

* Essay Topic 'Our Education system is Perpetrating Socio-economic inequalities'

Out line

1) Introduction

2) Definition of Education

3) How our education system is perpetrating socio-economic inequalities

3a) Our education system is denying a huge proportion of population, the access to education

(26.2 million out-of-the-school children, Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22)

3b) The existence of parallel systems of education across the country (Public schools, private non-elite and elite schools, charity schools, and madrasas)

3c) The educational marginalization of half the country's population: Females (i-Girls in poor families 22%)

less likely to attend schools
(WB)

ii- Girls in rural areas less likely to attend schools than boys (WB)

iii- Gross intake ratio of girls in Balochistan and Punjab is 46% and 78%, respectively.
(Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22)

3d) Intaprovincial disparity in education exists across the nation

(i- Teacher to school ratio in Balochistan and Sindh is 3 in each. In Punjab, it is 7.
Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22)

3e) Rural - urban disparity exists within each province

(i- Rural literacy rate is 54% and its population is 62% of the total size

ii- Urban literacy rate 77%, while population less than half of total
Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22)

4) How our education system can be reformed to halt, and reverse the socio-economic inequalities that it is perpetuating

4a) Increase the educational budget to ensure the accessibility

3)

of education to all

- (i - Budget allocated below 2.1% for past decade, currently 1.5% as percentage of GDP, Pakistan Economic Survey, FY 2023.
- ii - WB recommends: 4% to 6% of GDP)

4b) Institutional reforms for better governance and transparency

- (i - Institutional duplication to be removed
- ii - Political continuity)

4c) Quality gaps to be narrowed down across different streams of education

- (i - Transformation based pedagogy
- ii - New Zealand case study
- iii - Parallel madrasas)

4d) Reduce gender disparity in access to education

- (i - Nigeria's bridge education program)

4e) Narrowing down interprovincial and rural-urban disparities

- (i - Public-private partnerships)

5) Conclusion

"Pakistan's education system is a task of unfulfilled expectation."

It perpetuates the very socio-economic inequalities that it is meant to reduce.

A ~~majority~~ huge number of children do not have access to education. Those

who have access go to largely unconnected and parallel systems of

schools. Gender-based educational discrimination, interprovincial and rural-

urban disparities also prevail across the country. The way forward to this

educational apartheid include

increasing educational budget, bringing institutional reforms, and ensuring

provision of quality education in

public schools, non-elite private schools, charity schools and madrassas.

Furthermore, targeted interventions should

also be made to counter educational

disparities based on gender and

geography within the country.

This essay begins with the

definition of education. It then gives the causes of why our education system is perpetuating socio-economic inequalities. It then provides the solutions to address the educational stratification at the end.

"Education is the social institution through which society provides its members with important knowledge, including basic facts, job skills and cultural norms and values." - Sociology by John J. Macionis

Pakistan's education system is perpetuating socio-economic inequalities by denying 39% of children of school going age from access to education. (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22). The fact that Pakistan has the ~~highest~~ second highest out-of-school children in the world was

highlighted more than a decade now. However, the situation only worsened over time. The number has gone up to 262 million in 2021-22 from 22 million in 2016-17 (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22). This proportion of population is handicapped to improve their socio-economic prospects of life. Most of these children belong to lower socio-economic class of society. The deprivation of ~~decent~~ quality education leaves them with no decent means to push themselves out of economic poverty. Consequently, they also face discrimination when it comes to social recognition and respect; and ultimately, influence in the society. Shahid Siddique in his book, *Inequalities in education* reiterates that education is a powerful tool for personal and social development. Being deprived of this tool, these out-of-school children will

continue to be economically and socially unequal to those who have access to education.

Those who manage to get the access of education face another kind of inequality. The education system in Pakistan has parallel and largely unconnected systems of education operating simultaneously. Anjum Altaf in his essay, What we may get wrong about education, categorises them as following: Public schools, ~~big~~ low-fee private schools, high-fee private schools, charity schools run by NGOs, and madrasas. Each system follows its own curricula, teaching methods, and examination processes. Consequently, the quality of education and the type of student body in each system vary greatly. The public schools and non-elite private schools largely cater to children from

the lower-middle class to middle socio-economic groups. The madrasahs and charity schools consist of children from the poorest strata of society. Elite private schools apply stringent socio-economic screening and are reserved exclusively for the rich. Hence, getting into different streams of education stratifies, those ~~who~~ with access to education, along three major dimensions. Moeed Yusuf in his essay, 'Education as a strategic imperative', mentions these dimensions to be socio-economic, qualitative and ideological. According to Shanza Khan, these systems are so isolated that students go through their school and adult ~~life~~ ~~without~~ lives without having the opportunity to engage intellectually across the systems. As a result, our education system ends up producing different cohorts from within the country's youth.

The education system of Pakistan has not yet been able to effectively cater half the country's population, that is of women. There are various inhibitors to educational access for women in the country. One of them is poverty. According to World Bank, girls in poor families are 22 percentage points less likely to attend schools than boys.

Furthermore, their geographical location is also a vital determiner. Across the country, girls of all ages in rural areas are less likely to be in school than boys. (World Bank).

Similarly, interprovincial inequality in terms of gender also exists.

For instance, gross intake ratio in the first grade of primary education is 46% for females in Balochistan. In contrast, it is 78% in Punjab. (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22)

Apart from these socio-cultural

constraints, women also face security challenges. Girls face harassment in school and on the way to school. Various reports of Center for Gender and Policy Studies highlight that girls face challenges to their security in public spaces, transportation, and near schools. Given this, parents in Pakistan either delay girls' education or prevent them from attending school altogether. According to World Bank, another major reason parents give for not sending girls to school is the distance to schools. It is a factor that exacerbates parents' security concerns: the more distant the school, the more risk for girls.

Interprovincial disparity exists in terms of the development of each province's education sector.

Schools may be present in all provinces in varying numbers, and with varying facilities. However, schooling is largely missing in some provinces. John Macdonald in his book *Sociology*, defines schooling as formal instruction under the direction of specially trained teachers. The teacher to school ratio in Punjab is 7 (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22). In contrast, Sindh and Balochistan collectively have a ratio less than that of Punjab. Each has teacher to ratio of 3 (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2021-22).

Pakistan's population is largely rural; it makes up around 62% of the total population size (Pakistan Economic Survey FY2023). ~~Dep~~ Nonetheless, education sector of urban regions, across the country, are far more developed than their

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rural counterparts. This is the reason that only 54%, which is barely more than half, is literate in rural areas (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24). On the other hand, ~~the~~ urban population, which is less than half the total population size, has literacy rate of approximately 77%. (Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24). This large education gap between rural-urban areas is one of the primary drivers of the socio-economic inequalities in the country.

In order to resolve this educational apartheid, the government should allocate more budget to the education sector. Currently, it stands at 1.5% of GDP; and to much worry, it has only reached upto maximum 2.1% since past decade (Pakistan Economic Survey FY 2023). This allocated expenditure

is not adequate investment for the development of human capital in the country. According to World Bank, developing countries should have their expenditure on education as percentage of GDP of upto 4% to 6%. Currently, Pakistan is not meeting even half the target. This is why the country has 26.2 million out-of-school children. Financial outlays must increase to increase the number of public schools that grant free education. It is also imperative to extend the scope of social security nets through greater budget allocation. As most of these out of school children belong to the poorest segment of society, social protection can act as an incentive for ~~vulnerable~~ vulnerable families to send their children to schools. Hence, a rise in budget is necessary for the implementation of any development policies in the sector.

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Along with rise in the budget, institutional reforms are required, for better governance and to improve transparency. Ishtat Hussain in his book governing the ungovernable asserts that it is the governance and management issues that are impediments to the delivery of education services. The challenge is great and has no immediate solution. But there is no alternative to generating political will and capacity for better management of the education sector, and ensuring educational allocations are made efficiently. Institutional duplication needs to be resolved.

There are Despite the clearly defined subject in 12th Amendment, there are still ambiguities about roles of federal and provincial governments in education. For instance, there is a federal Higher Education Commission, as well as provincial Higher Education Commissions. This

needs to be resolved and clarified to counter institutional inefficiencies.

The returns of investment in education are gained in long term. Hence, policy continuity is key to the development of this sector. Ahsan Iqbal, federal minister for Planning and Development Initiatives said, that a policy needs minimum ten years to get successful. In Pakistan, unfortunately, ~~when~~ any new government that comes don't continue to implement the policies introduced by erstwhile government. Instead, it formulates the new ones, which eventually meet the same fate when any other government comes. This needs to be changed. It requires strong political will on the part of those in the government.

¶ The humongous gaps in the quality of education provided across different streams of education in Pakistan needs to be narrowed. Public sector schools that cater almost 54% of the total student body provides the worst quality of education of all alternatives. (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2022)

The key lies in transforming this public school system, and ensuring its uplift so that it can match its elite counterparts. Single National Curriculum was one such stride to bring uniformity across parallel systems of education. However, there are still many areas that need attention.

One of such areas is the teacher education. It needs to be revamped to enhance the quality of education in non-elite systems of education school. Teacher

education needs to be made relevant and effective, by incorporating the components of reflection and critical thinking. A vibrant linkage needs to be established between the theory and practice. Shahid Siddique in his book 'Inequalities in Education' asserts that we need an education system built on transformation-based pedagogy to ensure holistic development.

Teaching methods need to be revolutionized as well. Schools should adopt inquiry-based learning as practiced in New Zealand. In inquiry-based learning students are made to engage in projects based on their own questions and interests. This approach fosters curiosity and independent learning in students. ~~It~~ In addition, qualitative benchmarks for student learning, and standards for

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teacher recruitment should be focused, among other things.

Madrasahs are totally distinct from other streams of education. This is because they are more heavily focused on religious education unlike other streams. To uplift their quality of education, parallel madrasahs should be set up. They should run either by public or private sector that utilise teachers able to balance theological study with modern subjects. The students should be prepared for modern economic while retaining their faith based focus. Such an intervention would allow them to rise above their socio-economic constraint.

Women face discrimination in access to education on multiple grounds. Each element needs to

be dealt with targeted interventions. Since girls in poor households face more discrimination, government should expand conditional cash transfers. In order to incentivize parents to send their girls to school, a premium on girls, should be given on these conditional cash transfers. Nigeria's Girls Education Project can be a guiding case study of Pakistan. It has two primary pillars. One is the conditional cash transfer and the other ~~was~~ is the community engagement. Pakistan should also focus on the latter pillar. The government should work closely with local communities to change their attitudes towards girls' education. Due to socio-cultural constraints ^{particularly in} rural areas, and backwards areas within provinces, women do not have access to education. The engagements on community level can help counter these constraints.

Community-based school management committees, involving parents and local leaders should be established.

Being the direct stakeholders in the project, ~~parent~~ ~~mind~~ attitudes of parents and locals can be moulded towards girls' education. The

security concerns can be addressed by expanding the scope of existing legal framework. Their strict enforcement should also be ensured, with clear procedure for reporting, ~~and~~ investigation, and prosecution.

Furthermore, safe transport initiatives are necessary to address the security concerns ~~reg~~ with regards to ^{girls'} gaining education. ~~W~~ Women-only transport services should be expanded; safe routes to schools should be developed; and public transport safety should be ensured.

To reduce the interprovincial and rural-urban disparities,

the government should increase the number of schools where required. This can be done through Public-Private partnerships. In Punjab and Sindh, the governments got engaged in such collaborations. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan can do the same. The ~~facilities~~ difference in development of physical infrastructure should also be taken into account. Most importantly, the teacher-to-student ratio should be enhanced in provinces of Balochistan and Sindh, where it is the lowest.

To sum it up, there are numerous ills afflicting the educator sector of Pakistan. But the solutions discussed above not just hold the power to halt this educational apartheid, but also reverse it.