

# Challenges and Opportunities in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan

## OUTLINE:

### 1. Introduction

↳ Thesis Statement: While numerous challenges exist in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan, capitalization of opportunities and careful navigation of challenges can help realize the goal of mainstreaming madrasa education.

### 2. Overview of Madrasa Education in Pakistan

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3.3. Administrative and Infrastructural Constraints hinder Madrasa mainstreaming

3.4. Government's Financial Limitations act as stumbling block in mainstreaming Madrasa

3.5. Limited Availability of Qualified Teachers hinders mainstreaming of Madrasa Education

3.6. Different Medium of Instruction makes it difficult to mainstream Madrasa Education

4. Opportunities in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education in Pakistan

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4.2. Madrasa Infrastructure can be leveraged in promoting modern education

4.3. Vocational and Technical skills can be imparted in rural areas

4.4. De-radicalization Programs can be organized by mainstreaming Madrasa Education

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5. Navigating the Challenges in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan emerged as an adamant education reformer. He advocated the acquisition of modern education along with the religious education to excel under the British Raj. Muhammeden Anglo-Oriental College - established by Sir Syed - imparted modern and religious education simultaneously which gave rise to future Muslim leadership that played crucial role in Pakistan's independence. It shows the importance of acquiring modern education along with the religious education. Today, Pakistan is grappled with the issue of mainstreaming religious seminaries. There exist certain challenges in mainstreaming Madrassa education in Pakistan. Madrassa administrations are resisting mainstreaming due to apprehensions about their

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autonomy. In addition to this, multiple other administrative, infrastructural and financial issues exist which act as stumbling blocks in the way of mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan. However, there exist opportunities too that present promising prospects of mainstreaming madrasa education. These include a strengthened national integration, better utilized madrasa infrastructure and promotion of vocational training. Moreover, it would enhance de-radicalization endeavours, and integrate madrasa students in job markets, which would improve Pakistan's global image. To navigate and capitalize on these opportunities, Pakistan should foster dialogue with Madrasa administrations, make balanced curriculum and provide technical and financial support to Madrasa Education. In

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short, while numerous challenges exist in mainstreaming madrasa education, capitalization of opportunities and careful navigation of challenges would help Pakistan in mainstreaming madrasa education.

Religious education is an integral part of Islamic culture. At the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), there was a designated place of 'Suffah' for the Muslims to acquire religious knowledge. When Islam came to the sub-continent, the locals established seminaries to impart Islamic education. With time the number of these seminaries increased. However, the education in these seminaries strictly remained limited to 'religious' domain. The tradition continued and even today the <sup>majority of</sup> seminaries in Pakistan impart

religious education. The problem is that this education methodology is inconsistent with the modern-day realities.

Pakistan is making efforts to mainstream these seminaries so that students of madaris also acquire modern education, however, it has not <sup>been</sup> successful so far due to certain challenges.

The foremost challenge is the resistance from Madarsa administration in getting mainstreamed. The seminaries resist mainstreaming madrasa education since they believe it would compromise their autonomy and independence. The heads of seminaries have apprehensions that mainstreaming madaris education would devoid seminaries of their religious essence. For instance, during a boards meeting on 17 December

2024, scholars like Mufti Taqi Usmani and Mufti Muneeb ur Rehman reiterated that they would not let the government compromise the autonomy of seminaries. This reflects the challenge of resistance from Madaris administration in mainstreaming madrasa education.

Moreover, lack of uniform curriculum in madaris education hinders the mainstreaming of madaris education. There exist different boards of every sect and each one has a unique curriculum. It makes it hard for the government to mainstream madrasa education under one roof. For example, the seminaries' education board 'Wifaq ul Madaris' and 'Tanzeem ul Madaris' have different curriculum and different way of examination.



Hence, lack of uniform curriculum in madrasa education is a challenge in mainstreaming it.

In addition, administrative and infrastructural constraints halt the mainstreaming of madrasa education. The government cannot ~~not~~ reach the madaris in the remote areas. The mainstreaming of madaris education demands infrastructural and administrative support which is difficult to provide. For instance, in the village Mir Ali of South Waziristan there exist no infrastructure to mainstream seminaries to promote modern education. Therefore, the administrative and infrastructural constraints are a challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan.

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Furthermore, the financial limitations of government is a challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education.

By mainstreaming the madrasa education, it becomes the responsibility of the government to provide financial support to seminaries.

But, with a weak economy, the government of Pakistan cannot fund such a large number of seminaries. According to a study of Taimur Rahman for Routledge in 2011, only 11 percent seminaries are being funded by the government. This suggests that mainstreaming madrasa education would put extra burden on country's economy. So, the financial limitations of government are challenge in mainstreaming seminaries education in Pakistan.

Moreover, the limited availability of qualified teachers is a challenge in mainstreaming madras education.

There is shortage of qualified teachers in the remote areas which would problematize the mainstreaming of madras education.

Even in the public schools, teachers are not available.

Ensuring the access to qualified teachers under mainstreamed madras would be even harder.

Thus, limited access and availability to qualified teachers is a big challenge in mainstreaming madras education.

In addition, different mode of instruction in seminaries is also a challenge in mainstreaming the madras education. Most of the religious seminaries in Pakistan

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have Urdu and Arabic as a medium of instruction. Also, major portion of the religious curriculum is in Urdu, Arabic and Persian. On the other hand, most of the institutions under the Ministry of Education follow English as a medium of instruction. If the seminaries get mainstreamed, it would become an issue to assimilate them in the modern education system having English as a medium of instruction. Hence, different medium of instruction is a challenge in mainstreaming madrasa education.

Despite these challenges, there exist opportunities in mainstreaming madrasa education. The foremost is the strengthened social cohesion and national integration. By

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making a uniform education system, in which madrasa education would be under the Ministry of Education, Pakistan can achieve social cohesion. A uniform education standard which would remove the inequalities and class-based education system. Hence, social cohesion and national integration is a crucial opportunity in mainstreaming madrasa education.

In addition, madrasa infrastructure can be leveraged for promoting modern education. There are certain remote areas where the school infrastructure is absent. By mainstreaming the madrasa education, the government can leverage the infrastructure of seminaries to promote modern education from as well as

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religious education. In this way, the seminaries would act as platform for the government to impart STEM education without any extra cost on infrastructure development. Hence, leveraging madaris infrastructure is a crucial opportunity in mainstreaming the madrasa education.

Furthermore, <sup>promotion of</sup> vocational and technical training is opportunity in mainstreaming Madrasa education. The students of madaris can be taken on-board after mainstreaming the madaris education. In this way, the government will have more sway over the students and it would become able to impart vocational and technical training to them. Therefore, the promotion of vocational and

technical training is an opportunity in mainstreaming madrasa education.

Moreover, by mainstreaming the madrasa education, government will have the opportunity to better manage the de-radicalization programs. In the mainstreamed seminaries, the government institutions would be able to impart awareness. The institutions like NACTA would be able to perform Counter Violent Extremism conference, which would help in de-radicalization.

Furthermore, by mainstreaming the madrasa education, the students of seminaries would get better job opportunities. This would help in increasing their understanding of the

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modern world. Through the acquisition of modern education, they would become better able to adopt independent earning profession. They would not become a burden on the government resources. Hence, the better job option for madrasa student is an opportunity in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan.

Also, mainstreaming the madrasa education present opportunity to enhance the global image of Pakistan. The international community, particularly the FATF has concerns over the unregulated education of seminaries. Enhancing the global image of Pakistan is a good opportunity to



## mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, there are numerous challenges in mainstreaming madrasa education in Pakistan. However, the opportunities outweigh the challenge, thus the careful navigation of challenge can help Pakistan achieve the goal of mainstreaming madrasa education. The challenges are resistance from seminaries and other associated administrative, infrastructural and financial issues. On the other hand, the opportunities are national cohesion, utilization of existing infrastructure and more educated and empowered seminary students. Pakistan should engage with madrasa administration, make balanced curriculum and

provide financial and technical support to seminaries to ~~navigate~~ navigate the challenges. By mainstreaming madrasa education, Pakistan would empower seminaries students and promote modern education.