It cannot be English. You teach English as a language but your power to comprehend and understand becomes much better if you are taught and communicate in the mother tongue. That is because out of the 24 hours in a day, for 16 hours the child is exposed to a different language. You are actually strangling the intellectual and mental growth of the child by forcing him into English medium schools. You are creating a gap between well-to-do and poor families."

When The Citizens Foundation (TCF) started grappling with the question of how to deliver quality education at scale around 10 years ago, one of the first decisions they made was language. They committed to Urdu, going against the grain of private schools, other nonprofit networks, and popular consensus that children should use textbooks that are in English. Until that point, they had been supplementing poor-quality government textbooks that were in Urdu with Oxford University Press textbooks that were in English. Because a high-quality Urdu curriculum was not available, they began developing it based on research and in partnership with subject specialists.

Moving to Urdu rather than mother tongue was a pragmatic choice: developing and printing textbooks for tens of thousands of students (now 250,000) is expensive and the foundation sustained itself on donations. Now, with the endeavor nearly complete, TCF secured support from Thar Foundation, a nonprofit jointly established by the Sindh government and the Sindh Engro Coal Mining Corporation, to research a three-language formula for moving a child from mother tongue to the national language to English over the course of education through curriculum design, recruiting and building teacher capacity, and community engagement. This is called Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE).

The team consisted of Acumen fellow Ajay Pinjani, who has a social enterprise called *ek nuqta* [One Dot], and Ayesha Mehkeri, who has a masters from LSE, among others. It was overseen by Unaiza Ayub, the head of TCF's academics and a graduate of the Harvard School of Education. Together, this team interviewed over 130 language experts, educationists, and researchers in Pakistan and around the world, pored over 250 academic studies, studied over 15 global and local MTB-MLE models, and conducted a sociolinguistic survey with the population of immediate interest in interior Sindh.

Their conclusions were not very different from what is known among educationists, because it is well-established, but it still bears stating. They found that a strong education in the mother

tongue through MTB-MLE is the best for the child cognitively, socially, and academically. They broke it down as follows:



Endorsed by: UNESCO, European Commission, Save the Children, USAID, ADB, World Bank, SIL, Global Partnership for Education

A survey of TCF's target population, however, revealed an added layer of complexity: 47 percent of the target population spoke an obscure, local language called Dhatki while 34 percent spoke the provincial language of Sindhi. TCF faced the challenge of figuring out (1) how to move children through four languages to get to English, which is the language of higher education and (2) there was not a single mother tongue.

Through research, TCF arrived at a set of guiding principles that can be used to solve for such diverse settings, which were:

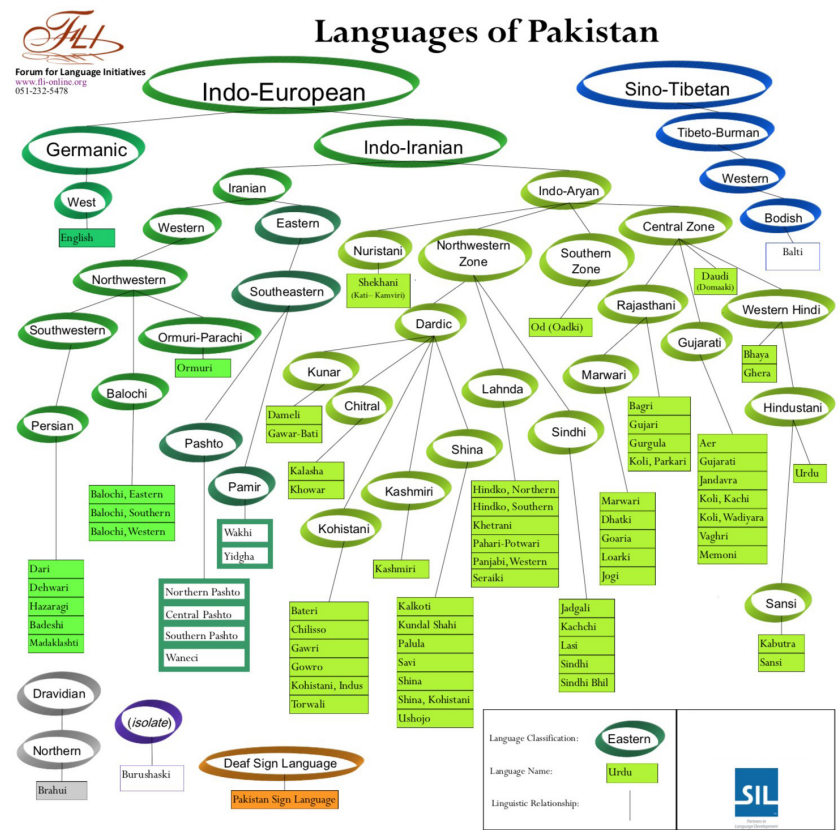
1. Education should be in the mother tongue or the most familiar language for the first six to eight years before switching to another medium of instruction.²⁹ Using an unfamiliar language like English as a medium of instruction from the start will hurt a child's academic achievement.
2. A second language can be introduced in the early years if (1) it is linguistically proximate to the mother tongue (as Dhatki, Sindhi, and Urdu are, but not English) and (2) it does not interfere with the development of literacy in the first language or mother tongue. TCF refers to a map of the origins of languages spoken in Pakistan developed by the Forum for Language Initiatives in Islamabad to suggest proximity.
3. Proximate, second languages should be introduced orally first, especially in the early years. Children can pick up basic proficiency in a language in one to three years if it is properly taught, the teacher speaks the language, and they hear the language outside of the classroom.³⁰
4. A foreign language like English can be introduced after literacy in the mother tongue is established, after three or four years, because having one language established well helps with learning foreign languages.
5. A foreign language like English should be taught as a subject for at least five years before it is used as a medium of instruction.

To deal with cases of multiple mother tongues, if the languages are proximate (like Dhatki and Sindhi), then early years education can focus on oral language acquisition to help the child transition. For example, a child speaking Dhatki would start school two years before primary school (pre-K). The curriculum would then be in Sindhi from grade one.

Pakistan is unusual among countries like it for opting for the national language besides English as the medium of instruction for all subjects from the time children step into school, rather than regional languages – which tend to be the majority mother tongue. In Pakistan, only one province uses the regional language, Sindhi, as the medium of instruction. The rest use Urdu and English. In India, only one state uses the national language, Hindi. The rest use regional languages as the medium of instruction in primary schools. “In countries that are federations, meaning they have states or provinces, the likelihood that they are using the regional language rather than the national language is much higher in the early years,” Pinjani points out. “India has been a federation from the beginning, whereas the 18th amendment came in Pakistan in 2010.”

The big exception, however, are private schools in both countries which tend to use textbooks that are in English.

The research team found nine developing countries with state-supported MTB-MLE models, which were large-scale because they were incorporated into the government system. In Pakistan, the team could only identify a few small-scale examples run by nongovernmental organizations. According to Pinjani, “When we look at MTB-MLE models around the world, most of them are state-supported except in Pakistan. In other countries, the initiative has been taken conjointly by the government and indigenous communities. So that’s why when we look at the scale, we would see hundreds of schools. But in Pakistan, even the government is unaware of the program and it’s just a handful of schools and randomly implemented.”



This map is based on information provided by Ethnologue: Languages of the World, SIL International. <https://www.ethnologue.com/>

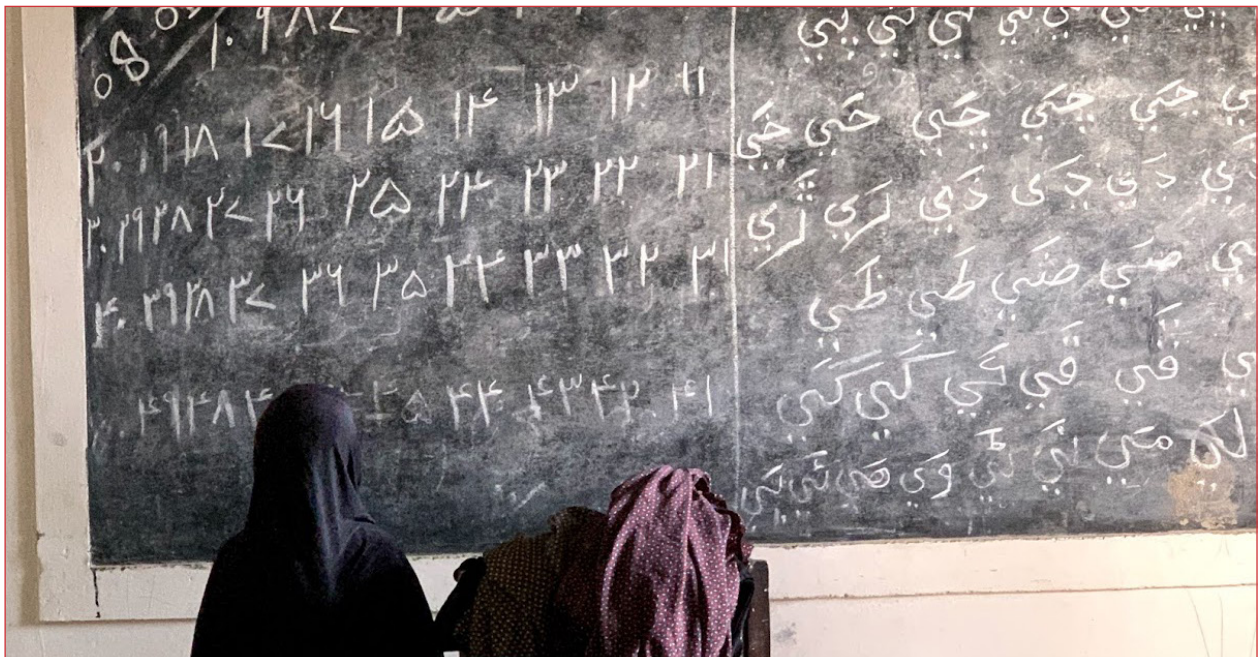
Permission to use this image was provided by SIL International.

Reading

Why can't children in Pakistan read after years in school? While quality has become a buzzword, officials and experts were often confused when asked about literacy or, specifically, "How can Pakistani schools become places where children can reliably learn to read?"

The question exposed the limits of the majority of those who work on education. They tend to be experts in policy and governance, examining structural issues around education. Those who are equipped to understand the problem – a credit to DFID is that many of its staff in Pakistan are former teachers – do not speak Urdu and local languages, so their ability to understand reading and language instruction is limited relative to a Pakistani.

Through observation of over 100 classrooms, it was very clear why children cannot read after years in school. First, as discussed in the previous section, they are being taught to read and write languages that they do not comprehend. Second, the problem of rote is well-known in Pakistan, but it is usually conceived of as a problem with higher level content like middle school science. It in fact starts from the first day a child comes to school. Schools are so unable to teach skills that they cannot teach the most fundamental one of them all: reading. Instead, in kindergarten, children are drilled in letters and spelling.



It works very simply, like this: what the teacher says, the children will repeat. She will often call on students and ask them to repeat it individually. The drilling is song-like, with names of letters and the spellings of words becoming a chant. The repetition is mindless: kids might be looking around, their faces blank, or they may shout to impress visitors. Even as an adult, it is hard to get the song-like lessons out of your head after you hear them once.

The following is a drill with a pre-primary class who were seated at colorful round tables in a PPP school that had good infrastructure. The teacher yelled and the students responded in unison.

Teacher: Under *be*?!

Students: One dot!

Teacher: Under *be*?!

Students: One dot!

Teacher: Over *te*?!

Students: Two dots!

Teacher: Over *te*?!

Students: Two dots!

Teacher: Over *se*?!

Students: Three dots!

Teacher: Over *se*?!

Students: Three dots!

Teacher: With *be*?!

Students: (Inaudible word starting with *be*.)

Teacher: With *se*?!

Students: (Inaudible word starting with *se*.)



The exercise did not go smoothly because kids often made mistakes and got confused, with the teacher re-running the drill with the group. They were also doing other things with their hands and looking around or staring off into space. Kids often held up their hands showing the number of dots with their fingers – so the exercise required or assumed some knowledge of numbers.

Children do not learn phonics, which is the established method for teaching reading around the world. Instead of learning the sounds of letters, Pakistani children memorize their names. Instead of learning to blend sounds into words (*cuh-aa-tuh – cat*) Pakistani children memorize spellings and their translations (*C-A-T – cat – cat means billee*).

The idea of what reading is, is not straightforward. Field officials would often respond in the affirmative when asked if children could read and even if they knew English. In classrooms, when asked to read unfamiliar pages from their textbooks, children would often indicate they couldn't, simply stating "we haven't done this yet." Teachers would offer the same explanation. In one grade two classroom in a government school in Peshawar, the author asked a teacher how he would help a child who could not read a sentence. He explained, "I have to tell them what it says first, then they can read it." In only one instance, in a government school in Lahore, when a child could not read, did the teacher help her sound out the letters (referred to as de-coding). The teacher had come from a private school. But in many schools, even after it was demonstrated that child

after child could not read unfamiliar text, teachers and officials would insist that they could read. They often argued that the children were just shy. That could have been true, but in most cases, children read other passages from their books – the ones they had “done” in class – or answered questions and interacted in other ways.

Instead of “learning to read,” which teachers had trouble placing in the curriculum, there is teaching *jor-thor* (combining-breaking). Urdu is like cursive, where letters change when they are attached to each other, except that letters have many more forms in English. One letter can have up to nine “faces” depending on where it appears in the word. So with *jor-thor*, children will be shown individual letters and taught to attach them to each other, or they will be shown a word and asked to break it up into letters. But this is also done by recitation and copying words from the textbook or board into notebooks.

For example, in one classroom in KP, children recited in chorus after the teacher: “*Te-te-lam-yeh* (names of letters). *Titlee* (Butterfly).” The word was written on the board. The teacher then called on individual students to recite the jingle.

The problem gets trickier. While there is an established phonetic method for teaching English, there isn’t a well-known method for teaching Urdu phonetically. The expectation is simply that children will eventually learn to recognize words through sight and repetition. This can work in a funny way. For example, children might recognize the shape of the word ‘Pakistan’ after going over it many times in class, but they cannot read ‘Pak’ on its own. Instead, they guess that it is another word in which prominent letters appear in the same pattern: *pankha* (meaning fan). Needless to say, this method of learning to read by sight does not work for the majority of children, which is why they end up illiterate after years in school.

With the phonetic method, it is possible to read nonsense words, meaning words that are not words at all like “mig” or “finap.” Any American could read *kya haal hai aap ka* without any understanding of what it means. This is how many Pakistanis read Arabic with ease, but without understanding any of it. But phonetics don’t transfer to Urdu very well: unlike Arabic, which is littered with vowel markings to guide non-Arabic speakers in pronunciation, Urdu drops all vowel marking as a stylistic choice. So the word *kab* (when) appears as *kb* in Urdu. A first-time reader would not know if it should be read as *keb* or *koob* or *kab* because there is no indication of the vowel. An Urdu speaker could guess pretty quickly because *kab* is a common word and *kib* and *koob* are not words, and the second or third time the word comes up an Urdu speaker would have developed a visual identification of the word. But if you do not know Urdu, as many children don’t, you would not be able to figure out the missing vowel in *kb* the first time it appears. Textbooks are of course more complicated because the text is full of advanced terms that have many missing vowels and are not first taught as vocabulary. This is, in part, why “it is essential to build an oral foundation in a language before proceeding to teaching reading in that language,” according to Ayesha Mehkeri, a researcher on language at TCF. “For example, listening should precede speaking and reading and writing should be introduced after – in essence mimicking how children naturally develop their first language skills while growing up.”

If a child has comprehension of a language and gets practice reading it, then the sight method can conceivably work. The trouble is that there is a dearth of fun reading material in Urdu for young children who are starting to read. It is even less likely to exist in mother tongue languages like Pashto, Sindhi, and Punjabi. According to UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), only 2.5 percent of households with children under the age of five in Punjab have three or more

storybooks. Storybooks help children develop a visual recognition of words and become fluent readers. It also helps develop vocabulary and creativity. It helps that they do it because it is fun. This is why a love for reading is so important. But in the absence of storybooks, kids only get practice reading when they read their textbooks, which is onerous and boring.

Zohra Nasir leads a team at TCF that has written over 100 illustrated storybooks in Urdu because they were not available in the market. She leads a school at TCF, one out of the over 1,500 experimenting with a model for play-based early childhood education that can be scaled in TCF schools. Besides writing storybooks, the team is making toys and has developed a curriculum that has cut textbook time in half. She says,

“Storybooks and storytelling create strong emotional bonds between learners, peers, facilitators or adults, and content. These emotional bonds are crucial to motivation to learn. We are likelier to engage in a practice that those we love are engaged in, such as a child pretending to read a newspaper like her father. Motivation is key to learning; we are motivated to read what we find joyful. We are also likelier to engage with and retain something we gain through a pleasurable, low-pressure, and often, social activity. Play-based literacy activities and literacy embedded in play, such as writing a recipe out when pretending to cook, are fundamental to learning how to read.”



Graffiti walls motivate children to want to write at TCF. These also take the place of blackboards in the earliest grades.

Finally, there is a jump in the curriculum between kindergarten and first grade. Schooling formally starts with first grade. In kindergarten, children learn English and Urdu or Sindhi letters, *for thor*, and numbers. When they get to first grade, they are given full pages of text in multiple languages. Language textbooks are in the language being taught – Urdu is in Urdu, English in English, Sindhi in Sindhi, Pashto in Pashto, and Arabic in Arabic – and then math and science are most likely in English. Each of these languages has a unique script and different alphabets, or alphabets that look the same but sound different. The teachers will read the textbook to the class – a word at a time or breaking up sentences in awkward places so it is impossible to understand what is being said – and children repeat. In Sindh, children wrote Sindhi translations between the lines of English text. Then the teacher called on individual students to come to the front of the class and read. They read so rapidly, running together the English with the Sindhi translation, that it was impossible to hear the difference between the two languages.

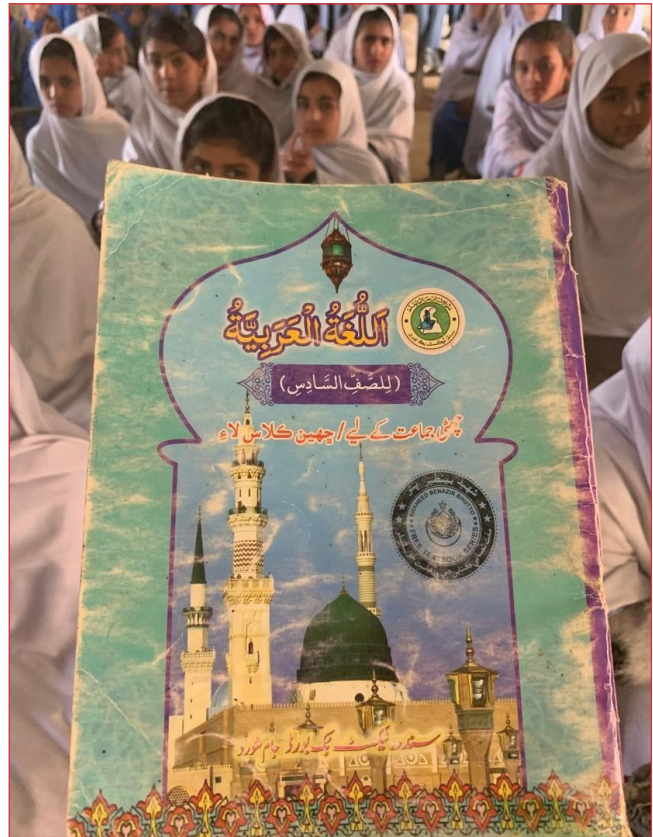
So by 1st grade, the textbooks are already beyond the level of children. They assume a child can read even though she was never taught to read. And in this way, textbooks advance according to the ideal of where an English-speaking child would be in the UK, rather than where Pakistani students actually are.

Alternative Education

Non-formal education is an opportunity that Pakistan has neglected. It is an opportunity to (1) introduce a simplified curriculum focused on literacy, numeracy, and basic life skills and (2) enroll the out-of-school population that is mostly too old to enroll directly into the formal schooling system.

Formal schools are constructed buildings (or intended to be) while non-formal schools are set up in community spaces with teachers hired from the community. In practice, there can be functionally little difference between formal and non-formal schools: formal schools may not have buildings or have buildings that are so dangerous that children are outside or in borrowed spaces. Both set-ups can be multi-grade with only one or two rooms and as many teachers.

Non-formal schools are attractive because they are fast to set up, since there is no construction. Women can be hired as teachers to teach from their homes (especially if teaching women and girls). They may rent a space if enrollment is high, or find a vacant community space like a mosque when it's not in use.



Arabic textbook at a secondary school in Sindh.

The difference should be in curriculum, but it is not. Non-formal schools tend to behave like formal schools in dividing children into grade by age and then going through the entire government curriculum for several grades at once. Instead, they should teach their own, simplified curriculum at the level of the children, recognizing that a five-year old and 10-year old may need to learn letters. Teaching at the right level would ease the pressure of multi-grading. They can also develop a stronger curriculum for teaching children to read.

Jan Madud, Education Specialist at UNICEF, uses the term "alternative" instead of "non-formal" because "people do not take it seriously if it's non-formal. The name is not attractive to stakeholders." This explains why it has been neglected even though it is an opportunity to absorb the older, out-of-school youth bulge before they become illiterate adults. He says, "In this country, people need to give serious thought to it. It has been going on for many years but it has a long way to go to be called a credible alternative education program."

USAID & Reading

It is commendable that USAID decided to tackle this problem through its Pakistan Reading Project (PRP) and Sindh Reading Program (SRP). PRP, a seven-year, \$165 million program, worked on developing a phonetic method of teaching and reading Urdu and Sindhi and materials to teach reading in Pashtu, Baluchi, and Brahvi. The program was implemented by the International Rescue Committee, Creative Associates International, World Learning, and the Institute for Rural Management. SRP was a five-year program funded as part of the Sindh Basic Education Program.

USAID trained teachers in government and nonprofit schools to teach reading using phonics. In visits to schools, it was common to see PRP workbooks and letter charts on the wall. But in the design and implementation of the program, there were a few apparent challenges. First, 1st and 2nd grade teachers were given materials and trained to use them, but by 1st grade, as discussed earlier, the curriculum is beyond learning the sounds of letters and blending, which is the level of the content in kindergarten. Teachers stick tightly to the prescribed textbook – ironically, given that children are not learning, it is tightly packed and teachers complain they do not have enough time to get through it. In a considerable proportion of intervention schools, supplementary materials tended to lie by the wayside. According to an officer, PRP asked teachers and students across their program areas about the use of materials according to their scripted lesson plans and found that over half of teachers – 55 to 58 percent – were not using them.³¹ It would have been ideal for the program to work with kindergarten in Pakistan, but USAID decided to work with grades one and two in Pakistan instead of kindergarten, due to their global priorities. PRP justified the effort since children in grades one and two were weak in identifying letters and their sounds.

Another challenge that is apparent in even the best-designed program is that it takes time and consistency to have a chance at changing behavior. USAID did one training per year with teachers, in-class mentoring twice per quarter, and monthly meetings where teachers could meet to learn from each other. Teachers took part in the program for two years. But it can take two years just to show results and convince a teacher that new and more intensive methods work. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, where Room to Read has been directly implementing a model similar to PRP's for many years in government schools, teachers admitted that they were skeptical and reluctant until they saw the first batch go through two years of the program. PRP did continue a reduced intervention model for an additional three years, and results showed that student achievement increased over time.

However, PRP reports a huge success. Around 2017 they were able to take advantage of a curriculum and textbook review that took place after 10 years; they managed to integrate their content into new textbooks for provinces except Punjab, and also for Gilgit-Baltistan. Ideally, this means that new textbooks should be structured to teach reading with simpler vocabulary that is gradually introduced. Realistically, however, the purpose of language content is often ideological or values-driven, so the extent to which revision has occurred, and how good it is, should be examined so that textbooks can continue to be improved.



Room to Read (RtR) works in partnership with government schools³² around the world to help children become fluent readers and make fun local language story books available to them in functioning school libraries. They have worked in every country in South Asia except Pakistan and Bhutan.

RtR develops literacy instruction, storybooks, and libraries. For literacy instruction, RtR supplements often-flawed textbooks with workbooks and lesson plans that complement textbook content so that teachers use them. The workbooks introduce vocabulary that children in villages and slums may not be exposed to in their vernacular. They not only train teachers and librarians, but also principals who, as school leaders, can motivate and oversee teachers in implementing the RtR model.

The key to the model is in-classroom coaching; literacy coaches regularly visit to observe from the back of the classroom and give feedback to teachers. Weaker students are identified and brought to the front row.

Students spend two days learning one letter, with a review day after every two letters. Stories are embedded in the lessons, and students start forming two-letter words from the start. In one school in Dhaka, the RtR program was in its second year. A teacher who had been with the school for 24 years said, "In the first year, we said that the method was too slow. Lessons were too short. They were just learning letters. How will they [students] learn [to read]? But this is the first time [at this school] that second graders can read."

RtR works with local writers and illustrators to produce attractive, amusing picture books with a little bit of large text in the local language, preferably the mother tongue. Like in Pakistan, high-quality children's books are not available in local languages in many countries. Storybooks are seen as key to cultivating a love of reading, which is important for creativity and lifelong learning.

They then work with the teacher to run the library period as a library class. In Pakistan, schools have library periods but they are seen as a free period when children can play or teachers can



teach other subjects like math or science. Some schools have libraries or bookshelves in classrooms, but the books are locked behind glass so that children cannot steal the books. Books are not checked out. These practices are similar in government schools in other countries.

RtR coaches the teacher on how to read with expression, which requires comprehension and active thinking while reading. This is different from what was seen in many classrooms in Pakistan – where teachers read sentences so disjointedly, with the class repeating in chorus after every few words – that it was impossible to understand what was being said. Students modelled the same lack of expression, just trying to get through the text, when teachers instructed them to read their textbook in front of the class.

The teacher has a few simple options of what to do in the library period: she can read a story to the class, ask a student to read to the class, have students read in pairs, or let them read independently. On a simple half-page form, she checks a box indicating what she did and records any reflections. A coach visits regularly to observe and monitor the class. The most remarkable aspect is that students, called book captains, manage the checkout process themselves and hold their peers accountable for returning books.

Most schools do not have an extra room for a library, so RtR sets up a simple, colorful shelf in a corner. Where there are libraries, RtR rehabilitates them with carpets, low and colorful tables, and colorful shelves that display books.³³

Donor-funded programs in Pakistan have often supplied books and stocked libraries, but ultimately they go unused because books are not enjoyable for small children, children cannot read or read the language that books are in, and library periods do not function or books are locked behind glass.

In Dhaka, RtR staff work with government schools directly. Because RtR enjoys a high volume of privately donated core funding, the Dhaka office can work with teachers to achieve behavior change over many years. This is in contrast to grants, which tend to start and close new projects every few years. RtR is now planning to come to Pakistan, with support from Pakistani and Pakistani-origin individuals.

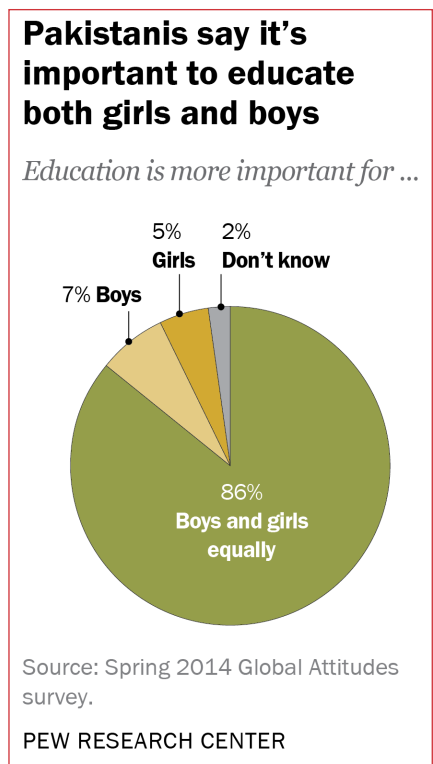


Girls

For many years, the Taliban have attacked girls' schools in Pakistan. In 2012, a group of Taliban gunmen shot Malala Yusufzai and her friends on their way to school. She was medevaced out of Pakistan and miraculously survived without a brain injury. She won the Nobel Prize and became a symbol for girls' struggles to access education.

The episode was horrific. But it also begs a serious question: why did the world assume that the Taliban represented the average Pakistani parent?

In 2014, Pew did a survey and found that 86 percent of parents in Pakistan believe that education is equally important for girls and boys. Another 5 percent said that it was more important for girls. That left only 9 percent of parents in Pakistan who believe that schooling is more important for boys than girls. When it comes to girls' schooling, the average Pakistani does not agree with the Taliban, Pew concluded.



According to Jan Madud, education specialist at UNICEF, parents may state that girls' education is important, but they may not behave accordingly – words must be followed by action. Even then, diverse data sets corroborate the idea that Pakistani parents demand girls' education, gender parity, or more girls than boys in school in parts of the country or certain age groups, *and* that girls tend to do better than boys once in school.

Pakistan scores 0.88 on the gender parity index for primary school, meaning that 88 girls are enrolled for every 100 boys.³⁴ A GPI score of 1 is gender parity. But the national average masks wide variation across the country. Urban Punjab, urban Sindh, and Islamabad have achieved gender parity in primary school, with equal or more girls in school than boys. Rural parts of the country lag, with the widest gap being for rural Balochistan, with a GPI score of an abysmal 52 percent.

The most surprising findings relate to secondary schooling and completion rates. Among 11 to 13 year-olds, there are more girls than boys enrolled in middle school in urban Pakistan.³⁵ Among 14 to 15 year-olds, urban Pakistan is at parity.

Delivering Poor Education Equally

Achieving a GPI score of 1 is an SDG. A country with a GPI score of between 0.97 and 1.03 is considered to have achieved gender parity. However, gender parity can simply mean that conditions are equally bad for boys and girls. For example, Malawi has achieved gender parity in delivering a poor education to 40 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls equally. “We should not settle for ‘equal to boys’ if both boys and girls are held back by subpar education,” wrote Stephanie Psaki, Katharine McCarthy, and Barbara Mensch in a World Bank blog.³⁶

The GPI score for secondary in Pakistan is 0.87, which is almost the same as for primary, which is 0.88. We know that girls tend to drop out in the transition to secondary school. The consistency in the score suggests that boys are also dropping out at high rates in order to maintain parity with girls.

Favoring Girls

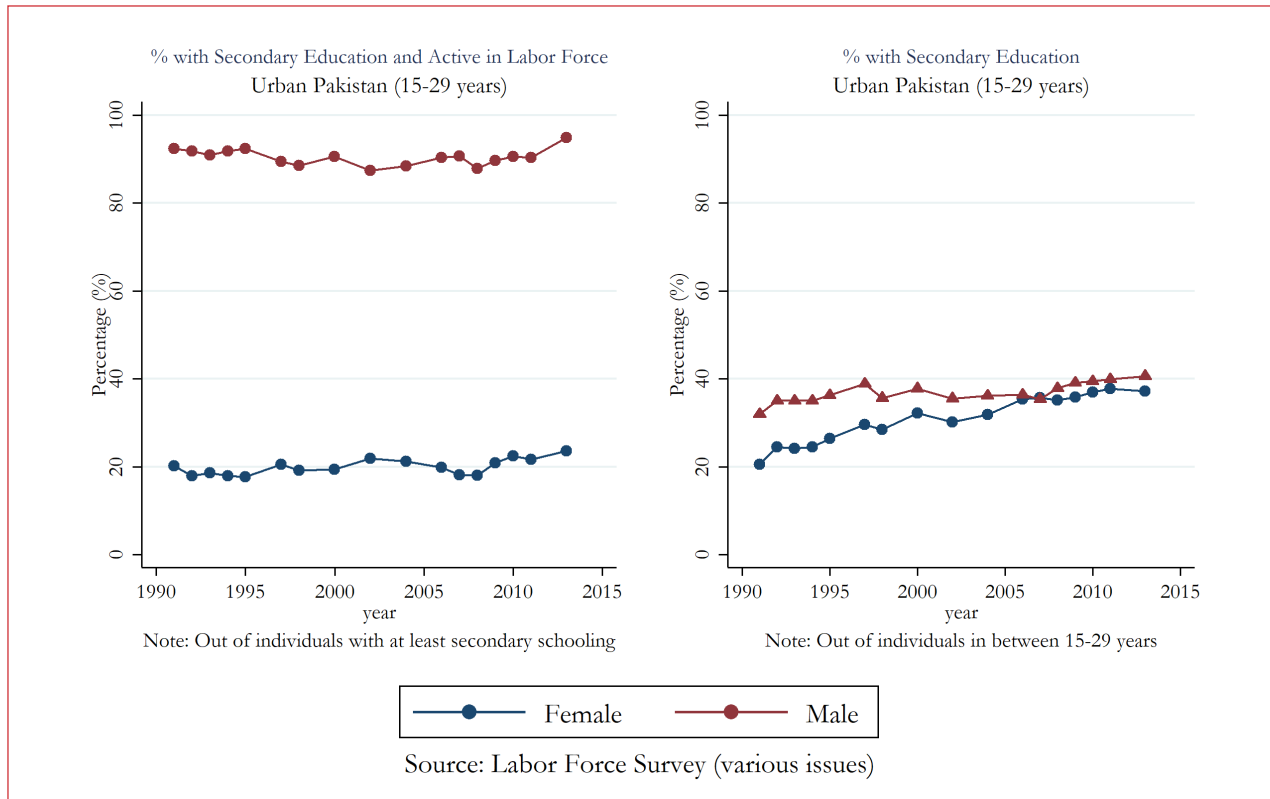
GPI scores can be above 1, indicating that there are more girls in school than boys. Globally, GPI scores for tertiary education tend to be above 1. In recent years, Pakistan has been at or near gender parity in tertiary education, but this masks a situation where only a tiny fraction of students make it this far.

The Danger of Averages

In 2014, UNESCO reported that “gender parity (meaning an equal amount of men and women) was achieved globally, on average, in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education.”³⁷ Gains were driven by a sharply narrowing gender gap in South Asia. However, as in Pakistan, using an average figure to represent the world masks disparities – in places like South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where girls are left out of school, and Latin America, where there are fewer boys in school.

Ali Cheema, who is part of the economics faculty at Pakistan’s premier university Lahore University for Management Sciences (LUMS), finds convergence between genders in the percentage of Pakistanis aged 15 to 29 who have completed secondary education in urban Pakistan. He still finds a wide gap in labor force participation in this group. Both phenomena would be explained by a stigma on mobility rather than education. He uses data from Pakistan’s Labor Force Survey.³⁸

Many studies find that norms are changing with respect to girls’ education; the gender gap is narrowing. According to a study³⁹ by Hanan Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri, lead economists at the World Bank, rural female enrollment in Sindh went up by 8 percent while rural male enrollment went up by only 2 percent between 2001 and 2004. According to the authors, “More than half of the rise for girls can be explained by the substantial increase in household incomes, whereas comparatively little is accounted for by increased school availability.” ASER data, which also shows a strong correlation between wealth and enrollment, also suggests that the gender gap in private schools has been narrowing over time.⁴⁰



Source: Cheema, Ali. 2015. "Pakistan's Demographic Transition: Young Adults, Human Capital, and Jobs." Background Paper for the 2016 Pakistan National Human Development Report. United Nations Development Programme, Islamabad

According to Punjab's education minister Murad Raas, "Girls are much more enthusiastic than boys in going to school. I think they are much more interested. That's what I've seen. I've been to boys' school and girls' schools, and girls' schools are running better. I don't know if they are much better but they are more disciplined, orderly, cleaner."

According to Dr. Kaiser Bengali, an economist and governance expert who has advised several governments, "There's no issue [with attitudes toward girls' education]. It's all myth. You might have isolated cases, but which parent doesn't want their children to have a better life than themselves?" He describes seeing a crowd of women with school-aged girls in Gwadar, Balochistan, in 1983. They were demonstrating because a one-room school refused to enroll their daughters because there was not enough space in the school. "There is no problem with the demand for education," he says, "The problem is supply."

More surprising still is data related to secondary schooling in KP, where Malala is from and the Taliban has attacked schools. According to an analysis by Adam Smith International, which provides technical assistance to the KP government funded by DFID, government secondary schools for girls in KP are enrolled nearly at capacity. According to a consultant working with the KP government: "In KP, a lot of the secondary school dropout is actually a supply side problem especially when it comes to girls, because there are no [girls'] schools." More often than not, where girls are not in school in Pakistan, the problem seems to be with the supply of schools rather than the demand for them.



Girls sit outside at a government school in Peshawar because there is not enough space in the classrooms. When a teacher is asked, “Is there anyone who says we don’t want our daughters to study?” she says, “No, they all come. Parents want their daughters to go to school.”

According to Atif Khan, who served as KP’s education minister from 2013 to 2018:

“I have never been anywhere where I have found out that they are not letting girls study, such as where there is a school and they are not letting girls go. Wherever I have been, people have always asked me for a girls’ school. So the perception that exists that [people don’t] let girls go to school that, as such, is not such a big problem. The problem is in some locations, because obviously when a girl is in 8th, 9th, 10th, then if there is no school in the village and the school is far from the village then of course they have some reservations about their daughters traveling far, and the transportation system isn’t good. So that is there, but in primary and middle, I have never encountered that someone had stopped their daughter from going to school.”

There has been a lot of change to the extent that even in middle [school] there are places where schools are not that available and boys and girls are studying together even in grade eight. Even in a place like Malakand, there is such a notion among people to educate daughters. The perception is that of the unfortunate incident of Malala, but that was a specific mindset of extremism. That was not something that you could apply to say this generally happens. The perception is there but I have never noticed that for girls in primary or middle people are stopping them from going to school.”

When asked if parents in KP do not want their daughters to go to school, the current secretary for education Arshad Khan explains,

“It’s only a cliché. This is outdated. There is no parent that does this to their daughters. I can’t speak for someone who is extremely unfortunate. Everyone sitting here [referring to the room full of officials who were waiting for a meeting with the secretary] is investing a lot in their daughters. If you go to our schools, I can show you pictures, that even where there is no girls school, even there girls enrollment is half [in a boys’ school].

In our province, why did the Taliban come together as kind of a movement that targeted girls education? It meant that it [girls education] had come together with such force that those opposed to it could not tolerate it. So the positive way of looking at it is that we suddenly emancipated our women, we wanted our girls to go to school and they couldn’t accept it. They showed social indigestion [could not digest it]. There are such unfortunate people who do not even send their kids to school at all, but this [opposition to girls education] has become very less.”

Adam Smith does report a gender gap in many districts, using data on out-of-school children collected by the government,⁴¹ and finds that girls are 14 percent more likely to drop out of school than boys. The reasons, according to a government survey, are the expense of schooling and the lack of schools. They find a strong correlation between poverty and girls being out of school at all levels, but poverty does not seem to affect boys’ enrollment.

Even when school is affordable, many parents will opt for a low-cost private school or no school at all; parents question the utility and safety of government schooling. A likely scenario is that local government schools do not function properly or are staffed by male teachers and are therefore not perceived as safe for girls. Where the only option is private schools, girls are likely to be left out for reasons of expense rather than ideology. Ahmed Shaikh, who served as Team Lead for the Equity and Access Component at ASI in Peshawar until recently, explains:

“What I’ve experienced or my team has learned is that the situation is not that parents do not *want* to send girls to school. Usually there is some reason behind it, like the out-of-pocket expenses are too high, or the distance to school is too far away. Or there may only be a co-educational school. For example, we have seen that the redemption rate for girls’ education vouchers is relatively low. There isn’t research done on this but besides other reasons quoted above, one of the reasons that we could think of it’s because private schools are often co-educational. School-related out-of-pocket expenses can be as high as 2000 rupees [~\$13] per month. Discussions with stakeholders show that around 45 percent of the cost is for transportation alone. Also, if schools don’t have proper infrastructure and facilities, especially toilets and boundary walls, then there is a tendency that girls will drop out. I don’t think that given all other things equal, such as affordability or access, that they (parents) will decide to send their sons and not their daughters. We haven’t come across any father who would say, education is not important for my girls so I will only send my son/s. Nonetheless, there are always some other socioeconomic reasons behind it. They also have to set their priorities. At the face of it, it appears that they feel like investing resources for the education of their sons rather than daughters, but it’s not that they don’t want to send the daughters to school.”

Adam Smith’s analysis finds that the strongest predictor of 5th grade test scores in KP is gender. Girls outperform boys, and the effects of gender on test scores are stronger than the effects of school or teacher characteristics, such as if the school is multigrade, has functioning facilities, the teachers’ qualification, or if it is rural.

Most surprisingly, according to the chairmen of the Peshawar and Mardan boards,⁴² more girls than boys take the exam to matriculate from high school at the end of 10th grade and the exams for 11th and 12th in Peshawar, Abbottabad, and Mardan. Further analysis would be needed to reconcile this data, but it may be that girls dropout happens earlier due to a lack of government secondary schools and within families who cannot afford to put all children in private schools, including because they see fewer financial returns to keeping a girl in school. But when access and cost are not a barrier, then more girls than boys tend to complete schooling, perhaps because girls do better in school so the family or the girl herself is more committed to it.



In visits to schools across Pakistan for this report, principals often reported similar enrollment and dropout rates for girls and boys. In many cases, there were more girls in school than boys. In one grade 10 class in Karachi, there were 14 girls and 4 boys. When asked why there were so many girls and so few boys in secondary school, the principal responded, “Since when do boys study? This is a poor area so boys work.”

In one 7th grade class in rural Sindh, where there were many more girls than boys, a group discussion went like this:

Teacher: There are more girls, and they are the ones that advance. I just took a medical test and girls were on top and boys were behind.

Boy: They put us in *karobaar* (local businesses) and that’s why there are fewer of us.

Girl: Now in our village and anywhere, our parents want girls to get ahead. They say, “We want them to study so they can bring honor to the family name.” They put the boys on *kehti barri* (agriculture).

Teacher: There are more girls doing “inter” [referring to grades 11 and 12 or higher secondary school] in the nearest city. Now the girls have taken a challenge that “we want to get ahead,” so they are putting effort into it.

Researcher: Why has this change happened?

Teacher: Because everywhere before it was that boys could get ahead, not girls. They [girls] got stoves. So that’s where girls would be left. Now there is TV and cell phone, and that’s how they got awareness that we want to study. And parents have also become aware and want their daughters to get ahead. Because of the good environment [of the school], girls have gotten ahead.

Researcher: Where are the other boys?

Boy: They are working.

Researcher: Did their parents tell them to work or they choose to?

Boy: They choose to.



In a group discussion with a 10th grade classroom full of girls at a government girls' high school in Lahore, when asked if girls' education was supported, nearly all the girls raised their hands. When asked who felt that girls' education was not supported, only two students raised their hands.

When the girls were asked why girls leave school, they said it was due to marriage and they described the case of a girl whose marriage was arranged in 6th grade. At least one student confirmed she faces immense pressure from her brother to start covering her face, and because of that she felt embarrassed to come to school. She said, "People think girls should only get education till grade 10 because otherwise they may be spoiled. There are pressures. Girls want to study and do something for our parents and country but people are narrow-minded. They only want us to get done with matriculation (grade 10) and then stay at home." Another girl from the same class commented on pressure from the community, which seemed to be located at a distance from the school. She said, "Many girls have stopped coming to schools from our village. One person said to my father why is he sending his daughter to school when others are not. He said what is the use of studying when girls have to sit at home later. My father has also started to object." But in these cases, it is worth noting that the opposition does not come till high school is complete, which is at the end of grade 10 in Pakistan.

Principals and girls could cite cases of child marriages and there was usually one girl in the class who knew of someone whose parents did not want her to go to school, but these scenarios were far from representative. More often, in cases where there were fewer girls in school than boys, they explained that distance was the issue. This is well-documented: According to Learning and Educational Achievement in Pakistan Schools (LEAPS), a long-running research initiative headed by Tahir Andrabi of Pomona College, Jishnu Das of the World Bank, and Asim Khwaja of Harvard Kennedy School, if you put a boy and a girl next to a school in Punjab, they are both equally likely to attend. But if the school is 100 meters away, then the likelihood that the girl will attend drops. As distance increases, so does the likelihood that the girls will attend.

Because 80 percent of schools in Pakistan are primary schools, getting to a secondary school requires travel – especially in rural areas – so this is usually where lower girls’ enrollment is seen. In one secondary school in interior Sindh, where the school was on a main road but children came from villages several kilometers away, there were far fewer girls than boys in 8th grade. The girls initially said that people opposed girls’ education, but when asked if this would change if their school was within walking distance and their teachers were female, they agreed enthusiastically. Most said that having female teachers was more important than the school being girls-only.



This is the school on the main road discussed in the previous paragraph. It has 42 teachers, according to the girls. Most of them are men. They hang out outside, because there are not enough classrooms for them to teach. Teachers are assigned according to enrollment, which is over 1,000, and not according to capacity for teachers or actual attendance. The school does not appear to have 1,000 students, nor could it fit that many.

Female Teachers

Out of 28 schools across Pakistan visited in the research for this report, there were only two that had very few girls in school and where administrators, teachers, and/or the girls said that the reason was that the community was opposed to girls going to school.

One of the two schools was extremely remote – a PPP school at the foot of the Kirthar Mountains near Dadu, Sindh. It was not connected by road. It could only be reached on foot or with an SUV. The school was adjacent to the community, so distance could not be an issue. The other was a private school in Mardan in KP.

In the school in Sindh, the problem was not simply ideological. When the male administrators and faculty were removed from the room and the girls were asked, “If your teachers were female, would the community feel differently about other girls coming to school?” they were earnest in saying “yes.” Among the girls were two young female teachers – the first in the community to be educated, because their parents went against the grain and insisted on their education. But with no other educated women in the village, the rest of the teachers were men who arrived on motorbike from communities on the main road. A solution to increase female enrollment in this village would be to transport female teachers from neighboring communities.

The village discussed that is at the foot of the Kirthar Mountains in Sindh could wait a generation till enough girls fight an uphill battle against the community to be allowed to go to school, and they ultimately become female teachers to staff the school. In this time, a generation of girls will be lost because most will not be allowed to go to school. An alternative is for the school to transport educated women from the neighboring community. Unlike men, women in Pakistan cannot travel on motorbikes because it is seen as improper, so they must be provided with transportation that is seen as safe and reliable.

This is TCF's model. When TCF built its first schools, parents told the founders that they would not send girls to schools if teachers were male. The founders made a decision to hire only women as teachers and principals. TCF today may be the largest private employer of women in Pakistan, with 12,000 female faculty.



In remote communities that had never had access to a school, there were often no educated adults, let alone women, available to serve as teachers. TCF solved this by transporting women from neighboring communities. Alongside schools, TCF runs a large transportation network of up to 800 vans that pick up and drop off teachers in hundreds of locations across the country every day. The vans are GPS-tracked by a Fleet Management System that reports routes, time of travel, average speed, and average fuel consumption every morning.



Remote village at the foot of the Kirthar mountains near Dadu, Sindh.

The gender of the teacher appears to be a bigger problem for girls' schooling in Pakistan than co-education. Although primary schools in Punjab and KP were designated as girls' or boys' schools, they were almost always mixed. One boys' school in Lahore had many girls and a female teacher so that parents would be comfortable sending girls to school. When asked what the difference between a boys' and girls' school is, the head teacher responded, "A boys' school can have girls in it. But a girls' school can only have girls." But in a girls' school with boys, the head teacher said the opposite: "If it's a girls school it can have boys, but a boys school

can't have girls." She explained: "In all primary schools there are boys and girls. It might be a girls school, but you have to admit boys." She described this as government policy. Of course, the Girls' Community Schools in KP described at the start of this report are 35 percent boys. It seems that ultimately either schools cannot, or the government does not want, to turn away children. The objective of designating boys' and girls' schools may be to create more administrative jobs – there are parallel education bureaucracies that reach down to the district level.

While it will take time for Pakistan to build enough schools that are walking distance for children, especially secondary schools, hiring only women as teachers can make a crucial difference in evening out the gender gap in existing schools. Private schools in Pakistan tend to hire women, while government schools tend to hire men. According to an international education specialist in Islamabad, "In most countries in the world, the majority of teachers are women. But teaching jobs are stable [because they are government jobs] so men crowd the women out."

In KP's last government, former education minister Atif Khan introduced a policy that all new primary teachers should be women. He explained the rationale: "We heard everywhere that females can deal with kids more properly than males. And especially [when teachers are] 20- or 25-year-old boys, how can they deal with girls and boys who are four or five years old? And when we looked into it, we found that mostly in countries primary [teachers] are female. We got some resistance from men [who were concerned] that their posts [jobs] will be fewer. But ultimately the kids should benefit." Implementing the policy, however, does not appear to be a priority for the new government, and it seems likely to be forgotten.

Ishrat Husain, currently an adviser to Prime Minister Imran Khan on institutional reforms and austerity, says that Pakistan must pursue this policy. "You must encourage female teachers. They are more compassionate, they are more humane in their dealing with the children. We should have female teachers for grade one to five across the board."

These ideas occurred to those planning the shape of Pakistan's education system in 1959. According to a report by the Commission on National Education, "It has been strongly urged on the commission that the teaching of the early stages of primary education should be primarily entrusted to women... The Commission... hopes that as women teachers become available, it will be possible for them to undertake the teaching of at least the first three classes. As the number of women primary teacher grows, it should be possible for primary education to become increasingly coeducational."

This excerpt comes from a paper by Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, and Asim Khwaja on the rise of private schooling in Pakistan. They described private schools as tending to be co-educational and to hire women. They state:

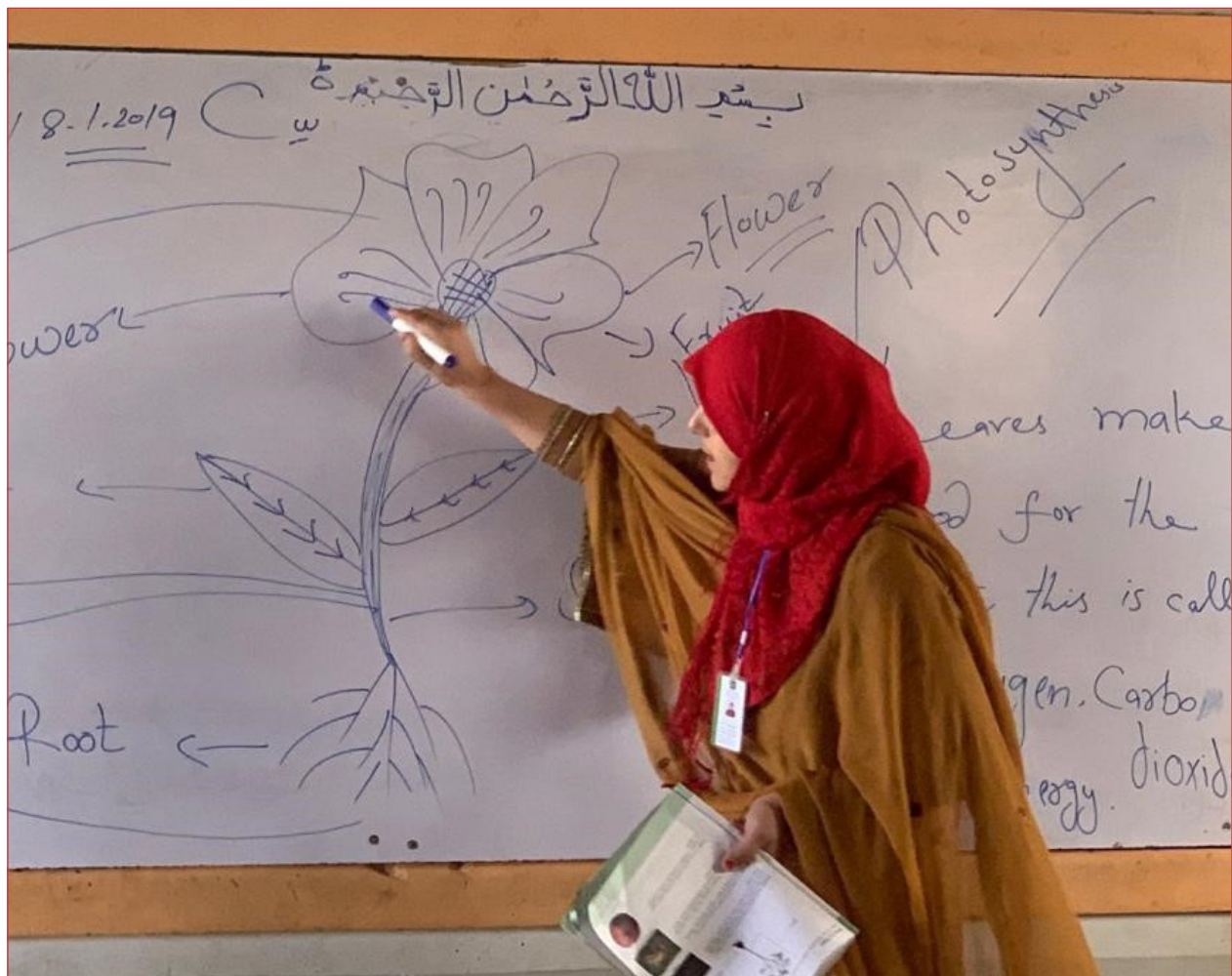
"Single-sex schools are often justified in terms of cultural beliefs that favor segregation ... [P]rivate school data however show that parents are quite willing to send their girls under a co-educational system, particularly if there is a female teacher. If there is a minimum of threshold of students before a school can be started, then waiting for a critical mass of girls to exist before a school can be started can lead to lack of educational opportunities for girls. In addition, since distance to school has shown to be a significant factor in determining enrollment (Alderman), if single-sex schools are far apart and girls have to travel alone to the schools, female enrollment may actually increase with the formation of co-educational institutions that siblings can travel to together."⁴³

At the second school where it was reported that the community opposed girls' schooling, the private school in Mardan, girls in a 10th grade science class said that the problem was purely ideological since the school was already an all-girls school with female teachers. But each girl had a different perspective on the frequency of the problem; it seemed to vary by community, by family, and even between cousins in a family. The girls came from three communities. The girls from the largest community laughed at the idea of trying to categorize practices in their area, protesting, "It's a very big community!" They estimated that most girls went to school while a few did not. In another community, which was small, one student said that "Everyone studies till 7th or 10th grade." Another girl from that community said that she was one of four girls on her street; she went to private school, two others went to government schools, and one did not go to school from the start. One girl came from the third community and said that girls tended to go to government school if they went to school, but often they did not go to school; parents would arrange their marriages and tell them to stay home and do housework. When asked how they, themselves, got so far ahead in school, they did not have an explanation. Some girls said their parents were educated, while a few pointed out that their mothers were not educated.

The reasons why parents favor girls' schooling can be surprising. A Girl Landscaping Study published by DFID⁴⁴ found that "parents acknowledged that girls should be educated, but their opinions varied on the purposes, objectives, and outcomes of this education." For some, a good education would help a girl get a better marriage proposal. For others, earning was important as it would protect the daughters' future and that of her future family. In case of hard times, it might help her earn without having to do physically difficult labor. Shahid Kardar attributes the change in norms over time to parents' wanting to secure better marriages for their daughters as well as the changing socioeconomic dynamics and the economic pressures being faced by middle- and low-income households. There is now a growing need for at least two earning members of the family to be able to afford minimum decent living standards, especially to give their children access to good quality education – which is not cheap.

This is an uncomfortable paradox: The fact that staying in school delays girls' marriages reflects a calculation by parents that the delay means a better marriage in the end. But this may not give enough credit to parents, who simply recognize that education means a better life for their daughters and standing in family and society.

The situation suggests that in the rare places where there is opposition to girls schooling, people have a diversity of views, as they would anywhere in the world. When norms are in flux, it is not surprising to find varying opinions and practices even within families. This makes it difficult to categorize attitudes even in these communities, let alone for the entire country.



Inheritance

Working on education today is challenging because of the size of the system and the way in which it has evolved in response to a series of perverse incentives. To reform the system, it is important to understand what we have inherited.

The Pakistani school system that is failing to perform is gargantuan. The United States has about 130,000 public and private schools.⁴⁵ Pakistan has 320,000 schools, of which 200,000 are government, 90,000 are private, and 30,000 are madrassas.⁴⁶ According to Murad Raas, Punjab's minister for education, the Punjab education department is the second largest in the country after the army. There are, in fact, as many teachers in Pakistan as there are military personnel. Half of at least two provincial governments, KP and Balochistan, consist of education department employees, which include not just teachers but bureaucrats and *chowkidhars* (gate-keepers) for schools.⁴⁷ As KP's former minister for education Atif Khan reflected, "The main issue in the education department is the number of employees. Almost half the provincial employees are in the education department. It's a quarter of a million people."

More problematic than the size is that the system has grown in response to perverse incentives, namely the distribution of jobs and contracts by politicians and courts who protect non-performing employees. Khan continues, "The education department is politicized throughout. Appointments, recruitment, postings, and transfers [of teachers] are made through political interference. There are a lot of issues related to politics and political parties. Members of parliament get involved because teachers are the main people who conduct elections. They [teachers] can favor you or they can disfavor you. That is a political compulsion that all parliamentarians have."

Going into the office of an education minister or secretary, it is common to see it full of supplicants concerned with jobs of their friends, relatives, or constituents. It's hard to see when in the day high officials deal with improving education quality. One current minister for education reportedly complains that he should be called the transfer & postings minister. Asia Khattak, an MPA, gave the clearest depiction of the role of politicians like herself in education as she was leaving a meeting with KP's de facto education minister Ziaullah Bangash:

"Listen, no one gets in my way. I was just talking *bakwas* (nonsense) to him. If I have a problem, no minister can stop me. I just came from threatening the health minister. I threaten ministers. Because I can. In a straightforward way, I tell them that if I call they must answer immediately. No one can stop my transfers of teachers or any kind of transfer. If they don't do it, I'll go to the chiefminister.

I just met him [Bangash] because I wanted an appointment for a delegation that's coming from Khurram. I also asked him when a DEO [District Education Officer] would be changed. He said



A multigrade one-room school in the chief minister's district in Sindh. None of the students can write a sentence. There are several schools nearby, including one that has an enrollment of three students, all of whom are absent, and Sindh Education Foundation schools that have full facilities and a classroom for every grade.

a decision will be made by this evening. I was doing a favor to get the female district officer appointed again, but on my authority. She could have gone through the regular process but I told her I'll get it done so that my power is maintained.

It makes a difference to me who the district education officer is because I am an MPA, a representative, so people bring me their work. When we behave powerfully, then our work gets done faster. For example, if someone needs a transfer then if we cover it then it happens immediately. If someone needs an appointment then it gets done immediately. Or if someone else has any problem when we call then it gets done quickly. I came today to maintain and further my own power. We are powerful. We cannot be cut down. I know my power, I can go to any director or secretary. I just went to a director and told him to get my business done and he did it.

As an MPA, these are our privileges. If we go to any minister or secretary, they will do what we say because we are public representatives. We are bringing them the work of the public. We don't have any personal business of our own.

Those who don't do our work, we remove them. We have constituencies. People bring us their work like transfers. They'll say they are posted far away and it's difficult for them so they want to be closer, so they ask to be transferred closer. Or poor people come to us and ask to be appointed, so we get people transferred and appointed. Or we tell them to do things regarding schools. If we ask, it gets done immediately, otherwise these people will get lost in the government."

Dr. Kaiser Bengali, an economist in Sindh who most recently served as an advisor to Sindh's chief minister, explains: "There is a perverse system that when general elections are held, the entire school system is brought into operation. It is the teachers who become polling officers. So if I'm a politician and elections are five years way, I will want my favorite people to be appointed teachers because then they will become election officers and help me in my election. The whole process of teacher selection has been corrupted. They are not selected on merit, but they are selected on

how they can help me in my election. So we need to give the electioneering job to someone else, not to schools.”

Khan tried to change this practice during his term as minister but he was unsuccessful. He explains: “I tried to convince the provincial government or chief minister to have separate election staff and don’t involve teachers in the election process. They said legally we can’t do this. Because the Election Commission is an autonomous body and they can assign anybody for election duty. There is no other such number of qualified people who can conduct elections. And they need a lot of people to conduct elections.”

The extent to which Pakistan’s education sector acts as an “employment agency,” as one former education secretary called it, is discussed in the author’s earlier report, “Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story.” What is more interesting, however, is how neatly international priorities to expand “access” to education have dovetailed with these domestic political imperatives to distribute jobs and contracts, leading to the growth of a system that no one really owns or can control.

An example that came up repeatedly in interviews was the proliferation of one- and two-room multigrade schools across the country in the 1990s. Several current and former senior officials held responsible the World Bank’s Social Action Programs I and II, which ran from 1993 to 2002, for enabling the haphazard construction of ill-conceived infrastructure. The current secretary of planning in Sindh (education) refers to SAP by the moniker of “one-room school.” She says: “There must have been advocacy for the idea of one-room schools. I don’t [know] how they thought of this. We spent 10 years making one-room schools, and after 10 years we realized that a one -room school is not a school at all. Children of five grades cannot sit in one room.”

Every province in Pakistan has an education foundation, which are semi-autonomous government bodies that do PPPs and non-formal education. When Naheed Shah Durrani, a former education secretary from the senior ranks of the civil service, came to head the Sindh Education Foundation in April 2015, she inherited 1,800 schools. They were predominately one- and two-room home schools and community schools. The Foundation had supported individuals and small NGOs to set up these schools in order to provide access to remote rural communities in Sindh. On paper the enrollment was 230,000 but in terms of actual presence and attendance the number was significantly lower. According to Durrani, 99 percent of these schools were primary schools and children usually dropped out after grade two. There were not enough teachers and most of them that were in schools could not teach.

Today, the schools have evolved into impressive structures. There is a classroom for every 38 students (down from 60), with vertical construction happening in Karachi’s slums in order to meet this requirement. Many schools have libraries, science labs, AV rooms, indoor play rooms, and solar panels.

SEF has done this by heavily conditioning the per child subsidy that they provide on the provision of adequate infrastructure as well as better-qualified and better-paid teachers. They have also strengthened their contracts by requiring compliance with standards for physical infrastructure, school facilities, teacher recruitment policies, teacher qualifications, teacher contracts and paying minimum wage, a strengthened quality assurance framework, requiring community engagement, and provisions for child care.

SEF improved engagements with communities by ensuring SEF field staff participate in parent teacher meetings and encouraging participation of parents in school activities. Over 60 Teach for Change fellows have also worked with SEF schools. SEF also deployed an Android-based M&E system with live reporting through a dashboard.

The subsidy is 700 rupees (\$5) per child per month for primary school and 1,200 rupees (\$8) for secondary. SEF has developed its own textbooks in partnership with Oxford University Press, which are in English, and provides workbooks, syllabus, teacher training, and conducts its own exams of students *and* teachers. The schools are free for students. Nisar Banbhan, who has been with SEF since it started and currently serves as deputy director of communication at SEF, has observed that low-cost private schools face pressure to close and lose their enrollment to SEF schools whenever the foundation enters a community.

Most remarkably, the schools, which once ended at grade five, forcing dropout in most areas since middle schools were not available, have been extended to grade 10, which is when students graduate. More than 400 out of 2,400 schools are now post-primary. Durrani had to convince the World Bank to extend the schools, because they were World Bank-supported at the time and middle school did not fit in the program design.

Today, SEF supports 2,400 schools and Adolescent Learning Centers where students' enrollments have now risen to over half a million, doubling since 2014-15. Average attendance has increased from 30 to 70 percent. Durrani says: "This is the biggest enrollment hike among government schools in Sindh in recent years, and it has happened on account of overall school improvements and not due to enrollment campaigns. Communities recognize the value in sending children to these schools which have [a] better learning environment and a comparatively more child-friendly environment."

In visits to 12 schools in Karachi and rural Sindh around Dadu and Larkana, children varied in their ability to read. In many classrooms, children could not read. In others, they could. There were also a range of methods being used for literacy instruction from drilling to PRP methods to a teacher who developed her own phonetic method and materials. But Durrani admits that a lot of work on quality of education remains to be done. "Many of the improvements to infrastructure and student-teacher ratio[s], adding secondary classes and ECE, have been recent so it has been a long road to just fix the form of schooling. When I came to SEF many years ago, every school was multigrade." She points out that the quality of textbooks has been improved with active engagement with OUP, and these have been upscaled and improved.



The establishment of one- and two-room schools actually pre-dated SAP and may have originated with the Pakistani government. Fazalullah Qureshi, who joined the civil service in 1966 and served as chief economist and secretary of the Planning & Development Department of Sindh, explains that the one- or two-room school was the Pakistani government's solution to give access to schooling to scattered and rural populations in this time period.

"In many settlements it was difficult to find even 20 kids in a place, so the solution was either to not have a school or to start with a one- or two-room school and then expand it. Whatever one- and two-room schools we started, the priority was that the school will be given to the person who will provide land. The reason for one- and two-room schools was we had a very scattered population, so it was very difficult to give a five-room school. We thought we should start small. If there was any rationale then it was this."

School construction could not, however, escape politics. "We started it but we are still repenting for it," says Qureshi. He points to the bulging budgets for roads since 1971 as an indication of political interest in how budgets were allocated and spent. The "Transport and Communication" budgets for roads increase exponentially every year, are usually overspent, and appear to borrow from other areas like education, which are slightly underspent. "Every MPA and everybody wants roads. This priority of [the] roads sector still continues today," he says.

In the early 1980s, military dictator Zia ul-Haq directed discretionary budgets for development through an un-elected *shura*. In 1985, Zia ul Haq's prime minister, Muhammad Junejo, announced a five-point program that promised "the elimination of illiteracy" alongside "the establishment of a strong Islamic democratic system; continuation of a strong national defense and a nonaligned foreign policy; promotion of an equitable economic system; and a crusade against bribery, injustice, and corruption."⁴⁸

In this period, the education budget started to overtake "Transport and Communication," but "Rural Development" also ballooned, which was funding roads as well. Qureshi says "that was the first time money [for social sectors] was doled out through politicians." Qureshi, as an officer in the planning ministry, was in charge of the development budget, which came through the education ministry and district officials on direction from politicians who were allocated construction funds and jobs. He says, "The locations for schools were not selected on merit or any criteria. One criteria was that within one kilometer there must be 50 kids, but no one followed that criteria. Around basic health centers, there had to be a certain amount of population. Those models were on paper but they were not strictly followed... the *shura* made one school and the Five-Point Program made another and probably both became *godowns* [warehouses for animals, grains, or used as a quasi-residence]."

According to Kardar, the problem was that the government asked communities to donate land instead of buying it, but land in accessible areas was expensive. Those who donated got things in return.

"The policy was very simple: thou shall build schools on government land. But there was no government land. Government land would only be in remote places. Where government land existed in more approachable areas [for children], schools had already been built...."

"That obviously meant that the location was driven by two considerations, [and] particularly in Sindh and Balochistan. The landlord would suggest a place and the only reason he was giving

land was it would be built as his rest house to entertain guests and constituents. He would kick out the schoolteacher and the children [if there were any]. There were no schools operating. Not only did public money build his rest house, but he also got two positions, one of a teacher and the other of a chowkidhar. The two of them were his [personal] employees paid for by the state. It was a perfect arrangement.”

“The worst examples were in Sindh and Balochistan. In Sindh, the buildings served as *autaks* and in Punjab the *Deras* of the landlords.”

Parliamentarians or members of the national assembly (MNAs) were often the landlords who benefited. Kardar says, “Political bribes enabled skimming off of money by the MNA as he selected the contractor. ‘School buildings’ were constructed on land provided by the same MNA, which got used as his rest house. His nominees were inducted as teachers, sweepers, and chowkidars paid from the public purse. In several cases, they did not even operate as schools.”

Another version of this was seen in the mountains of KP, where the person who donated land was given a government job for life as a chowkidar. In a case seen by the author, the schools no longer exist because they were destroyed by the 2005 earthquake,⁴⁹ but the landlords continue to receive government salaries as chowkidars.

Kardar also details the political economy around teaching jobs. “Each politician was allocated five positions for [teachers]. So he would appoint five people from his constituency who, say, had the backing of 1,000 votes because they belonged to a certain caste or had the backing of a certain political leader. And of course they had to pay. The standard rate ... was 100,000 rupees at that time. The rate of return was higher than if I invested in a financial instrument. And thanks to the lack of technology, a teacher could be appointed in five different schools [but show up in none].”

It is in this context that one sees the expansion of schools and teachers in the late 1980s and over the 1990s. Sindh data shows a doubling in the number of schools, from 15,000 in 1987-88 to 33,000 in 1994. The largest jump is between 1989 and 1991, when schools jumped from 17,000 to nearly 24,000. The number of teachers also doubled in this period, from 50,000 to 100,000, with about 25,000 teachers hired between 1989 and 1991 alone.

With the proliferation of schools came a demand for teachers, which politicians were happy to fulfill. The problem was that teachers were given permanent government jobs, so they could not be held accountable for showing up to school. It was, and many say it still is, impossible to fire a teacher. According to Kardar, “Historically, it was easier to dissolve governments in this country than to dismiss government servants let alone someone who never turns up for duty or someone who turns up for duty but never provides the service.” As minister for education in the late 1990s, Anita Ghulam Ali threatened to publish the names of missing teachers in the newspaper, announcing that they would be fired, but the move was blocked, presumably by her political party. As late as 2005, the teacher absentee rate in Punjab was 40 percent. Ministries tried hiring teachers on contract, but when their contracts ended, the teachers went to the courts, which ordered that they must be converted to permanent government employees. Even today, the courts are “regularizing” teachers who were at any point hired on temporary contracts into permanent government employees with pensions, even if their schools or the programs they were hired for no longer exist.



"I come to school every day because of biometric verification." But there are no students or furniture at this school in Sehwan, Sindh, which is Chief Minister Murad Shah's district. The register shows three students who come to the school occasionally – they live on the other side of the school wall. The reason for low enrollment is that "there are too many schools." One and a half kilometers away is another two-room boys' primary school where two 5th graders have survived, but they cannot write simple Sindhi sentences.

SAP simply continued what Pakistan had already started with a shared justification of creating access to school. "Social Action Programme: Pakistan: A Review of Progress," a conference paper in the World Bank's archives, describes how funding for schools and teachers was channeled through local politicians:

"Another phenomena which coincided with SAP was the heavy politicization of development programme during the 1990s. This resulted in weak management and poor governance in public sector service delivery, particularly in the social sectors. Each of the successive governments introduced politically motivated development programmes implemented through elected representatives. Under these programmes, elected members of the national and provincial assemblies were provided annual grant[s] by the government to implement new schemes in their constituencies. The criteria and procedures followed for selection of these schemes were often in variance with those under SAP. This policy adversely affected the implementation of SAP, [and] particularly the selection of sites for new schools or RWSS schemes, recruitment of staff, and procurement of goods and civil works."⁵⁰

SAP was described as "the largest program of its kind, not just in Pakistan but in the region." But most of the money came from the government of Pakistan. SAP I and II totaled \$14 billion in value. Of that, only \$3 billion came from donors. The donors' minority contribution was used to get the Pakistani government to increase its allocations in the social sectors, including education. But, as happens in aid programs with Pakistan today, the driving interest in the program came from the finance ministry, which needed \$3 billion, even as a World Bank loan, to pay off previous debts, and politicians who were able to channel the \$14 billion to their constituencies as jobs, construction, and contracts to help secure re-election.⁵¹

SAP I and SAP II were ultimately considered failed programs. The World Bank's evaluation of the program, called Implementation Completion and Results report (ICR), gave SAP II the following ratings:

Outcome:	Unsatisfactory
Sustainability:	Unlikely
Institutional Development Impact:	Negligible
Bank Performance:	Unsatisfactory
Borrower Performance:	Unsatisfactory

The evaluation echoes what still happens in the best of circumstances today: Technical experts or other well-meaning individuals study the political realities on the ground and are sufficiently warned by local leaders, but they somehow fail to design around them, perhaps driven by their own agendas that are determined in foreign capitals.⁵² The report reads: "The Bank team assisting in project preparation demonstrated solid understanding and expertise of, and insight into, both sectoral and cross-sectoral issues. However, the breadth of the programme, the number of actions, innovations, and new mechanisms and institutional arrangements proposed for implementation during the project period made the project design complex and daunting, especially in view of limited provincial capacities and uncertain political commitment. To this extent, it was unfortunate that the concerns expressed by the provincial governments at the conclusion of SAP I about the complexity of a multi-sector, multi-province project were not adequately factored in the design of SAP II."

In sum, SAP was entirely technical, overlooking the role that compelling and coherent local leadership plays in driving change. But the nature of leadership entirely shaped the outcomes of SAP, the consequences of which Pakistan is still trying to undo today. The expansion of schools and teaching jobs for motives other than education may have fueled drop-outs and the mushrooming of the low-cost private schools that now cater to low-income households.⁵³

Not enough has changed today. In February 2019, the current PTI government quietly approved a 24 billion rupee SDG Achievement Program that would be channeled through MNAs for local development schemes recommended by them. According to an unnamed senior official quoted in the Pakistani press, the fund was approved "keeping in view [the] thin majority enjoyed by the PTI in the National Assembly..."⁵⁴

Pakistan has shifted to merit-based hiring through tests to limit nepotism in teacher hiring. This is a big success for reform, but interviewees questioned its impact. According to Bengali, the National Testing Service (NTS) exam doesn't disrupt previous practices because politicians simply appoint those who have passed the NTS. "It is not that those they want to appoint are dumb. They will appoint intelligent people who have passed the NTS, but they are loyalists. They have no intention to teach. They don't even have an inclination to teach." The visa system also co-exists with the NTS: without regular monitoring that includes biometric verification, teachers can also still subcontract their jobs because their salaries are much higher than the market.

Kardar agrees that "the relative intake has improved. The new ones certainly have better credentials in terms of educational qualifications." But the existing stock of teachers is much bigger in size. The culture of the public sector is one where jobs are permanent and performance is optional. The old stock, which is set in its ways, is retiring too slowly. "The attrition rate in the Punjab government is barely 1.7 percent per year. By the time you replace them, the teachers who are new today will

have imbibed their culture.” Until that happens, the “old ones are still located somewhere, unable to carry out simple arithmetic operations.”

In December 2018, the Sindh government requested a closure of the World Bank’s second Sindh reform program due to delays in disbursement. This effectively cancelled a remaining \$38 million, after \$323 million had already been disbursed. The decision followed reports about the “dismal results of the four-year programme.”⁵⁵ It is baffling that Pakistan takes development loans so liberally, despite the history of failure. As advisor to the chief minister for planning and development in 2010, Bengali opposed an education sector loan to Sindh, predicting it would fail. But it was accepted after he left. He says:

“The World Bank is a shop that wants to sell its loans. They’ll give you a loan for anything... You can build very good schools but if the teachers and students don’t show up what is the World Bank going to do about it? If the state is not committed to something, you can’t make them do it. The state, of course, they think the World Bank is good, let them come with the money, we’ll have nice offices and a few extra cars and we’ll get a trip to Washington and so on and so forth, which is what they did.

We have a huge debt burden for debt that has not gone into anything. The education loans are all program loans to improve the quality of education. You don’t need that. There was a loan that Pakistan took from the ADB to improve the quality of justice. Why does justice need money, let alone foreign money? So they took that money and painted the court houses, gave them better furniture, gave them better stationary, gave cars to district court judges, but the quality of justice remained the same. How can you improve that by a foreign loan?

And how do you re-pay that money? If I take a loan to spend lavishly on my daughter’s wedding, once everyone has danced and dined and gone away, then I have to repay the loan. Where will I repay the loan from? [I do it] by selling my existing asset, so I’m poorer than before. For the last 20 years, the WB has been giving program loans, no assets are being created, no new income sources are being created, and this is what’s led to the debt crisis.”

The Courts

The courts in Pakistan regularly convert teachers, drivers, and office staff hired on contract to permanent government employees with pensions, even if the programs or schools they were hired for no longer exist, and even if they have no job to do. According to Kardar, Shahbaz Sharif did this for the first time in 2008. Since then, courts are simply implementing the precedent, based on the principle that those hired as contract workers are performing the same functions as the regular, permanent employees. This satisfies a political imperative but also reflects the culture of the public sector.

“The problem is not just politics but also culture,” explained Umbreen Arif, who was a World Bank education specialist for Sindh and Balochistan when she spoke to the author in 2016. “Pakistan is considered a welfare state when it comes to government salaries. Once you have the job you will continue to get the monthly ‘stipend’ whether you perform or not.”

This practice of regularization creates huge permanent public liabilities for no public purpose. It also debilitates the culture of the public sector, which offers permanent jobs with minimal performance requirements rewarded by above-market salaries. People around the world would

consider these the terms of a dream job, and hence the aspiration of most Pakistanis is to get a job in the public sector.

It is a hazard whenever governments hire directly, which is why the Punjab and Sindh Education Foundations, which are public institutions, let their partners hire teachers instead of hiring directly. To disrupt this practice, Kardar suggests that budgets be given to communities so that they hire instead of the government. Ishrat Husain suggests that if District Education Authorities are established as autonomous bodies, then they can specify in the law the kind of new employees they would like to hire – regular, fixed contract, or open-ended contract with varying compensation packages. The courts would therefore not be able to interfere unless there is a blatant violation of the law. However, Kardar is of the view that adopting this approach will not change the culture governing public sector employment.

Pakistan must figure out a way to stop this practice, but any effort to do so will generate massive protests and even violence by education department employees, who constitute half of provincial governments. This kind of a move by an elected government against its elections workers is a no-go. This is how tightly rigged the education system has become in pitting political and public interests against each other, leading to a stunning wastage in resources. But if there is hope for a solution, it must start with shining a light on the problem. The public should know what is happening so that the status quo also becomes a political liability.

Repeating History

Reflecting on the last few decades of reforms in her office, Sindh's Secretary for Planning and Development Shireen Mustafa reflects: "The tragedy of education is the tragedy of the way we think about it. We think change is linear, but it doesn't work this way in real life. We think first we'll enroll kids, then we'll make bathrooms, then we'll force the teacher to show up, then suddenly we realize the teacher can't teach, then we'll fix her training, then we realize that learning levels matter so we start talking about quality education. It doesn't make sense to talk about education and quality as two different things. Education without quality is not education."

Shahid Kardar makes an almost identical comment describing how donors' and experts' solutions have traveled over decades. "First we didn't have enough schools, then it was oh, we don't have enough classrooms, then we don't have enough toilets, then in the case of girls we don't have enough boundary walls. Then came non-salary budgets. Post-SAP the discussion is about missing facilities – that discussion phrased that way came later. All of these things came as a sequence, never as a package."

It was also disconnected from how children and parents – referred to presumptuously as 'beneficiaries' - experience the problem that billions are spent on solving. "They were never hearing what the customer is saying," continues Kardar. "Presence was always a major issue while donors were spending time creating infrastructure, which frankly never made sense [because teachers were absent]. When we made classrooms, children still didn't come. Then we made boundary walls and children didn't come. We made toilets, but we forgot they didn't have toilets in their homes anyway, they were going out in the fields. Governance came much later as part of a recognition that that was an issue. That was always *the* issue. We built schools, everyone was interested in school, but no one was asking the obvious question of what is going on here [in the school, in terms of teacher absence and quality]."

Ahmad Ali, Research Fellow at I-SAPS, describes a scene of “traveling reforms” and “development debris.” According to Ali Cheema at the Economics Department at LUMS and a former Rhodes Scholar, “Any picture that you take over the last 18 years, it seems to me that except for some improvement in net enrollment which has also plateaued, nothing much has moved. You’ve done reform after reform after reform after reform, no tangible indicator has actually moved. It’s not just in the government sector. Even in elite private schools there is a real crisis of learning. Even O level and A levels – it’s a rote based system which is anti-thinking and anti-learning.”

Imagine if history had been different. Pakistan could have figured out how to deliver education and then set up fully functional infrastructure, staffed them based on teaching criteria, and then enrolled children in them. This might have meant a slower expansion in the beginning, accepting that children would be out of school until a functioning system could meet them, and saying “no” to donors. Today, even if the education system were smaller, it would be fully functional and expanding at a faster rate every year. The country would also have fewer loans to pay back. This kind of local ownership could put donor resources to good use. This approach is quality and then access.

Instead, expansion is the flightpath that Pakistan is on, without a reckoning of the mess that donors and the country, working together, have created in the name of access. Access first then education. Children must enroll and then wait for years while the country figures out how to make schools meet minimum standards of safety, enable children to learn to read, or at least engage children’s cognitive abilities. But what is really happening is that children are exiting the system by dropping out or going to private schools while the country waits for international experts to tell them how to deliver quality and give them budgetary support to cooperate. In the meantime, a system motivated by the exchange of personal favors and staffed by permanent employees who answer only to politicians is further entrenched. Someday, when the world figures out how to deliver quality, the generation that inherits the problem will find that it has grown to twice the size that it is today.

High-quality education cannot be achieved immediately. But a sincere commitment to deliver education to a minimum standard must precede putting children in school. The state of schools today does not suggest that Pakistan is there yet.

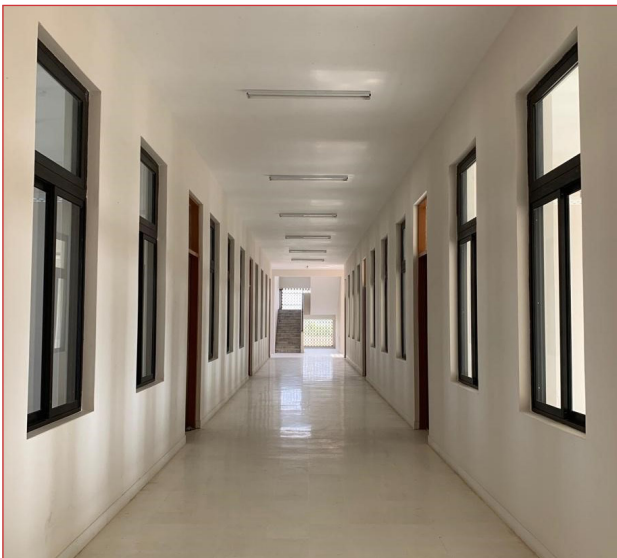
Ignorance

It is in our ignorance that public resources are wasted.



This brick school was built by USAID in interior Sindh as a response to the 2010 floods. When visited in January 2018, it had been completed but closed for two years. It had no furniture.

The building next to it is the five-room government school that students are using until they are allowed to use the new school.



This USAID-built school replaced a 7-room school that was demolished after its roof caved in due to 2010 flood damage.

There is a lock on the door of the school. The classrooms are locked, but the bare, unfurnished rooms are visible through the classroom windows shown here.

According to the head teacher, they are waiting for permission to use the building when the schools were handed over to the private management under a new PPP policy that USAID helped the government develop.

As of January 2019, 47 out of 118 schools had been completed. Forty-three have been transferred to private management.



Above: The classrooms are so packed that children sit on a table at the back. The school has an enrollment of 700 students for five classrooms. Half of the enrollment is girls. 380 students are present today. The policy is that there should not be more than 40 students per classroom.

Right: A boy sits in a window because there is no other space to sit in the classroom.

“We are in a lot of pain because [of] the lack of space,” says the school’s head teacher.





Above: A classroom in the five-room government school that is being used until the new USAID-supported building next door is opened. When we entered the school's gate, students and teachers were outside. They rushed into their classrooms.

Left: This is the junkyard left behind on the school grounds by the contractor who built the schools.

Teachers hang around outside because there are too many of them for five classrooms. The school has 20 teachers. Based on the student strength of 700, they have 10 vacant posts for teachers that can be filled.

White Elephants

Concrete skeletons litter northern Pakistan — monuments to the government’s failure to rebuild thousands of schools destroyed by a massive 2005 earthquake. About 67 percent of the schools in the region were destroyed or damaged by the calamity.



Only around half of the schools have been rebuilt, which numbered “no less than 6,000,” according to early estimates.

Pakistan had the money for the job, thanks to generous international assistance, but the effort took years to mobilize. Building schools in remote mountain communities was more complex than anticipated. By 2009, funding dried up as then-President Asif Ali Zardari began diverting funds to other government projects. Contractors were told to de-mobilize because they could not be paid. Sites like this have experienced stop-and-go construction since then, while children study in makeshift spaces – a mosque and a rented porch.

The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), which is in charge of rebuilding the schools, was due to be disbanded after three years in 2009. ERRA also became redundant when the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was set up. But when ERRA's chairman wrote to then-Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani to request that ERRA be closed as planned, the prime minister wrote back saying "ERRA was doing a great job and should continue working."

Curiously, the government that did not want to fund ERRA made it permanent through an act of parliament.

According to a former senior official at ERRA, it is a "white elephant" that serves as a parking spot for retired military officials. "They are not interested in performing but in huge perks like high salaries, SUVs, utility bills paid by the government, and servants at home," he says.

In 2013, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wrote to ERRA stating that he "has been pleased to approve, in principle, the winding up of ERRA." But the letter was moot. Only parliament can abolish ERRA now.

ERRA has an estimated 700 employees and occupies 44 acres of land in Islamabad.

The author wrote about the saga of ERRA in more detail back in 2017.⁵⁶

A school without a roof.



Solutions

The author's earlier report, "Pakistan's Education Crisis: The Real Story" (and an associated TedXLahore talk) indicted elites in Pakistan for a lack of interest in education, based on the views of Haris Gazdar and Faisal Bari. They described how the achievement of public education anywhere in the world has come about thanks to self-interested elites or leaders who pursue it to build national cohesion. As those on the political left complain, schools are factories to manufacture citizens. This has also played out in Pakistan. The extent to which religion has been embedded in the curriculum and yet schools fail to deliver education reflects the interests of those with power to shape the system. Bari also pointed out that what sets Pakistan apart from the United States, Turkey, or China is that elites are emigrating; and progressive elites do not see their future tied to the 10-year-old boy who sells pens on the street or the children of house help who cannot read despite years in low-cost private schools.

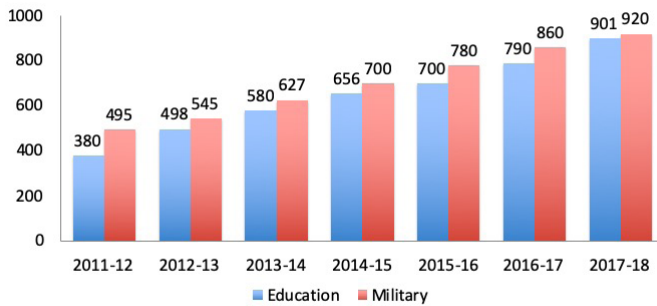
In response to that earlier report, many people approached the author stating that they had money, connections, or networks to leverage. How could the research be actionable? What could they do? So the intention of writing this paper was to set out some solutions.

First, reform starts with a leader, in this case Imran Khan, who (1) lays out a clear and compelling vision for the pursuit of public education that resonates with those who experience it (not donors in Washington or London); this provides ownership, coherence, direction, and inspiration to reform, (2) puts people in charge who have the right incentives for being involved in education (not money, nepotism, or a promotion) and are empowered by him to prioritize that vision over day-to-day political pressure that can be coming from people connected to him, and (3) understands what change looks like at the classroom level.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who led education reforms in the UK working with Sir Michael Barber – someone whose views have been incorporated into reforms in Pakistan – lays out a similar and simple recipe: purpose, prioritization, policy, and personnel.⁵⁷

The initiative taken by the Punjab and federal ministers to gather civil society experts to shape an agenda for reform is a very good step. They have identified priorities that previous governments missed, such as the need to solve for older out-of-school children and the importance of language, but the effect needs to be driven by a unifying vision that comes from the top. More people will be willing to consider controversial aspects of their agendas, like moving to Urdu-medium, if Imran Khan articulates why and tries to pull the nation behind it.⁵⁸ A segment of the English-speaking elite will probably never agree, but they are leaving anyway. More importantly, the public that the public education system serves must understand how change is envisioned and feel like they can be part of the conversation as people who experience it. The current conversation

Education budgets in Pakistan rival the official defense budget.



The Stimson Center estimates that the military spends another 9% of its budget on the nuclear program. Economist Sakib Sherani estimated the actual 2012-13 military budget to be 679 billion (net after foreign aid receipts) compared to an official 545 billion. Pensions are not included here in either the education or defense budgets.

that happens in technical circles, mediated through data wars, has a place – but it is secondary to an inclusive conversation on terms that the majority can understand.

In Pakistan, data has displaced leadership; instead it should guide how leaders identify and own priorities and build consensus with the public. Portugal's trajectory since 2000 is starkly different from Pakistan's story. In Portugal, just one strong data set from the globally recognized Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – around 80 countries participate in it – was sufficient to drive prioritization and

consensus-building. In his comments at the Global Education and Skills Forum (GESF) in Dubai, Portuguese Secretary of State for Education João Costa articulated classroom-level reforms that politicians and governance experts in Pakistan would consign to a level of technical expertise that they shouldn't need to be bothered with:

“The first participation in 2000 was a wake-up call. We had already identified some problems but it was very clear that we were way below [the] OECD average with very specific problems on literacy and mathematics. The data that PISA provides was used as a motivation for the country to find some consensus on some areas of investment in education. To give you four examples of things we've done: there was [a] huge program on early language teaching and early mathematics teaching, a program that invested [in] teacher training – in classroom training – and the production of pedagogical resources [which were] school materials to help the teachers to teach better.”

After leadership, the solutions have to do with how we define the problem. At least in Pakistan, development efforts seem to fail because donors mis-define the problem they want to solve; its identification is driven by headlines in foreign capitals. The Western imagination is also slow to catch up with change in developing countries, such as regarding girls education. An example is that while DFID was funding campaigns to double the budget for education and Michelle Obama was asking Maryam Sharif, the former prime minister's daughter, to spend more on education, nobody noticed that Pakistan had doubled the budget many times but nothing changed. The budget has gone up by 18 percent every year since 2001, according to the World Bank and to the author's analysis. Education budgets in Pakistan now rival the military budget. The fact that no one noticed demonstrates the power of Western narratives in shaping even how local elites define problems. Of course, many of these local elites are contracted to carry out donor programs that are underpinned by those narratives; those who would want to challenge them have little space to do so.

Besides the budget, what most people know about education is related to girls' education, out-of-school children (who are imagined to be perpetually five years old), extremism in the curriculum, and, for Pakistani elites, the fees that high-end private schools charge. This report has sought to demonstrate why the central challenges in education are rooted elsewhere.

Public discourse on education in Pakistan should be anchored on the following:

1. Among children in primary school, if there is one “education emergency,” then it is not the 5 million out-of-school children, but rather the 17 million children who are in school and learning nothing.
2. Pakistan needs one reliable measure for the ability of children in school to read with comprehension that can be compared on a year-to-year basis. Currently, children are being excessively tested. The presence of so many tests, each testing different things with low levels of reliability (admitted within many program evaluations or because children who cannot read are being tested with written tests and in languages they do not know), is impeding clarity on the problem.
3. The crisis of out-of-school children is a crisis of youth aged 10 to 16. Of Pakistan’s now-23 million broken promises, 18 million belong to this age group and they present a very different problem from the primary-aged children that have been the focus of this report (of which there are 5 million). Pakistan needs a large-scale accelerated or alternative education program that will provide basic literacy and numeracy, and help prepare those who want to go back to school to catch up on what they’ve missed and provide vocational skills to those who do not want to go back to school. A lot of this population will not be interested in school, especially given what school has to offer, but Pakistan needs to catch them before they become illiterate adults. Literacy and numeracy programs should be within walking distance and staffed by women so that girls will enroll. Special attention should be given to boys – they may be working, and therefore harder to attract.
4. The skill of reading must be taught (a) in school, (b) through large-scale alternative education programs for older out-of-school children where schools do not function, and (c) through adult literacy programs. The illiterate adults Pakistan has today were once children that the system failed. The formal school curriculum for grade one onward is very difficult to change, but both pre-primary, where 84 percent of children enroll, and non-formal education are opportunities to introduce a simpler curriculum focused on reading as a skill or on laying foundations for reading and language.
5. The curriculum needs to be simplified and brought down to the level of the child. For example, the schooling system officially starts in grade one. It is unrealistic to expect that children can read full passages from the day they start school, especially since most of them come from illiterate households. Later, new words, whether in Urdu or English, should be recognized as new vocabulary rather than thrown into text to be memorized. Right now, the content of textbooks does not follow any logical sequence. Any space for content, especially in language subjects, is used for ideological content using advanced vocabulary. USAID’s Pakistan Reading Program has gotten a start on this by getting governments to revise their language textbooks with their content, but sustained attention is needed from civil society to determine the extent to which content has been modified, what further improvements are needed, and how much change is occurring in classroom practices. The value of what PRP has achieved can be lost or reversed if civil society does not pay attention.
6. Early grade and primary education must embrace the mother tongue, with textbooks in those languages, because it is what many teachers and children are speaking anyway. This

is necessary for cognitive development and makes it easier to learn foreign languages later on. English can be taught as a third or fourth language, but curriculums should be realistic, i.e. in most places, it will not be possible to find English-speaking adults as teachers.

7. Boys matter, and are at risk of being left behind. Pakistan is not a country that offers education to boys and not girls. Right now, the system is not working for children and neglecting boys will create social problems in the next generation. That said, the gender gap is not as wide as people imagine it is. Where the gender gap is wide, the problem tends to be with the nature of the supply. The highest priority should be given to having all-female teachers. This is more important than all-girls schools – there appears to be more tolerance for co-ed schooling than people think given that many girls and boys schools are co-ed, and especially at the primary level. On the demand side, norms have changed and are changing. Even while that happens, demand outstrips supply.
8. Equity is key. In Pakistan, parents of children in high-end private schools have gotten the Supreme Court and politicians to limit the fees that schools can charge them. It is significant that the hottest issue in education in Pakistan that has galvanized the most privileged centers on their right to education. If Pakistani elites believed in equity, then this fight would have been about the least privileged: as part of the Right to Education acts, private schools in Pakistan are required to give 10 percent of their seats for free to disadvantaged children. This would have been a more just distribution of private school profits, and it would have put a dent in the class system for the next generation. India heavily debated this law, where the percentage is 25 percent. In Pakistan, nobody knows it exists. When raised in interviews, most people, including ministers, opposed the idea of disadvantaged children going to school alongside elite children, believing that they could not co-exist and that this would ultimately be psychologically damaging to the lower-class children. Of course, progress is only possible if school administrators, urged by wealthier parents, teach and protect values of equality and tolerance regardless of background in school. But this has not been seen as an issue of social values that could be changed through collective action, or one that is important for national cohesion. In Pakistan, universities have programs to take in the least privileged on merit and with full scholarships; similar programs need to be extended to early years education where there is an opportunity to create equal opportunity and children's attitudes towards difference are being formed. It is hard to see how universal quality public education can be achieved based on the premise of separate but equal.
9. Higher education should embrace multilingualism. The current insistence on English excludes the majority, despite their level of intelligence, and fuels plagiarism because students and professors cannot produce original scholarship in English. There is an insistence on English for science, but allowing students to express themselves in the language they know will improve the quality of scholarship in the social sciences. These are potential leaders and thinkers that Pakistan needs; instead they are being stunted. Figuring out how to translate texts and papers is possible, and the demand for Urdu and other Pakistani languages might make it more available internationally (as it is for German, Turkish, and Arabic).
10. Higher secondary education (grades 11 and 12) and degree colleges (two-year programs for years 13 and 14) need the kind of attention that has been given to primary school and university. High school in Pakistan ends with grade 10 (matric). Students then have to go

to “intermediate” institutions for grade 11 and 12 in order to apply to university. Many fall off in these years because public institutions are few and far between, and classes are often not held because teachers and students don’t show up. Instead, children enroll but take private tutoring to pass exams, which is expensive. According to Ishrat Husain, “No one has focused on college [intermediate] education and that is a complete area of neglect and disaster. It’s a critical period of a young man or woman’s life that has gone completely sterile. Civil servants used to come from government colleges, but now they [students from government colleges] can’t compete.”

The education system is tightly rigged against children. On governance, the following reforms are needed.

11. Teachers must be taken out of elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan needs to figure out a different work force. Elections for national and provincial assemblies could be staggered or held on different days to reduce the volume of polling agents needed at one time.
12. The courts must stop converting teachers and staff hired on contracts (who might have no job to do because their contracts have ended) into permanent government employees with pensions because there is a belief that the state owes people jobs. This feeds and reflects a culture of corruption, through non-performance, in the public education system.
13. Teachers should be all female and primary schools should be co-educational to increase access for all children *and* narrow the gender gap. This is key in KP and FATA, where the government and donors are expanding girls’ primary schools. Even in rural FATA, half of private schools are co-educational.⁵⁹
14. Teachers should be restricted to working in the areas they are hired from – preferably within walking distance to schools, or areas accessible by local transport if teachers are not available in the immediate community.⁶⁰ This recommendation dates back to 1947. “It is specially important that provincial State Governments should, despite well-known obstacles, undertake a special drive for encouraging qualified women to take to the teaching profession. I suggest that their recruitment should be made on local basis so that after training they could be posted to the schools of the area to which they belong.”⁶¹
15. The power over posting and transferring teachers should be taken away from the education secretary and politicians. It can be devolved to district education authorities or lower.
16. To decentralize the system, district education authorities, hired from the private sector on contracts and on merit, should have the highest decision-making powers, not the central bureaucracy in cities.⁶²

Even as you read this report, Pakistan’s education system continues to grow. Tens of thousands of teachers are hired every year, schools are always under construction, and hundreds of spaces will be designated as non-formal schools staffed by contract employees who will ultimately go to the courts and be converted to a permanent government employee with a pension. The Pakistani government also continues to establish one- and two-room schools to meet targets of increasing access set by reform programs that grant the government budget support, even though the government’s budget dwarfs what is being provided by donors.

In this process, the poor are heavily taxed – once through regressive sales taxes that finance education departments to the point that they may be the largest civilian institutions in the country and pay teachers’ salaries that are far above market rates; and then again when parents devote a significant proportion of their income to low-cost private schools because government schools do not meet minimum standards of performance. The government ends up spending thousands of rupees (tens of dollars) per child per month while parents pay in the hundreds (a few dollars) for functional private schools. And yet, the international community and elites, neither of whom have a real stake in the public system, have made “spend more” the center of advocacy.

Reading is the minimum that schooling must achieve. Without it, the burden of proof is on political leaders to explain why lower- and middle-class Pakistanis are being double-taxed.

The author’s view coincides with that of Shahid Kardar:

“A key question left unanswered relates to the efficiency of this expenditure. That’s what is confusing about the debate in this country, the common, unending refrain for more funding, budgetary allocations, for the sector. Are we getting a fair return on the money that we are spending right now? In my opinion, given the poor return on these investments, it’s good we are not spending more. If this is what you’re going to get as a result or an outcome, I’m glad we are not wasting scarce resources through this mechanism and using this poorly functioning institutional structure. . . . You are providing a service that the customer doesn’t want. They do not want what is on offer. We have to recognize that parents are voting with their feet, preferring private schools for their children. And today more than 40 percent of the students are enrolled in private schools, the majority of which are of the low-cost variety.”

Anyone who works on education should be required to study the history of the net failure of foreign-funded reforms. International actors, both Western and Islamic countries, have been involved in Pakistan’s education policy and programs almost from the start. UNDP, UNESCO, and UNICEF funded education innovation in the 1970s.⁶³ Reforms that we assume we have thought of for the first time, such as early childhood education or making teachers female, have occurred in program proposals and reports describing failure since the 1980s. When repetitively funded by loans, this failure comes at a cost of indebting Pakistan.

Reform is possible. Universal public literacy is not rocket science; schools and communities have been teaching children to read for centuries and that too without foreign assistance. But literacy and, beyond that, education, will not be achieved as the sum of technical solutions. It also cannot be what is left after we multiply donor and local government interests to distribute contracts and jobs and report enough success to foreign capitals to reincarnate reform programs into perpetuity. The incentives that drive expenditure must be factored into the design of reform efforts.

It is ultimately the confluence of narratives between leadership and the public that can overcome how vested interests dominate the system. According to Tony Blair, “Change happens when leaders set out a vision and have the executive capability of seeing it through, when change comes from below, when people agitate for change, and the best hope of getting change is when the leadership and the people are marching in step together.”

Or in the words of Atif Khan, describing his term as KP’s education minister between 2013 and 2018, “A pace was set for reforms. People had started to expect things. So people understood

they are serious and they will get things done. They will move things forward. Even if we resist it won't make much of a difference."

Pakistan needs dogged local leadership that prioritizes education enough to understand it. This might not be forthcoming from political leaders, but it can come in response to popular consensus amongst elites. Furthering that consensus is the purpose of this report. This is the only way to shatter Pakistan's fossilized, white elephantine education system and replace it with a new and reformed model for education – one that finally enables children to read and learn, teachers to teach, and Pakistan to become a better educated and more prosperous place.

Endnotes

- 1 This is the gross enrollment rate for pre-primary/katchi reported in the Pakistan Education Statistics for 2016-17. A net enrollment rate for this age group is not reported.
- 2 Asad Zia, "Community School Students Perform Better Than Schools," *The Express Tribune*, July 23, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1764449/1-community-school-students-perform-better-schools/>.
- 3 By the time this report was published, it was discovered that donor funding had concluded and the government authority in charge of the schools, KP's Elementary and Secondary Education Foundation, had signed a 60 million rupee contract to fund the program directly. The author served as a civil society member on the board at the time. The Secretary of Education described how this came to the full board's knowledge in a press conference. "The MD said, 'we have a project whose budget is finished and it was completed. I have continued that program and put 56 lakh of the government's money towards it. Board approval is required for this. The money was moved between budget heads without authorization and the MD requested ex-post facto approval. The board denied the request.'" See Arshad Khan, "Live Stream: Advisor To CM On E&SE Zia Ullah Khan Bangash Press Conference On Elementary and Secondary Education Foundation. Peshawar," March 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSY9TRrwbxM>.
- 4 In schools with two teachers, this is a problem. If one teacher is occupied with the ed tech class, that leaves one teacher to handle the rest of the school. Teachers in the first school complained about this, saying the program required her presence in the classroom, but those leading the program said that by providing a distance learning teacher, it was supposed to add capacity and free up the existing teacher. But in this case, it's clear that the teacher is needed to provide translation so the program can run smoothly.
- 5 Teachers in government and private schools were tested, with scores reported for private schools by their medium of instruction. Among teachers in English-medium private schools, 44 percent were categorized as having zero abilities in English. Thirty-one percent could use basic phrases, such as introducing himself/herself. Nineteen percent could understand frequently used expressions and communicate routine tasks. In all, 94 percent of these teachers were categorized as having zero or very basic knowledge of English. For more details, see "Can English Language Medium Education Work in Pakistan: Lessons from Punjab," British Council, 2013, p. 13, https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/peeli_report_0.pdf.
- 6 The program actually collected data on the language that children speak and found that only 1 percent of children's families in the program speak Urdu. Eighty-six percent of children's families in the sample speak Pashto. The rest speak other languages. English did not show up on the survey.
- 7 K. Geven, "The Learning Crisis in Punjab," World Bank, forthcoming.
- 8 World Bank, Project Appraisal Document, Punjab Education Sector Project, March 30, 2012, p. 2, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/582481468325217093/pdf/475910PAD0P102101OfficialUseOnly1.pdf>.
- 9 According to LEAPS: "A teacher in a public school is absent one-fifth of the time and has students that perform very poorly but still earns five times more than a teacher in a private school who is present nearly every day and has students that perform very well. One implication may be that the educational system would benefit if this government teacher were to stay at home, pocket 85 percent of his salary and use the other 15 percent to pay a teacher in the private sector to take his/her place." See Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, Tara Vishwanath, and Tristan Zanjonc, "Pakistan: Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools (LEAPS): Insights to Inform the Education Policy Debate," in *Do Teachers Teach?*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2008), p. 58, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/997531468090281061/Pakistan-Learning-and-Educational-Achievements-in-Punjab-Schools-LEAPS-insights-to-inform-the-education-policy-debate>.

Also see: SAHE and Alif Ailaan, "The Voice of Teachers: Learning from Teachers Across Pakistan," Alif Ailaan, Islamabad, 2014, p. 64, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/alifailaan/pages/731/attachments/original/1419857490/VOT_English_Web.pdf?1419857490.
- 10 According to former World Bank staffer Umbreen Arif in an interview in April 2016, when the government in Sindh asked teachers to biometrically verify their identity and validate their employment as teachers, "there are people who came from Dubai and gave biometrics because they thought it was a one-time activity. A ticket from Dubai is not a big deal if you're getting 60,000 rupees (~\$600 at the time) in pocket money from the government every month."

- 11 Jishnu Das, "A Data Guide to Sir Michael Barber's 'The Good News from Pakistan,'" Let's Talk Development, World Bank blog, June 11, 2013, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/data-guide-sir-michael-barbers-good-news-pakistan>.
- 12 These figures are converted using exchange rates from the respective year. In rupee terms, Pakistan budgeted 304 billion rupees in 2010, 790 billion rupees in 2016, and 982 billion rupees in 2018. These figures come from Ahmad Ali and budget charts published by I-SAPS based on provincial and federal budget books. See I-SAPS. "Public Financing Of Education In Pakistan: Analysis Of Federal, Provincial, And District Budgets, 2010- 11 To 2015-16," Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, Islamabad, 2016, http://i-saps.org/upload/report_publications/docs/1461768887.pdf.
- 13 The LEAPS team is investigating the returns to schooling in terms of wages among a population in three districts of Punjab that they have been following since 2003.
- 14 Haroon Sethi (former content advisor, McKinsey), interview with author, November 2015, Lahore.
- 15 Firuza Pastakia (development professional), interview with author, October 2016, Islamabad.
- 16 Jishnu Das, "A Data Guide to Sir Michael Barber's 'The Good News from Pakistan,'" World Bank blogs, June 11, 2013, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/data-guide-sir-michael-barber-s-good-news-pakistan>.
- 17 Ammar Sheikh, "Discrepancies Found in Punjab School Enrollment," *The Express Tribune*, November 3, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1548116/1-discrepancies-found-punjab-school-enrollment/>.
- 18 The *Kitaabcha* goes up to 10, but it is otherwise single-digit.
- 19 "LND English Test Class 3 Lesson 1 in Urdu," YouTube, November 03, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wosWmNw9zc&t=493s>.
- 20 ASER Pakistan Secretariat, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi, Annual Status of Education Report Pakistan, 2018, p. 80, http://aserpakistan.org/document/asere/2018/reports/national/ASER_National_2018.pdf.
- 21 As reported by a former education secretary for Sindh. KP officials have given similar figures. In rupee terms, the stated cost is PKR 3,000 per month per child, and the actual cost is PKR 5,000 per month per child.
- 22 Pervez Khattak, "Presentation on Social Sectors," speech at launch of PTI's 100 Days' Agenda, Marriott Hotel, Islamabad, May 20, 2018, <https://dnd.com.pk/pervez-khattaks-full-speech-at-launch-of-pti-first-100-days-agenda/142344>.
- 23 See discussion of this British Council survey in the "The Problem" section of this report.
- 24 Sindh is an exception. In Sindh, textbooks can be in Sindhi.
- 25 Hywel Coleman and Tony Capstick, "Language in Education in Pakistan: Recommendations for Policy and Practice," 2012, [https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Language in Education in Pakistan.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Language%20In%20Education%20in%20Pakistan.pdf).
- 26 M.P. Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2009), <http://www.ethnologue.com>.
- 27 See "A Dream Policy for Language in Education in Pakistan, 2020," in Hywel Coleman, *Teaching and Learning in Pakistan: The Role of Language in Education*, September 2010, p30 and 44, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265186454_Teaching_and_Learning_in_Pakistan_The_Role_of_Language_in_Education/download.
Also see Max De Lotbinière, "Pakistan Facing Language 'Crisis' in Schools," *The Guardian*, December 07, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/dec/07/pakistan-schools-language-crisis-lotbiniere>.
- 28 Students in government schools in Pakistan take board exams administered by a government body to graduate. Students in good private schools test under a parallel British system of A-levels and O-levels.
- 29 This is UNESCO's recommendation.
- 30 TCF credits this to language researcher Jim Cummins' Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) framework.
- 31 The officer said that it was not "systematically done," but it was a sufficient sample across geographies that PRP was working in at the time. A more recent survey found 77 percent of student workbooks completed across PRP provinces. This is an easier measure to satisfy though if there is some oversight and teachers expect "copy checking." It does not necessarily mean that lessons were taught as they should be.
- 32 RtR also works with local and international NGOs.
- 33 The author observed the RtR model in government schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- 34 This figure is derived from a situation where 53 percent of girls are enrolled compared to 60 percent of boys. The GPI score comes from dividing the percentage of girls who are enrolled with the percentage of boys who are enrolled. The GPI score here is as reported in PSLM 2016-17, which uses the NER for five-to-nine year olds to calculate the GPI score.
- 35 This holds for urban Punjab and Sindh but not KP and Balochistan.
- 36 Stephanie Psaki, Katharine McCarthy, and Barbara Mensch, "Why Gender Parity is a Low Standard for Success in Education," World Bank Blogs, December 18, 2017, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/why-gender-parity-low-standard-success-education>.

- 37 UNESCO, "Gender and EFA 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges," EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234809>.
- 38 Background chapter for a UNDP National Human Development Report shared by author. Labor Force Survey data is available online At <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/labour-force-publications>.
- 39 Hanan G. Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri, "Income Growth, School Enrolment and the Gender Gap in Schooling: Evidence from Rural Pakistan," *The Pakistan Development Review* 53: 2 (Summer 2014): 205-21. Also available at <http://www.pide.org.pk/pdf/PDR/2014/Volume2/205-221.pdf>.
- 40 Annual Status of Education Report 2016, National Rural (Provisional), August 2, 2017, 2 <http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2016/reports/national/Annual-Status-of-Education-Report-ASER-2016.pdf>.
- 41 According to KP's Education Management Information System (EMIS), which tracks school-reported enrollment data and measures it against population estimates, there are 5 million out-of-school children in KP, of which 54 percent – nearly half – are girls. According to the KP government's own census of out-of-school children, there are 1.5 million OOSC in total, of which 67 percent are girls. The report states that the data is being checked and these results should be taken as tentative and indicative.
- 42 This was shared by Dr. Fazlur Rehman, chairman at the Board for Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) for Peshawar, who was present during an interview with now-education secretary Arshad Khan in December 2018. Dr. Shaukat Hayat, chairman for the Mardan BISE, was also present and confirmed the information.
- 43 Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, and Asim I. Khwaja, "The Rise of Private Schooling in Pakistan: Catering to the Urban Elite or Educating the Rural Poor?" April 2002, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228758859_The_rise_of_private_schooling_in_Pakistan_Catering_to_the_urban_elite_or_educating_the_rural_poor.
- 44 Rebecca Calder, Irum Noureen, Allah Rakhi, and Fouzia Imtiaz, "Pakistan Girl Landscaping Report," UK Department for International Development, April 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/58f9cce240f0b606e70001af/Pakistan_Girls_Landscaping_Report_Apr2017.pdf.
- 45 National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>.
- 46 "Financing in Education Sector," Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2018, <http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Financing%20in%20Education%20Sector%202018.pdf>.
- 47 Every school in KP must have two teachers and a chowkidhar, regardless of the number of children in the school or whether a physical school exists or not.
- 48 "Junejo Unveils New Government's Program," UPI, December 31, 1985, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/12/31/Junejo-unveils-new-governments-program/7263504853200/>.
- 49 Of an estimated 6,000 schools destroyed by the 2005 earthquake, the government has rebuilt around half, despite having the money needed for reconstruction. The author has written an investigative piece to understand why. See Nadia Naviwala, "Failure to Launch," *Dawn*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1363890/development-failure-to-launch>. Also, see the section of this report entitled "White Elephants."
- 50 Abid Ahmed Mallick, "Social Action Programme: Pakistan Review of Progress," Paper for the South Asia Regional Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop, New Delhi, June 8-10, 2000.
- 51 Shahid Kardar, interview with author, December 2018, Lahore.
- 52 Another example is from 2011, when the Sindh education ministry warned USAID not to give it money directly for post-flood school reconstruction due to the high risk of corruption and inefficiency. USAID routed assistance through the ministry anyway in order to meet internal targets for government-to-government spending. See Nadia Naviwala, "So Much Aid, So Little Education," *Dawn*, July 6, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1192624>.
- 53 Kardar, Whatsapp conversation. March 30, 2019.
- 54 "Govt Approves Rs24 Bn for Uplift Schemes of MNAs," *The News*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/436945-govt-approves-rs24-bn-for-uplift-schemes-of-mnas>.
- 55 "No World Bank Funding Forthcoming for Sindh Public Schools: Secretary," *The Express Tribune*, May 29, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1721136/1-poor-progress-world-bank-declines-funding-public-schools-says-sindh-education-secretary/>.
- 56 Nadia Naviwala, "Failure to Launch," *Dawn*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1363890/development-failure-to-launch>.
- 57 Tony Blair, "Changemakers at the Highest Government Levels," Proceedings of Global Education and Skills Forum, Dubai, March 24, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rF3c-DZDp-Q>.
- 58 This will require Khan to understand classroom-level realities. In his last term, despite otherwise good reforms in education, he switched textbooks and testing in KP to English.
- 59 Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, and Asim I. Khwaja. "The Rise of Private Schooling in Pakistan: Catering to the Urban Elite or Educating the Rural Poor?" p. 27.

- 60 TCF has analyzed the performance of teachers hired within walking distance versus those who they transport from neighboring communities; they have found that those hired from within walking distance stay with the foundation for longer and therefore can be developed to be equally effective.
- 61 Address delivered at the All-Pakistan educational conference held at Karachi, November 27, 1947, and cited in Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja.
- 62 This recommendation comes from Ishrat Husain. He says that Punjab has incorrectly implemented his recommendation. While they put Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in charge of education at the district level, these CEOs were the already-overburdened district commissioners (DCs). Husain says the District Education Authority should be headed by an eminent citizen, with the District Education Officer reporting to the Authority.
- 63 Shahid Siddiqui, *Education Policies in Pakistan: Politics, Projections and Practices* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2017).

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Nadia Naviwala is a nonresident fellow with the Wilson Center in Washington, DC. She is the author of the Wilson Center report “Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story,” as well as several articles and opinion pieces about public education reforms and financing in Pakistan.

Nadia moved to Islamabad in 2012 as country representative for the United States Institute of Peace. At USIP, she started the Peace Innovations Fund to give small, flexible support to social startups.

Prior, she served as a Pakistan desk officer at USAID and a national security aide in the U.S. Senate. She has also taught U.S. foreign policy at the National Defense University in Islamabad.



Nadia holds a master’s in public policy degree from Harvard Kennedy School, which she attended on a full scholarship as a public service fellow. She was also a fellow at Harvard’s Belfer Center and an associate with the Harvard Carr Center Program on State-Building and Human Rights in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She holds a B.S. in foreign service from Georgetown University.

Nadia has written for the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *NPR*, *Devex*, and *Dawn*.



Available From:

ASIA PROGRAM

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

One Woodrow Wilson Plaza

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20004-3027

www.wilsoncenter.org