

THE TRICHOTOMY OF PAKISTAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Dr. Muhammad Aqib Ali^{*1}, Verda Yousuf Barakzai², Sara Shabbir³, Usman Khalid⁴

^{*1}Senior Faculty University of London Programs at The Millennium Universal College (TMUC);

²Head of Institute at The Millennium Universal College (TMUC);

³Program Coordinator at The Millennium Universal College (TMUC); ⁴Director of Learning and Development at Teach Globally

Corresponding Author: ^{*1}email_aqib@yahoo.com

Received: 18 April, 2024

Revised: 15 May, 2024

Accepted: 30 May, 2024

Published: 15 June, 2024

ABSTRACT

The education system of Pakistan has evolved greatly to what it was at the time of independence; however, the system has not been able to deliver the intended objectives expected from a robust educational setup. The education system of any country is aimed at attainment of certain social and economic goals pinned upon higher literacy rates. An effective educational setup produces educated population leading to intellectually capable human capital having a greater social awareness in addition to their domain or field knowledge. The development and wellbeing in the modern world revolve around technological advancement which is also the consequence and corollary of a progressive educational system. A well established and potent system of education warrants social and economic inclusion, financial prosperity, and skilled workforce eventually leading to overall welfare of the masses. The system of education that was inherited at the time of country's existence was modeled around different tiers and educational subsystems including the religious seminaries (madrasahs), governmental educational institutions and private educational institutes. The paper discusses the current situation of education in the country by shedding light upon the problems, challenges and prospects in the context of education's existing triple-tier structure encompassing the national, religious and transnational educational streams. The paper also presents some recommendations to achieve the potential success based upon a powerful educational setup to ultimately guarantee a prosperous nation.

Keywords: Education System, Pakistan, Higher Education, Transnational Education, Religious Education, Education Problems, Recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

A sound and strong education system is inevitable for any country in order to develop economically, social, politically as well as technologically. The economic wellbeing and any country's success and prosperity is reliant on how well it develops its education system (Ahmad et al., 2014). Education is essential for the growth and advancement of nations in a world that is becoming more competitive, interconnected, and globalized. Developing skills and human capital is a crucial part of any strategy for development. Education instills meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals by developing their mental and intellectual; capabilities and contributes towards the improvement of living standards, enhances the

quality of life, and offers vital opportunities for everyone within the society. The role of education in the growth and development of a country is well-recognized and increasingly important. Additionally, many countries acknowledge education as a fundamental basic right for their citizens (Ashraf et al., 2016). Whereas education system includes all educational institutions—public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, offering in-person or online instruction—as well as their staff, pupils, physical facilities, resources, and policies—are included in the system of education. Broadly speaking, the system encompasses the establishments that have a direct role in funding, overseeing, running, or

policing these establishments (such as government agencies and regulatory councils, central testing services, textbook publishers, and accreditation boards). The education system also includes the standards and guidelines that direct institutional and individual interactions within the framework and governs the functioning and coordination of all educational providers and receivers to ensure all stakeholders' interests are safeguarded and best served. (Islamabad Policy Research Institution, 2015). The education system of Pakistan is broadly pinned upon a two-tier model that comprises religious education and worldly education. The religious education is delivered through a large network of religious seminaries termed madrasahs whereas the modern education in the country is provided by schools, colleges and universities. The two-tier model can also be construed as a triple-tier framework which includes religious, national and transnational education. We will discuss the three categories i.e., national, religious and transnational in the coming sections of the paper to evaluate the education structure and functioning in order to make some suggestions and recommendations to develop the education system which promises

Educational System of Pakistan – Origin, Development and Challenges

Pakistan's education system which is inherently based on the two-tier model was based on religious educational institutions/seminaries (madrasahs) and conventional educational institutions including schools and centers of higher learning including college and universities. In the past, education sector of Pakistan was neglected by Ministry of education and provincial government whereas, federal government played active role in curriculum

development and financing. However, education sector in Pakistan has steadily advanced over the last few decades which eventually aids in growth of nation as a whole (Ashraf et al., 2016). The article 25-A of 1973 constitution of Pakistan mandates the state to provide free and quality education to children aged 5 to 16 years. Additionally, article 37-B of the constitution obligates the state to provide free compulsory education and remove illiteracy from the country (Ashraf et al., 2016). However, according to (Zaidi, 2023), Pakistan currently has the world's second-largest number of out-of-school children (OOSC), with approximately 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not attending school, accounting for 44% of the population in this age group.

According to the (International Trade Administration, 2024) report Pakistan ranks fifth in population globally with a number of approximately 229.22 million in year 2022. Out of this, nearly 63 percent of population lives in rural areas and 37 percent lives in metropolitan regions. Youth under 24 years of age accounts for 55 percent of the population. The Government of Pakistan has taken various initiatives to ensure access to quality education for its residents The literacy rate in Pakistan has been roughly 60% since 2014–15, with 74 percent of people literate in urban areas and 54 percent in rural areas, despite efforts by the government to boost it.

Pakistan's national education system has seven layers (Table 1). The federal ministry of education with the help of provincial education ministries controls all the educational matters up to intermediate level and all the university programs are administered and regulated by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan.

Sr#	Education Level	Grade Description
1	Early Years Education	Playgroup or Nursery and Prep
2	Primary School	Grade 1 through 5
3	Middle School	Grade 6 through 8
4	High School	Grade 9 through 10
5	Intermediate	Grade 11 through 12 Can be located in school or college
6	College	Grade 13 through 14 in most cases except for 4 years degree program
7	University	15 through upwards

Table 1: Pakistan National Education Structure

According to the government's 2021–23 Pakistan Economic Survey, there were approximately 11.35 in

early years of education, 25 million on primary schools, 8.75 million students enrolled in middle

school (grades 6–8), 4.5 million in secondary school (grades 9–10) and 2.5 million in higher-secondary education (grades 11–12). According to the survey in 2021–2022 there were over 1.96 million students enrolled in universities, nearly 820,000 in degree-granting colleges, and approximately 455,000 in technical and vocational education.

Pakistan's education system is able to accommodate 41,018,384 students with the help of 1,535,461 teachers working in 260,903 institutions. There are 180,846 public institutions and 80,057 private institutions in the system. Therefore, the private sector manages 31% of educational institutions while the Government sector oversees 69% institutions (Islamabad Policy Research Institution, 2015). In Pakistan, there are over 182,600 operational elementary education schools, 46,800 middle level education schools, 34,800 secondary schools, 7,648 higher education/intermediate/secondary institutions, and 3,729 technical and vocational schools. Throughout Pakistan, there are more than 200 universities and 3,000-degree colleges.

The actual education situation in Pakistan is contradictory to the constitution of Pakistan in the context of education. To address this situation, the Government of Pakistan initiated the National Education Policy (NEP) in 1998 to 2010. A new NEP 2009 was introduced one year prior to the conclusion of the previous NEP. By 2015, the ministry of education anticipated that, through a variety of educational reforms, 100% of primary school-age children would be enrolled, and 86% of adults over the age of ten would be literate. However, the majority of national surveys are deficient in providing critical information regarding variables including, completed years of education, the age at which children began school, literacy and numeracy abilities, educational quality, and technical training. The data gaps prevent the computation of potential experience and the evaluation of the effect of primary school on literacy rates. Despite foreign and local agencies literary aid, Pakistan's current literature falls short in addressing the differences between the rich and poor, rural and urban, and male and female populations. Pakistani government was not successful in improving primary education and lowering illiteracy (Ashraf et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Pakistan is facing a critical issue of out of the school children (OOSC). These kids are just no longer in the educational system. On the other hand, there are concerns over the quality of education

provided to students within the education stream (Memon, 2024). Annual Education Status Report's statistics on students' assessment have shown significant learning gaps among school going children aged 5 to 16 years. The learners were evaluated in core subjects using a suitable assessment criterion such as reading a short Urdu story and a sentence in English. The learners were also asked to solve Mathematics problems according to their class standards. The results showed major learning poverty for students in the national education stream as only 50% of respondents were able to read Urdu story, 54% were able to read an English sentence and only 46% of students to solve a mathematics problem. This survey also highlighted major disparities between inter provincial results and public and private school results where private school learners outperformed public school learners (Memon, 2024)

Furthermore, Early childhood education (ECE) has a significant role in a country's economic, social and intellectual development (Ahmad et al., 2013). In Pakistan, ECE is the key component of future development and progression. However, the ECE system is constrained in its capacity to offer young children a high-quality education due to a variety of intricate issues (Nolan & Molla, 2017); (Raikes et al., 2020). Limited access to high-quality education is a major issue, particularly in underprivileged rural and urban regions (Ardiyanti et al., 2021); (Lee et al., 2021). Moreover, infrastructure constraints, lack of ECE teachers' training and lack of ECE's importance awareness are major obstructions in Pakistan (Mogale & Malatji, 2022). Although some progressive initiatives have been taken into consideration such as technological reforms in teaching & learning and developing curricula according to the local need but there is still room for improvement (Khushik & Diemer, 2018); (Rehman et al., 2023). Despite challenges, ECE in Pakistan has exciting prospects, driven by innovation and with greater commitment from governments, NGOs, and society, there is significant potential to transform the ECE system and foster an optimal learning environment for children (Ali et al., 2021); (Khaskheli et al., 2023).

According to (Memon, 2024), Pakistan has a fragmented education structure consisting of government, private, and madrassahs also results in a divided and fragmented youth that impedes the integration of the country. Children will not be able

to compete in the upcoming global technological boom if they lack technical skills. It is concerning that young people without formal education, unemployed, and with disruptive worldviews from various educational trajectories are susceptible to extremist ideologies. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education needs to be implemented in adjunct to the existing school education to ensure that upcoming workforce is equipped with the capability of integrated theoretical knowledge and applied experience (Pakistan Science Foundation, 2022). In addition to this, to resolve the learning poverty and social disparities, the previous elected government took the initiative of Single National Curriculum. The aim of adopting SNC was to streamline the minimum education standards, providing fair and equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education and remove public and private school divide from the education system. SNC is based on the concept of universal education, a single curricular structure applies to all classes, with the same medium of instruction from grades 1 to 12. All provincial governments in Pakistan were required to implement this common system of education in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction, and assessment (Tayyab et al., 2022)

From the day of independence to every 5 years development plan later on, the government of Pakistan made commitment to increase literacy rate and ensure compulsory and fair education on the grass root level but so far most of the commitments were not materialized. The major causes of neglect and poor management at school level education are lack of funding for primary and secondary education as government provides large sums of finances to higher education and school level education is left to provincial and local government authorities. Poor policy monitoring is another serious problem where there is contradiction between policy declared on the paper and its execution for the betterment of the education system. Despite all our efforts to diminish class disparities, major steps still need to be taken to remove this social difference. Poverty is another reason that impedes their abilities to gain knowledge. Children in the poor families are in great disadvantage because of less awareness of education among families and expensive private school setups. In Pakistan, many donors fund primary education through NGOs, but most operate in isolation. Consequently, their efforts to improve curricula and

education quality have had limited impact on children from poor families (Ashraf et al., 2016). However, some NGOs work closely with government education authorities and significantly improve educational standards in marginalized areas, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

The Pakistani education system is heavily focused on examinations, which serve as the primary motivation for students to study. However, rampant cheating and an emphasis on rote memorization have rendered the examination system corrupt and ineffective. Consequently, current exam results are poor indicators of student performance and learning. The Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs) are largely responsible for these issues. There is a Federal Board under the federal ministry of education and 22 provincial boards. The BISEs possess significant assets and income, with some using examination fees to construct large buildings. Furthermore, universities are key institution that are dynamic and complex in nature. A modern university aims to disseminate knowledge, generate new insights, and develop employment skills essential for a contemporary economy. Nevertheless, the budgetary expansions in higher education (on the expense of school education) the enrollment is 2.7 percent of the eligible group. While officials often lament the poor quality of Pakistani universities by citing the low number of research papers, Ph.Ds, inadequate facilities, and frequent violence, the issues run deeper. Public universities suffer from a severe lack of scholarship, intellectual diffidence, societal irrelevance, and authoritarian teaching. Additionally, student rights to appeal unfair marking and biased assessment and evaluations are severely limited. Although, private universities overcame infrastructural challenges but they lack science departments and research function (Hoodbhoy, 2014).

To address the learning crisis, a national consensus must be formed to address the need for minimum learning national standards. This initiative will overcome the limitation of SNC policy which emphasized on a unified curriculum. Secondly, Pakistan urgently needs to increase its education expenditure. With 26 million children out of school and 34,000 schools destroyed by the 2022 floods, the current spending of 1.7% of GDP is inadequate. This is below the South Asian average of 2.7%, the global average of 3.7%, and UNESCO's recommendation of 4%. Both federal and provincial governments should

align their policies to increase education funding to ensure significantly improve infrastructure, resources, and teacher training. Expanding digital learning platforms and integrating technology into classrooms can enhance learning experiences, especially in remote and underserved areas. Online education is cost-effective and provides extensive content accessible at any time (Gul & Khilji, 2021). Students can receive instruction from top global professors without relocating, contributing to the country's socio-economic growth (Gul et al., 2021). Furthermore, collaborations between the government and private sector can bring innovative approaches and additional resources to the education system, helping to bridge gaps (Murtaza and Hui, 2021). These collaborations will also address the private school proliferation which sparked unrest and insecurity among nationals and government teachers (Ameen, 2024). Emphasizing vocational and technical education at all levels of education can better prepare students for the job market, addressing the skills gap and reducing unemployment. STEM education is a prodigious way forward to implement dynamic and holistic learning. In 2019, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan accredited 1,200 public colleges and 188 universities (Amjad and Mahmood, 2024). However, due to Pakistan's large population, more universities are needed. The government missed the 2020 target of a 15% higher education enrollment rate and should now aim for 20% by 2030. Implementing Total Quality Management models, successfully used in the US, UK, Japan, and China, could help achieve this goal (Soomro & Ahmad, 2012). Higher education should collaborate with social and non-governmental organizations to arrange cross-cultural activities, helping students understand various aspects of culture, art, literature, religion, and technology. The current analysis of social and academic exchanges between local and international students is insufficient for learning about each other's cultures and traditions. Lastly, to eradicate corruption and contract cheating in Pakistan's education system, strict enforcement of regulations, increased transparency, and technology-driven solutions are essential. Promoting academic integrity through education and safe reporting channels, combined with regular audits and international best practices, can significantly reduce these issues from all levels of education. The prospects of national education in Pakistan, from school to university

level, are promising with ongoing reforms and increased focus on quality and inclusivity (Aziz et al., 2014). Enhanced funding, technological integration, and public-private collaborations can bridge educational gaps and improve standards. Addressing socio-economic barriers and fostering a culture of academic integrity will be crucial in building a robust education system. Pakistan can achieve significant advancements in educational outcomes and societal growth with sustained efforts and national consensus.

Religious Educational Institutions in Pakistan – The Madrasah System

The Madrasah education system has its origins deeply rooted in the history of religion of Islam in the subcontinent, the system is much older than the country itself and Pakistan inherited the system of religious education from pre-independence Indian subcontinent wherein there were numerous established madrasahs functioning from a long time (Jabeen, 2022). According to some scholars, the concept of madrasah system is as old as the religion itself. From the first religious educational setup at the time of Holy Prophet (PBUH) termed Ashaab-e-Suffa, the religious education has been at the very core of Islamic societies. The religious-education centers of learning in the golden era of Muslims flourished in the various regions of the world including Arab states and the Middle East including the counties like Iraq, Iran and Egypt (Ibrahim, 2019); the system further expanded to Asian states and territories including central Asian terrain and South Asian regions including the subcontinent (Zaman, 1999). The system of madrasahs has clearly passed the test of time and proved its religious, societal, educational, and intellectual worth by sustaining and overcoming obstacles of all sorts including financial, cultural, imperialistic and other hurdles in its way. The relatively recent onslaught of world media driven by the rhetoric of terrorism and extremism being linked to the madrasah system especially in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks and global war of terror has dented the perceptions regarding the madrasah system (Sodhar and Rasool, 2013). Nonetheless, the propaganda has failed to inflict any substantive damage to the functioning and vitality of the madrasah educational institutions in general. The global agenda to trample the Islamic educational centers by molding the narrative against madrasahs is based on false reporting and misinformation of

facts and figures. The efforts to malign the Islamic centers of learning by tarnishing their image and reputation has been unsuccessful to a larger extent as the same was based on biases and hidden mala fide intentions to curb the religious inclinations of people and to discredit the madrasah system to make people suspicious towards attainment and promotion of Islamic knowledge delivered through the madrasahs (Sajjad, 2013).

The madrasahs in Pakistan have not only served as centers of religious learning but they have also played a vital role as the centers of support and care for the needy and poor children across the country by providing boarding facilities with provision of food and basic facilities for the children of the poor class (Afista and Abu Bakar, 2020). The madrasahs provide the opportunity to have religious education coupled with the fulfillment of basic needs like food, shelter and clothing for their students and majority of students of these religious educational establishments are poor kids who reside in these institutions and avail free education, food and residence which unfortunately their parents cannot afford as well as the state is also incapable to do this bare minimum for them.

The madrasah system in Pakistan is undoubtedly a positive force which contributes towards the welfare of poor class by ensuring food, residence and free education for the underprivileged sections of society, nevertheless there are numerous challenges of multifarious and diverse nature faced by these madrasahs (Iqbal et al., 2023). The challenges range from insufficient financing, poor infrastructure, backward curriculum and pedagogical methodologies, weak administration and precarious regulatory framework to name a few (Ahmed, 2009). To add to the misery of these seminaries, the governments of different periods have failed to support these religious learning centers through adequate financial and non-financial support. The madrasah system in Pakistan is such a great opportunity if utilized and managed aptly. There is an expansive network of these seminaries across the length and breadth of the country, which is the greatest factor that can be utilized by the concerned authorities to facilitate the cause of religious education as well as indirectly impacting favorably, the lives of thousands of poor students studying in

these madrasahs. As discussed, that post 9/11 and global war against terror, the madrasahs were blamed to be the alleged nurseries and recruitment centers for terrorists and therefore clamped upon by the law enforcement and governmental authorities instead of being supported morally, financially and politically. The aftermath and fallback of the measures against the madrasah system didn't help the cause of already volatile system and added to the woes of madrasahs nationwide. Among many other issues, the aspects of sectarian hostilities, seemingly negative and non-productive role of madrasah graduates and lack of adaptability to changes in structure, functioning and policies have further exponentially aggravated the problems for the madrasah system in the country.

The madrasah system in Pakistan typically offers three main levels including the basic level in which memorization of Quran and its recitation in the main goal, the second level comprises of focused learning of Arabic language including pronunciation, understanding meanings and translation of Holy Quran and Hadith books, the third level entails study of Tafsir i.e. commentary and exegesis of Holy Quran as well the study of Islamic jurisprudence called Fiqh which comprehensively covers subjects like basic beliefs, various Shariah legal frameworks and methodologies and the ways and procedures to derive the rulings and judgments from the primary sources of Islamic faith i.e. Quran and Sunnah including Hadith (Iqbal et al., 2023). According to Jabeen (2022), the madrasah system in Pakistan operates under the governance and supervision of six madrasah boards which represent the major sects and organizational groups of Muslims within the country, these include Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Ahl-e-Sunnat (Barelvi) situated in Lahore, Wafaq Al Madaris Al-Arabia (Deobandi) located in Multan, Kanzul Madaris Dawat-e-Islami, in Karachi, Rabita-tul-Madaris Al Islamia (Jammat Islami) in Lahore, Wafaq Al Madaris Al-Salafia (Ahl Hadis, Wahabi) in Faisalabad and Wafaq Al Madaris Shia (Shia, Jafria) based in Lahore. In addition to the above six madrasah boards, the following five madrasah institutions are authorized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to grant degrees to their students once the students graduate after completing their studies from these madrasahs:

Madrasahs that award degree on their own:

S No	Name of Madrasa	Orientation	City/Place
1	Dar-Ul-Uloom-Muhammadia Ghausia	Ahl-e Sunnat	Bhera Distric Sargodha
2	Jamia Islamia Minhaj-Ul- Quran	Ahl-e Sunnat	366 M Model town Lahore
3	Jamia Ashrafia	Deobandi	Ferozpora road Lahore
4	Jamia Taleemat Islamia	Ahl-e Hadis	Sargodha, Road Faisalabad
5	Dawat- e – Islami	Ahl-e Suunat	Darul-Madina Karachi

Table 2: Degree Awarding Madrasahs in Pakistan (Source: Jabeen, 2022)

Over the years there were plans and efforts undertaken by the various government and political regimes to reform and improve the madrasah system in the country. For reference in 1969, Pakistan's then-President, Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan, constituted a committee that discussed ideas to bring modernity to the scheme of education in madrasahs. After some time in the era of General Zia ul Haq, he formed a Madrasa reform committee in 1979, called the "Qaumi Committee Barai Deeni Madaris Pakistan" (National Committee for Religious Madrasahs Pakistan). The committee recommended teaching the five basic subjects other than the religious curriculum to be taught at the elementary level students at madrasahs. These subjects were Urdu, mathematics, social studies and science, the committee further suggested teaching additional subjects to the higher level students at madrasahs which included English, mathematics, and general science and Pakistan studies. The madrasahs however largely rejected the proposals to teach worldly courses and insisted on teaching only the religious sciences asserting that the conventional schools, colleges and universities can cater to these subjects and just like the manner in which the conventional schools, colleges and universities do not offer religious education, madrasah institutions will not offer the worldly education to their students. The argument was however flawed but still the curriculum and scheme of studies at the madrasahs could not be reformed. Later on a "Qaumi Idaara Barai Deeni Madaris" was recommended by this council called (National Centre for Religious Madrasahs) to standardize and harmonize the

madrasah scheme and structure of curriculum and refine course provision and delivery methodologies, however these efforts was stalled owing to sectarian disagreements and hostilities and lack of political will and sincere dedication to reform the madrasah system in the country.

The recommended course of action in the light of above discussion is to deploy dedicated and focused efforts to reform and revitalize the madrasah system of education. The need is to take on board, the religious leaders and Ulema from all major sects and factions and ask them to work collectively towards the reforms and rejuvenation of the madrasah system in order to bring the educational model of madrasahs with the contemporary educational and academic levels of excellence. The madrasahs must be governed and overseen in such a manner to ensure that the graduates from these madrasahs are capable of offering a productive contribution to the society after they graduate from these religious learning centers. For this motive, the madrasah administration in the country should contemplate to provide modern education of basic sciences and knowledge domains simultaneously with the religious education which is nowhere prohibited from the Islamic standpoint. The efforts to modernize the madrasah system should aim at maintaining the distinctive identity and uniqueness of these religious academic centers while also updating and uplifting their status both in terms of hard and soft infrastructure by supplying them economic and non-economic resources and providing ample governmental support and assistance at all appropriate levels (Sajjad 2013). Furthermore, to include the madrasah students in the

mainstream, they must be provided with equal employment opportunities in relation to their study specializations in addition to their services only in the mosques and religious entities. The teachers and faculty at these must be trained and their capacity building must be carried out in such a way to enable them to teach and train the students at madrasahs to become versatile and diligent individuals capable to deliver fine performance in various capacities other than only becoming Imams in masajid and only serving the madrasahs as teachers once they complete their studies. There must be greater emphasis to pursue religious and worldly education in parallel even if they are to be inducted in both streams i.e. in madrasahs as well as in schools and colleges simultaneously and their roadmap or course of action should be complete both streams of study sequentially so they have adequate job and business opportunities after they are done with their studies. The efforts to reform the system will be fruitful only if these efforts are blended with good faith and a strong resolve, otherwise like the past, these shall only be construed as mere words and suggestions, if not applied in letter and spirit.

Transnational Education (TNE) in Pakistan – Issues and Opportunities

The evolution of transnational education (TNE) marks a significant paradigm shift in primary, secondary and higher education, presenting a range of opportunities that are reshaping educational landscapes worldwide. This section delves into the positive potential of TNE, its multi-faceted challenges, and the long-term ramifications for educational provision. TNE serves as a visible manifestation of higher education globalization, reshaping educational paradigms worldwide specially after proven educational standardization of Cambridge GCE, IGCSE, A Level examination. Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) institutions establish international campuses and engage in cross-border collaborations. TNE essentially becomes pivotal for policymakers, educators, and institutions striving for global competitiveness. This globalization fosters knowledge exchange, cultural enrichment, and international innovation, driving the evolution of higher education in an interconnected world. It emerges as a pivotal component of higher education globalization, offering opportunities for expanded access and collaboration. However, addressing its challenges necessitates coordinated

responses at all levels to maximize benefits and mitigate negative impacts (Hussain, 2007).

The proliferation of regional hubs for transnational education (TNE) marks a significant development in the global higher education landscape. Emerging from the convergence of factors such as globalization, increased student mobility, and economic imperatives, several developing nations, including Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, the UAE, and Qatar, have enacted policies to attract prestigious universities from developed countries. These initiatives aim to make foreign higher education accessible locally at affordable rates and enhance the global competitiveness of national higher education systems.

Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong have become magnets for Western universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, either through local campuses or collaborations with domestic partners. On the other hand, China and India have strategically positioned themselves to host permanent branches of foreign universities, leveraging TNE for national development objectives rather than purely commercial gains. In contrast, the UAE and Qatar operate as commercial hubs for transnational education, with fewer restrictions on fees and ownership. The concentration of foreign universities in five regional hubs underscores their significance in the TNE landscape: Singapore & Malaysia, China & Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh & Pakistan, UAE & Qatar, and South Africa. These hubs serve as focal points for a wide array of undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programmes offered by leading Western universities, with Singapore and Malaysia emerging as key hosts due to historical ties and linguistic affinity. In the Middle East, the UAE and Qatar have established education zones to accommodate the growing presence of foreign university campuses. Historically, Australian universities dominated the Southeast Asian, South Asian, and North Asian education markets, buoyed by historical and linguistic connections. However, intensified competition from UK and US universities has prompted the establishment of local branch campuses by many Western institutions. This evolution has reshaped the educational landscape and intensified competition among institutions, ultimately benefiting students through expanded choices and improved quality. (Adams, 2015)

Unlike conventional academic expansion, TNE operates akin to international business, prioritizing strategic alliances, international branch campuses, and investments from equity firms over traditional academic governance and curriculum development. The authors stress the significance of robust cross-border initiatives like "twinning" arrangements and comprehensive international campuses, positing them as more sustainable alternatives to earlier TNE models reliant on distance learning without local presence. Thus, Transnational Education emerges as an indispensable resource for stakeholders navigating the complex terrain of global education markets, stimulating critical discourse on the evolving landscape of higher education. (Lane, 2007) Upon researching into Transnational Education (TNE) systems via surveys, it was found that levels of student satisfaction at UAE branch campuses were generally high. The factors that were most influential in determining whether or not a student at a UAE branch campus was satisfied overall with their institution were quality of lecturers, quality and availability of resources, and effective use of technology. (Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013)

These interviews, complemented by reflections on the researcher's personal, professional, and academic experiences, provided a comprehensive contextual lens for the study. Thematic analysis of the data revealed nurses' enhanced self-confidence, knowledge, questioning skills, and professionalism. Nurses primarily enrolled in these programmes for the prestige of a Western degree and associated financial and promotional benefits yet demonstrated resilience and transformative professional development. The findings provide valuable insights for continuous professional education policy and can assist TNHE providers in improving programme delivery (Arunasalam, 2013). While expansion, massification and universalisation of higher education has been achieved in the developed countries mostly through public institutions, countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan are increasingly reliant on private sector contributions to meet their national demands for higher education. The discussions revealed that there is an urgent need to develop a regulatory framework to ensure equity in access and quality in outcomes to evolve successful systems of higher education.

The Going Global 2023 conference shared rising significance of TNE as a deliberate approach to improve and boost education systems globally. It is

noteworthy to mention how TNE enables international collaborations with HE institutes, giving access to learners to global benchmark education without leaving their country. Not only does it promote cultural exchange but also builds capacity in local institutions. It also facilitates connections between universities that collaborate to stay abreast with educational research, enables innovation drive via shared expertise and resources as well improves global employability skills.

Globally, coordinated responses through strategic alliances and partnerships are imperative to navigate the complexity of TNE and ensure equitable benefits for all stakeholders. Despite its benefits, TNE presents formidable challenges across local, regional, national, and global contexts. Locally, institutions encounter heightened competition and cultural integration complexities. Regionally and nationally, policymakers grapple with the need for regulatory frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms to accommodate cross-border education. Globally, coordinated responses through strategic alliances and partnerships are imperative to navigate the complexity of TNE and ensure equitable benefits for all stakeholders (Hussain, 2007). While TNE presents vast opportunities for internationalizing higher education, host countries must align their policies with sustainable development goals to avoid exacerbating social inequalities. Without robust long-term strategies, there is a risk of creating an elite class with access to quality education, potentially disrupting the social fabric of developing nations. There are also concerns about over-westernization and the erosion of indigenous cultures underscoring the need for Asian universities to preserve their unique identities through academic exchanges and collaboration within the region. However, challenges such as regulatory hurdles, cultural differences, and the need for substantial investments in infrastructure and technology persist (Top Universities, 2024). However, various challenges persist in the Pakistani educational landscape with respect to TNE that include aligning curriculum standards, adapting to new teaching methodologies, and ensuring quality assurance. Integrating foreign educational frameworks with local contexts in accordance with cultural and regulatory requirements is a challenge. (The News, 2024). Alongside these, the need for substantial investments in infrastructure and

technology is also a pressing concern (Top Universities, 2024).

TNE is evolving rapidly in Pakistan, driven by collaborations between local and foreign educational institutions. The role of Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has been pivotal in fostering these collaborations by approving and regulating foreign educational programme through local partnerships. The goal is to enhance the quality of teaching, research, and meet the skill needs of the country (British Council, 2023). TNE has proven to catalyse global educational advancement, thereby offering diverse opportunities to accelerate accessibility and quality in higher education. TNE enriches learning experiences, fosters global knowledge exchange, and enhances the cultural understanding by integrating international education systems (Adams, 2015). The partnership between Pakistani and UK universities has been successful for Pakistan by enhancing research capabilities, improving teaching quality, and addressing educational challenges. Joint initiatives can lead to capacity building, faculty development, and resource sharing between collaborating institutions.

Pakistani institutions may benefit from access to global networks, cutting-edge knowledge, and innovative teaching practices, which elevate their academic standards and international reputation. This collaboration opens doors for students as well as faculty to build capacity as per international standards. A survey from March 31 to April 17 in 2020 with 1,493 valid responses from Pakistan and India yielded notable finding, as an impact of Covid-19 on aspirant Pakistani students, was that a significant portion of respondents from Pakistan, 28%, had initiated the process of applying for overseas study, a figure lower than that observed in India, where 39% had done so. This contrasted with our prior survey in China, where 71% of respondents had already applied. However, it aligns with the application timelines typical for South Asian markets. When evaluating the likelihood of students canceling or postponing their study plans due to Covid-19, approximately 40% from both Pakistan and India expressed no inclination to do so, whereas only 12% of Chinese respondents shared this conviction. Nevertheless, a notable proportion of Pakistani (35%) and Indian (29%) respondents indicated at least some likelihood of canceling or had already done so. Health, safety, and financial concerns emerged as significant factors influencing

decision-making, albeit to a lesser extent compared to Chinese respondents. Pakistani and Indian respondents exhibited heightened apprehension regarding financial pressures, a trend likely to escalate with the deepening economic repercussions of the pandemic in both countries. Understanding and addressing these concerns are pivotal for educational institutions navigating the uncertainties posed by Covid-19. This makes locally available TNE a fine opportunity for the local population to benefit from and presents a robust solution to the anticipated slowdown in traditional international student mobility. The British Council highlights that TNE can provide quality education to students in their home countries, circumventing barriers such as high travel costs and restrictive immigration policies. This approach not only makes education more accessible but also ensures that students gain international exposure and qualifications without leaving their home country. Additionally, TNE partnerships can help host countries build local capacity and improve their educational infrastructure.

Beyond economic considerations, TNE has profound social implications, fostering skill development, mitigating brain drain, and enhancing local education systems' competitiveness.

The burgeoning trend of regional hubs for transnational education reflects the evolving dynamics of higher education in a globalized world. As student mobility continues to reshape educational demographics, it is imperative for policymakers to adopt a holistic approach that balances economic imperatives with social development goals, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all (Alam et al., 2013). The latest national census data estimated the total population of Pakistan at around 208 million people, in 2017. Within that population, the proportion of young people under 30 years stood at nearly 64%. More importantly, approximately 29% of the population, at the time of the last census, was under 10 years old. Therefore, the youth bulge of Pakistan, as we know it, is predicted to increase in the coming years. Within the total population of Pakistan over 10 years old, the proportion of degree holders (bachelors and above) was only 6% signifies that access to quality tertiary education is still low. However, that also represents a massive opportunity for education service providers to cater to the higher educational needs and demands of an ever-increasing young population. Meanwhile, as the world advances

rapidly in technological innovation, the onus falls on educational institutions to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills that are relevant to a rapidly evolving and technologically intensive workplace. Transnational education can therefore play a crucial role in ensuring access to quality higher education that can, in turn, enable Pakistan to truly harness the potential of its young population.

Transnational Education (TNE) in Pakistan has evolved through various partnerships and branch campuses established by foreign universities. During the 2000s, several prestigious international institutions formed collaborations with local universities to enhance educational opportunities in the country. Some examples of successful foreign collaborations include Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and the Aga Khan University. LUMS established partnerships with institutions like Harvard Business School and Carnegie Mellon University, focusing on business and management education. The Aga Khan University collaborated with international institutions to advance medical education and research (WENR, 2015). It is noteworthy to analyze the fact that universities such as Pakistan College of Law (PCL), the oldest Law College became Pakistan's first recognized Teaching Centre followed by many others such as The Millennium Universal College (TMUC), SZABIST Karachi, The Institute of Legal Studies (TILS), Roots Ivy, Beaconhouse International College (BIC), Lahore Grammar School, Lahore and more. These collaborations have not only contributed to the diversification and enhancement of the higher education sector in Pakistan but also allowed access to students to globally recognized qualifications without the need to travel abroad. Such partnerships also aim to elevate the quality of education by incorporating international standards and practices (WENR, 2015; Top Universities, 2024). The TNE initiatives impact the improvement of educational standards and the potential for local institutions to gain international accreditation and recognition. This is particularly beneficial for middle-class students who might not afford overseas education. TNE partnerships help Pakistani universities improve their curricula, adopt innovative teaching methods, capacity building of stakeholders and enhance research capabilities (British Council, 2023). The number of Pakistani students enrolled in UK TNE programmes has

increased significantly as per a recent survey by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). It makes Pakistan the fourth largest host country for UK TNE after Singapore, China, and Malaysia indicating a steady growth in the TNE sector in Pakistan. As per the latest facts and figures reported by The News (2024), there were 46,640 Pakistani students enrolled in UK-awarded programmes in 2015-2016, a number that has grown by 33% over the past five years.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the education system of Pakistan has evolved to a huge extent and progressed greatly as compared to what it was at the time of independence; however, the system has not been able to deliver the intended objectives expected from a robust educational setup and hence the situation calls for an educational emergency focusing reformed infrastructure, cogent policies and effective regulatory framework with strong implementation and seamless functioning of all entities. There is need for an integrated and coordinated approach by the concerned stakeholders for securing the favorable outcomes involving all national, religious and transnational educational establishments to ensure conformity to established benchmarks of academic quality and global best practices. The development and wellbeing in the modern world revolve around technological advancement which is also the consequence and corollary of a progressive education system. A well established and potent system of education warrants social and economic inclusion, financial prosperity, and skilled workforce eventually leading to overall welfare of the masses. The country's system of education which is based on a triple-tier structure encompassing the national, religious and transnational educational streams must be harmonized in such a manner that on one end it must emphasize to maintain the distinguishing aspects of each stream by realizing and appreciating the diversity and distinctiveness of each educational stream while on the other end, it must be ensured that all tiers and layers of education institutions are in conformity to the defined standards and performance benchmarks set by the governmental, regulatory and administrative institutions to ultimately achieve the best possible outcomes in order to collectively strive towards national educational goals for a promising future of the country.

References

- Adams, C. (2015). Developing international education hubs in Asia. *World Education News & Reviews*. <https://wenr.wes.org/2015/07/developing-international-education-hubs-asia>
- Afista, Y., & Abu Bakar, M. Y. (2020). Islamic Boarding School-Based Madrasah: Policy Efforts to Reform the Superior Education Model. *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 4(2).
- Ahmad, I., Ali, A., Khan, I., & Khan, F. A. (2014). Critical Analysis of the Problems of Education in Pakistan: Possible Solutions. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 3(2), 79-84.
- Ahmad, I., Rauf, M., Rashid, A., Rehman, S., & Salam, M. (2013). Analysis of the problems of primary education system in Pakistan: Critical review of literature. *Academic Research International*, 4(2), 324.
- Ahmed, Z. S. (2009). Madrasa education in the Pakistani context: Challenges, reforms and future directions. *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peace building*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Alam, F., Alam, Q., Chowdhury, H., & Steiner, T. (2013). Transnational Education: Benefits, Threats and Challenges. *Procedia Engineering*, 56, 870-874. Retrieved 5 23, 2024, from <https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877705813005638>
- Ali, W., Wen, J., Hussain, H., Khan, N. A., Younas, M. W., & Jamil, I. (2021). Does green intellectual capital matter for green innovation adoption? Evidence from the manufacturing SMEs of Pakistan. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 22(5), 868-888.
- Amjad, F., & Mahmood, M. (2024). Analysis of Institutional Quality Assurance Practices in Public and Private Universities. *Pakistan Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 38-55.
- Ameen, F. B. (2024, January 16). Privatization of Government Schools in Pakistan's Educational System. *Paradigm Shift*. <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/government-schools/>
- Ardiyanti, S., Qurbaniah, M., & Muldayanti, N. D. (2021). Joyful learning model: Improving higher order thinking skill and students' learning motivation at senior high school. *Proceedings of KOBİ 2nd International Confer*, 1, 33-40.
- Arunasalam, N. (2013). A Defining Moment: Malaysian Nurses' Perspectives of Trans-National Higher Education. Retrieved 5 23, 2024, from http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/11561/04102651_arunasalam_nirmala_final_edd_submission.pdf?sequence=1
- Ashraf, Muhammad Azeem, & Hafiza Iqra Ismat. (2016). Education and Development of Pakistan: A Study of Current Situation of Education and Literacy in Pakistan. *US-China Education Review B*, 6(11). <https://doi.org/10.17265/2161-6248/2016.11.003>
- Aziz, M., Bloom, D. E., Humair, S., Jimenez, E., Rosenberg, L., & Sathar, Z. (2014). Education system reform in Pakistan: why, when, and how? (No. 76). IZA policy paper.
- Bari, F. Dawn Newspaper. (2024). Education Emergency. Published May 10, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1832621>
- British Council. (2015). New university models: Opportunities and challenges. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/new_university_models_jan2015_print.pdf
- British Council. (2020, August 10). COVID-19: Influence on overseas study plans in India and Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/covid-19-influence-overseas-study-plans-india-pakistan>
- British Council. (2023). Going Global 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/going-global-2023>
- British Council. (2023). Pakistani and UK universities partner for change. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/pakistani-uk-universities-partner>
- British Council. (2024) Five trends on international student mobility for 2024. Retrieved from <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/news/reports/five-international-student-mobility-trends-2024>
- British Council. (n.d.). Managing large systems: An international perspective. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3.6_managing-large-systems.pdf
- British Council. (n.d.). Massification Seminar in Delhi - A Summary Report. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/massification_seminar_in_delhi_-_a_summary_report.pdf
- British Council. (n.d.). Transnational education handbook: Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/transnational_education_handbook_pakistan.pdf
- Government of Pakistan (2018). Labour Force Survey 2017-18. Islamabad. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/labour-force-statistics>
- Gul, R., & Khilji, G. (2021). Exploring the need for a responsive school curriculum to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan. *PROSPECTS*, 51(1-3), 503-522. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09540-8>

- Gul, R., Zakir, S., Ali, I., Karim, H., & Hussain, R. (2021). The impact of education on business opportunities for women entrepreneurs in public & private television advertisements in Pakistan. *Industrial Engineering & Management Systems*, 20(2), 140–147.
- Higher Education Commission Pakistan (2020). Foreign Collaboration Policy. <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/Documents/HEC-Foreign-Collaboration-Policy.pdf>
- Higher Education Commission. (n.d.). Policy for foreign collaboration [PDF]. Higher Education Commission. <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/Documents/HEC-Foreign-Collaboration-Policy.pdf>
- Hoodbhoy, P. (2014). Education reform in Pakistan—Challenges and prospects. *Pakistan: Haunting Shadows of Human Security*, Edited by Jennifer Bennett, 58. <https://eacpe.org/app/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Pakistan-Education-Challenges-and-Prospects-2006.pdf>
- Hussain, I. (2007). Transnational Education: Concept and Methods. *The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 8(1), 163-173. Retrieved 5 23, 2024, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ed494810>
- Ibrahim, B. (2019). Madrasah transformation into modern educational institutions during the new order. *Istawa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2), 196-216.
- ICEF Monitor. (2014, October). The Substitution Effect of Transnational Education on International Student Mobility. Retrieved from <https://monitor.icef.com/2014/10/substitution-effect-transnational-education-international-student-mobility/>
- International Trade Administration. (2024, January 12). Pakistan—Education. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/pakistan-education>
- Iqbal, M., Yousaf, M., Shaheen, A. K., & Nisa, Z. U. (2023). Barriers To Modern Education In Madrasas Of Pakistan: Student And Teacher's Perceptions. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 31-40.
- Islamabad Policy Research Institution. (2015). Education System of Pakistan: Issues, Problems and Solutions. <https://ipripak.org/education-system-of-pakistan-issues-problems-and-solutions/>
- Jabeen, F. (2022). Madrasa Education in Pakistani Context: It's History and Structure. *Kocaeli İlahiyat Dergisi*, 6(2), 517-534.
- Khaskheli, M. B., Wang, S., Yan, X., & He, Y. (2023). Innovation of the social security, legal risks, sustainable management practices and employee environmental awareness in the China–Pakistan economic corridor. *Sustainability*, 15(2), 1021.
- Khushik, F., & Diemer, A. (2018). Critical analysis of education policies in Pakistan: A sustainable development perspective. *Social Science Learning Education Journal*, 3(09), 01–16.
- Lane, J. E. (2007). Transnational Education: Issues and Trends in Offshore Higher Education (review). *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(1), 119-120. Retrieved 5 23, 2024, from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/224372/pdf>
- Lee, R., Hoe Looi, K., Faulkner, M., & Neale, L. (2021). The moderating influence of environment factors in an extended community of inquiry model of e-learning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 41(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1758032>
- Memon, P. (2024, May 2). Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023: A Clarion Call. Paradigm Shift. <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/aser-2023/>
- Mogale, M. L., & Malatji, K. S. (2022). Progressed Learners' Participation in Developing Curriculum Support Programmes: A Critical Pedagogy Approach. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, October, 475–487.
- Murtaza, K. G., & Hui, L. (2021). Higher education in Pakistan: challenges, opportunities, suggestions. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 4(2).
- Nolan, A., & Molla, T. (2017). Teacher confidence and professional capital. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 62, 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.11.004>
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2018) Provisional Summary Results of 6th Population and Housing Census 2017. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/provisional-summary-results-6th-population-and-housing-census-2017-0>
- Pakistan Science Foundation. (2022). Pakistan Science Foundation. <https://psf.gov.pk/stem.aspx>
- Raikes, A., Koziol, N., Davis, D., & Burton, A. (2020). Measuring quality of preprimary education in sub-Saharan Africa: Evaluation of the Measuring Early Learning Environments scale. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 53, 571–585. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.06.001>
- Rehman, S. U., Ashfaq, K., Bresciani, S., Giacosa, E., & Mueller, J. (2023). Nexus among intellectual capital, interorganizational learning, industrial Internet of things technology and innovation performance: A resource-based perspective. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 24(2), 509–534.

- Sajjad, F. (2013). Reforming Madrasa Education in Pakistan; Post 9/11 Perspectives. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 3(1), 104-121.
- Sodhar, Z. U. A., & Rasool, S. (2013). Madarsa system of education in Pakistan: Challenges and issues. *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 41(41), 291.
- Soomro, T. R., & Ahmad, R. (2012). Quality in Higher Education: United Arab Emirates perspective. *Higher Education Studies*, 2(4), 148-152.
- Tayyab, M., Umer, S., & Sajid, A. (2022). Decoding religious contents of grade 5th textbooks of Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 10(1), 291-297.
- The News. (2024). Maximising transnational education: Challenges, opportunities for Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.thenews.com.pk>
- Top Universities. (2024). University Branch Campuses. Retrieved from <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-branch-campuses>.
- Wilkins, S., & Balakrishnan, M. S. (2013). Assessing student satisfaction in transnational higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(2), 143-156.
- World Education News & Reviews (WENR). (2015). Developing International Education Hubs in Asia. Retrieved from <https://wenr.wes.org/2015/07/developing-international-education-hubs-asia>.
- Zaman, M. Q. (1999). Religious education and the rhetoric of reform: The Madrasa in British India and Pakistan. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41(2), 294-323.
- Zaidi, A. (2023). Education | UNICEF Pakistan. <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>

