**Education A constitutional right**

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The present system of education prevalent in Pakistan is the heritage of the pre-partitioned British India. A review of the education system of Pakistan suggests that there has been little change in Pakistan’s schools since 2010 when the 18th Amendment enshrined education as a fundamental human right in the constitution under Article 25A of the constitution of Pakistan 1973. Problems of access, quality, infrastructure, and inequality of opportunity, remain endemic. According to the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), the Federal Government was entrusted with the responsibility for policy, planning, and promotion of educational facilities in the federating units. This responsibility was in addition to the overall policymaking, coordinating, and advisory authority; otherwise, education was the concurrent subject.

The Federal Ministry of Education also administers the educational institutions located in the federal capital territory. Universities located in various provinces are administered by the provincial governments, but are exclusively funded by the federal government through the university grants commission and now called as Higher Education Commission located in Islamabad city. The Federal Ministry of Education was headed by the Minister of Education. The most senior civil servant in the Ministry was the Education Secretary assisted by Joint Secretary and Joint Educational Advisors of each wing. There were 6 wings in the Federal Ministry of Education and each wing is headed by Joint Educational Advisor. The concurrent subjects have been delisted from the schedule – 11 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 as amended in 2010. Now Provinces of Pakistan are empowered to make policy decisions as per their local needs for the communities and individual citizens.

Education is a child’s basic right. Even in times of conflict, war, or disaster, temporary learning opportunities are set up as part of emergency relief to provide continued learning support. In Pakistan, the public policies on education reflect the National ideology. It consists of the political option, tradition, values, culture, and socio-economic needs, emerging trends, and concepts, and even its implications in the future. Pakistan has an estimated 22.8 million children from five to 16 outside school. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and consequent educational institution closures have resulted in millions more deprived of learning opportunities.

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Our current education system can be depicted from a short scene, in which the protagonist takes up the stage, the audience gets settled, and becomes quiet. The protagonist assumes his position and starts delivering a monologue facing the audience. The audience believes what they watch, agree to what they hear, and learn from whatever perception the protagonist holds. The scene ends, the protagonist leaves the stage for the next to come and the audience imbibes all the preaching’s of the protagonist’s monologue without stirring their comprehension level and standards.” This is not an opening scene of Shakespeare’s play, but it is a scene from every classroom in most of our educational institutions where a teacher like a protagonist comes and inculcates his concepts and perspectives into the minds of the audience, his students, who absorb all the lecture without trying to comprehend or analyze it. Our curriculum is designed only as exam-oriented ignoring the fundamental aims of education. The disparity in education in Pakistan rears its ugly head again as millions of students face learning losses. Major barriers like the digital divide and the weakness of education systems threaten to increase further the vastly unequal learning opportunities available to the economically, geographically, or politically disadvantaged.

Currently, the decision of closing all educational institutions due to the second wave of COVID-19 has raised many questions regarding the future of the young generation.

Maximizing access through alternative learning options is essential during the crisis, the quality of content and diversity of mediums will be the deciding factor for learning outcomes or engagement. Another important factor is support at home. In economically disadvantaged segments, most parents lack basic skills, time, or interest to help their children learn at home. Our education systems often do not equip a child with skills like time management or independent learning. Mass parent awareness campaigns may improve the outcome of alternate learning options by providing support at home.

However, we have to admit that millions of children in this country will not have access to any learning in this period. To prevent these children from greater learning losses we must prepare for the challenges when schools resume. We must take help from those with the expertise to design accelerated learning programs to support students left behind and create strategies to reintegrate dropouts. We must design training programs for teachers to give them the confidence to meet the needs of learners.

There is a dire need and the urgency for revitalizing our education system. The teaching-learning process should not only be based upon instruction but on the learning process as well. The students should be trained to observe, analyze, synthesize and apply concepts of whatever they have been taught or learned to new and unfamiliar situations. It should make the students open-minded with regard to new ideas. Its aim should be character formation, moral and spiritual development, personality development and training in good individual and good citizenship.

To come out of this pandemic stronger we have to engage in discussions that go beyond the educational budget and school enrollment numbers. We must take into account the disparities that rob young children from marginalized communities of their right to education. It is time to open our eyes and understand that without quality education for all, we as a nation will always lag, regardless of the ‘potential’ we may have. Though education is a constitutional right of citizens, our educational policies should be reviewed in consonance with aspirations of the people and the socioeconomic structure of the country, and for its reorientation and reorganization, appropriate measures should be adopted which ensure integrated and balanced development of education in various stages.

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