**Improving education in Punjab**

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As a fundamental human right, education is vital to human, social and economic development. In Pakistan, this right has been enshrined in the constitution as Article 25-A, which makes the state responsible to provide free and compulsory education to children aged 5-16 years. Under the current Chief Minister, Sardar Usman Buzdar, the government has outlined its framework for school education and has taken several initiatives under the New Deal 2018-23. In addition to improved learning outcomes, it aims to better access to school education and strengthen governance. Moreover, the first-ever departmental policies for Special Education and Literacy & Non-Formal Basic Education have been formulated to ensure capable and efficient departments are engaged in successfully providing an enabling environment and equitable opportunities for all.

Since delivering quality education is the top priority of the Government of Punjab, multiple initiatives have been devised and implemented to foster this notion. One of the most pertinent developments has been the Classroom Observation Tool (COT) that is being implemented as an important tool for education policy and research. The aim is to collect data on 11 teaching practices that are associated with improved student learning outcomes.

[Pakistan reports 2,304 new coronavirus cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/13-Nov-2020/pakistan-reports-37-deaths-by-coronavirus-2-304-new-cases-in-one-da)

In addition, the emphasis on quality learning has been prioritised through other measures as well; a hybrid system has been set in place where Urdu has been introduced as the language of instruction at the primary level. Simultaneously, to enable students to successfully transition to post-primary level, English will be taught as a language subject from class 1 to 5. Hopefully, it will increase students’ proficiency in both English and Urdu languages and comprehensibility of the subject matter being taught as well. In order to restore the educational quality and access during the pandemic, “Taleem Ghar” has been introduced. It has enabled remote learning for students between grades 1-8, reaching more than 70 percent of the population of Punjab via YouTube channel, android-based applications and a TV channel.

Owing to the high dropout rates and low retention of students, the government has launched the “Insaaf Afternoon School Programme”. The programme provides a cost-effective solution and easy access to students encouraging them to attend school. In addition, 1227 Schools, 606 for girls and 621 for boys, have been upgraded from elementary to higher secondary to ensure the continuation of student’s education in the same premises. Furthermore, under the Punjab School Construction & Rehabilitation Programme (PSCRP) 110 Model Schools, 2000 new classrooms, 1000 Science and IT labs and 400 libraries are being established. Numerous literacy centres have been established in collaboration with private partners including UNICEF, JICA and DFID etc. in remote areas to increase access to basic education. There is a specific focus on educating the special children, for whom Special Education Institutions including 9 new Special Education Centres and 2 Degree Colleges have been established. For further facilitation of special people, a fleet of 51 new buses has been added to provide free pick & drop.

[Singles’ Day sales top $74.1 billion: Alibaba](https://nation.com.pk/13-Nov-2020/alibaba-singles-day-sales-top-dollar-74-1b)

Along with this, the present government has also acknowledged the potential of higher education as an engine of national progress and hence, 7 new universities are being established, while also uplifting 4 existing universities. In addition to expanding the 4-year BS Programme to 80 colleges, associate degree programmes are being offered phasing out the 2-year BA/BSc degree. Coupled with this, an Academy of Higher Learning, Innovation and Entrepreneurship has been established as a training and research institute for college/university teachers. Through these developments, the incumbent government is striving for continuous improvement of the educational system where students will act as contributors in uplifting the nation’s economic growth.

Furthermore, there is an equal focus on imparting skill-based education through the “Hunarmand Nojawan” Programme to an additional 100,000 students annually at the Technical Education Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) institutes across Punjab. Moreover, in its New Skill Ecosystem, TEVTA has made a policy shift from its Conventional Mode of Learning to one based on Competency Based Training & Assessment System, recognised in 130 Countries. Technical training has been emphasised on and all Technical Training Institutes (TEVTA, PVTC & PSDF etc.) are now under one roof; the Punjab Skills Development Authority (PSDA), with sole dedication to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public sector skills training provisions.

[Trump says delay in North Carolina vote count fishy](https://nation.com.pk/13-Nov-2020/trump-says-delay-in-north-carolina-vote-count-fishy)

Moreover, digitisation across school education, higher education, and special education departments has been introduced to allow efficiency in data management. The Human Resource Management System (HRMS) of the School Education Department currently registers around 400,000 teachers working in more than 50,000 public schools. To facilitate the teachers, E-Transfer was launched last year, which has appropriated more than 45,000 transfer requests effectively. Likewise, the Higher Education Department has launched and successfully completed its first phase of e-transfer as well.

Keeping in view the significance of special education, a helpline (1162) has been established for complaint resolution and counselling of parents and caregivers. Moreover, a special education mobile application for the Geographic Information System (GIS) has been introduced to support online admissions and provide information regarding facilities in the institutions. All these initiatives are an indication of the government’s shift towards e-governance and enhanced public facilitation.

[Biden reassures U.S. allies in calls with leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia](https://nation.com.pk/12-Nov-2020/biden-reassures-u-s-allies-in-calls-with-leaders-of-japan-south-korea-australia)

These initiatives are a step in the right direction, especially as Pakistan is progressing towards fulfilling its commitment towards the Sustainable Development Goal number 4, that pertains to inclusive and equitable provision of quality education. If we continue to strive in this direction, a better and brighter Pakistan will become a reality.

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