

Breaking Pakistan's Cancerous Education System: One Nation, One Educational Program

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Abstract: Pakistan's education system is divided into three unequal streams, one for the elite, one for the middle class, and one for the poor, perpetuating inequality and stunting national progress. Rooted in a colonial structure that valued rote learning over critical thinking, the system fails to produce ethical, skilled citizens. Teachers are underpaid and disrespected, science is taught without experimentation, and social studies fail to build social responsibility. Meanwhile, unregulated private school fees have become a source of financial and mental torture for families. The government's inaction enables a "school mafia" that profits from the absence of quality public education. Reform demands a unified curriculum, strict fee regulation, improved teacher pay and training, and skill-based learning to replace rote memorization. Without urgent change, Pakistan will remain a nation divided by education, unable to achieve sustainable development.

Keywords: Pakistan education crisis, three-tiered education system, colonial legacy in education, rote learning vs critical thinking, private school mafia, government negligence, teacher respect and pay reform, one nation one education system, fee regulation, inequality in education, Pakistan education system, inequality, national curriculum, accountability, education reform

How We Got Here – A Colonial Mindset Still Rules Us:

In Pakistan today, we do not have one education system, we have three. One for the elite class, O/A Levels, expensive private academies, and foreign-trained teachers. One for the middle class, mid-tier private schools and government colleges. And one for the poor, underfunded, crumbling government schools where sometimes even basic furniture is missing. This three-tiered system is not just unfair, it is a factory for inequality. It ensures that the rich stay rich, the middle class struggles to keep up, and the poor are left behind. The system is not broken, it was built this way. Perhaps it will shock you that the first matriculation examination in the subcontinent was held in 1858 under the British. The British rulers decided that the people of India were "half as intelligent" as them. They lowered the passing marks from 65 to just 32.5, later rounding it up to 33 "for convenience." Today more than 70 years after independence we are still measuring

the intelligence of our children with this same 33% standard. The world has moved to creativity, innovation, and critical thinking, while we are stuck in colonial leftovers. Even decades after independence, our institutions, governance, and social attitudes remain shaped by colonial frameworks. The British left political control but entrenched systems of hierarchy, obedience to authority, and blind reverence for the West. Education glorifies colonial narratives while neglecting indigenous knowledge; bureaucracy mirrors imperial rigidity rather than serving citizens; and societal aspirations still equate progress with imitation of former rulers. This colonial hangover breeds dependency, weakens self-confidence, and sustains inequality. True freedom demands mental decolonization, reclaiming cultural pride, reshaping institutions to reflect local needs, and cultivating independent thought instead of colonial mimicry.

What We Can Learn from Japan:

In Japan, until grade 3, children are taught only ethics and manners. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) said:

“Where there is no etiquette, there is no religion.”

Japan has taken this seriously. We, the Muslims, who claim to love Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as), have ignored his words. In Japan, teachers are treated like national treasures. When a Pakistani friend once introduced himself as a teacher at a Japanese airport, the officials treated him with the kind of respect we reserve for ministers, perhaps more. In our own country, a teacher often has to beg for salary, is insulted by parents, and is ignored by the government. The rise and fall of nations is tied to the respect given to teachers, and we have failed on this front.

Our Schools: Copy, Cram, and Forget:

Let’s be honest. Our current schooling system is a copy-paste factory. Teachers read from the book, write it on the board, and students copy it word for word. The same material is tested, marked, and graded. Nothing is learned, nothing is applied. Parents clap at good results, thinking their child is a “genius.” Those whose children fail insult them for being “dull-minded.” But what has either child actually learned? Only one skill: memorise and reproduce. We teach “Social Studies” for 10 years, but look at our society, bribery, line-cutting, rule-breaking. We teach “Science” in classrooms without laboratories and expect to produce scientists. How can a child learn science without touching, seeing, and experimenting?

Education in the Clutches of the School Mafia:

In Pakistan, private school mafias dominate education by charging exorbitant fees, prioritizing profit over learning, and exploiting parents’ helplessness. They create an elitist system where quality education is reserved for the wealthy, while the majority remain deprived. Weak regulation and state neglect allow these cartels to flourish, deepening inequality and turning education into a business rather than a public right. For the poor, the government system is

collapsing. For the middle class, private school fees have become a nightmare. For many families, school fees are higher than their entire monthly grocery bill. Parents are under constant mental torture from the “school mafia”, a network of private schools that increase fees whenever they want, knowing parents have no alternative. Many parents have gone into debt, some have suffered strokes, and tragically, some have even taken their own lives, citing school fees as the reason. The government issues “statements” and “press releases,” but nothing changes. Ministers send their own children abroad, so why would they care? Their dreamland is far away from the harsh reality of a parent struggling to pay a fee slip.

Pakistani Government’s Criminal Negligence:

Government negligence stems from corruption, lack of accountability, and misplaced priorities that favor power over public welfare. Incompetence, political instability, and indifference to citizens’ needs deepen the crisis. Such failures are not mere oversights but systemic betrayals that perpetuate poverty, injustice, and underdevelopment. The government’s negligence is rooted in corruption, weak accountability, and a chronic disregard for public welfare. Political elites prioritize power struggles over governance, leaving health, education, and justice systems to decay. This indifference, coupled with incompetence and misuse of resources, makes negligence not just failure but a deliberate betrayal of citizens’ rights and trust. This is not just laziness, it is criminal negligence. The federal and provincial education ministries have failed to: Standardise education so every child, rich or poor, gets the same quality learning. Control private school fees through strict legal mechanisms. Invest in teacher training and respect. Modernise curriculum for the 21st century. The truth is, education in Pakistan is not a priority, because an educated population is harder to control.

How to Fix This Mess: A National Action Plan:

Pakistan’s fragmented education system, divided into public, private, and madrasa streams, has created inequality, confusion, and a lack of national cohesion. For real progress, the country needs a unified education system that provides equal opportunities to all citizens, regardless of class or region. Education must be treated as a national security and development priority, not a privilege for the few. Implement one national curriculum focusing on science, technology, critical thinking, and cultural values. Ensure uniform quality in urban and rural schools through standardized teacher training and facilities. Adopt bilingual education (Urdu/Regional + English) to balance global competitiveness with cultural identity. Reform religious schools by including modern subjects while respecting faith-based learning. Cap profiteering and enforce compliance with the national framework. Allocate higher GDP share to education, ensuring free and compulsory schooling. One Nation, One Education System, No elite syllabus for the rich and garbage syllabus for the poor. A unified, high-quality curriculum for all. Legal Fee Control, Pass laws giving provincial ombudsmen the power to audit and control private school fee hikes.

Teacher Respect and Pay Reform, make teaching the most respected and best-paid profession, so the best minds want to join. Practical Learning, science labs in every school, ethics training as a core subject, and mandatory skill-based courses.

Accountability:

Publicly publish school performance reports and teacher evaluation results. True reform in Pakistan's education system requires strict accountability. Schools must be legally bound to publicly publish annual performance reports, covering student results, facilities, and financial transparency. Similarly, teacher evaluation results should be shared openly to ensure merit, discourage negligence, and reward excellence. This transparency would empower parents, expose inefficiency, and pressure institutions to maintain quality. Without accountability, any education reform remains hollow.

Government Role in Quality Schools:

Build state-run schools that are actually better than private schools, so parents have an alternative. The government holds the primary responsibility for ensuring quality education, yet its failure is evident in underfunded schools, poor infrastructure, and untrained teachers. Instead of strengthening public schools, it relies on private institutions, widening inequality. A truly responsible state must invest in modern facilities, merit-based teacher training, and strict accountability. Without this, "quality schools" remain a privilege for the few rather than a right for all.

Ban Rote Learning – Replace "cram and vomit" exams with project-based assessments:

Pakistan's exam system encourages rote memorization, students cram facts and reproduce them without understanding. This "cram and vomit" culture kills creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, leaving graduates unfit for modern challenges. Replacing rote exams with project-based assessments, research work, and practical applications would nurture analytical minds and innovation. Without ending rote learning, education will continue producing degree-holders, not thinkers.

The Way Forward requires political courage and vision. The government must:

Ban rote learning and introduce project-based, inquiry-driven assessments. Unify the education system under a single national framework with space for diversity but equal standards for all. Break the school mafia through strict regulation and transparency. Invest in teachers, making their training and salaries a top priority. Ensure accountability by publishing performance reports of schools and evaluations of teachers. If we keep running three separate education systems — one for the rich, one for the middle, and one for the poor, Pakistan will remain three separate nations pretending to be one country. Dear President, dear Prime Minister, if you truly

want to transform Pakistan into a prosperous nation, start with education. Break the school mafia, invest in teachers, and unify the system. Do this, and you will not only win elections, you will win the future. Do you want me to polish this further into a formal policy paper format (with headings and subheadings), or keep it in this academic-essay note style?

Final Word:

The greatest weakness of Pakistan's education system lies in its obsession with rote learning. For decades, students have been forced into a cycle of memorization and regurgitation, "cram and vomit", where marks matter more than knowledge. This system produces degree-holders who lack creativity, problem-solving ability, or the capacity to innovate. As a result, Pakistan continues to lag behind nations that have embraced project-based, research-oriented, and skill-driven learning models. Equally damaging is the structural inequality within education. We continue to run three parallel systems: elite private schools for the rich, mediocre institutions for the middle class, and underfunded public schools or madrassas for the poor. Instead of creating unity, these divisions entrench class barriers, foster resentment, and deny millions of children the right to equal opportunity. In essence, we are not building one nation but three separate societies that merely coexist under one flag. The school mafia, unchecked private profiteering, and the state's chronic neglect have turned education into a business rather than a public good. Teachers remain undertrained and underpaid, rural schools are abandoned, and national curricula fail to inspire critical thinking. Accountability is almost nonexistent. Until this cycle is broken, no reform will deliver real change.

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