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Reforming Pakistan's Education System: Bridging the Gap for 21st-Century Skills

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Introduction

In today's age of globalization and knowledge-based economies, higher educational standards are closely linked to the economic growth and prosperity of the countries. Institutions are responsible for more than only producing new information; they should provide the next generation with the sophisticated competencies and skills they will need to survive in the next millennium. Education is now viewed as a significant commitment for personal growth and is essential for the socioeconomic growth of the nations. It is also asserted that the goal of educational institutions is to promote personal, social, cultural, and economic growth in addition to the transmission of information in certain fields. The expectations of society and the difficulties posed by the current global environment must be taken into consideration by higher education institutions. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are the driving force behind the current economic system. As a result, education is contributing in a variety of ways to the achievement of the 21st century goals. Previous research claimed that the world is continuing to make the switch from an industrialized to an intellectual economic growth and that developing 21st century abilities is necessary for success in the global economy. Significant obstacles, such as those in the social, moral, political, and economic spheres, are being faced by higher education, and how these obstacles are overcome will determine its destiny (Ansari & Wu, 2013).

In this century, analytical as well as critical thinking are considered the basic demands to survive. According to Wagner (2008), there are many institutions or teachers who fall short in preparing pupils to meet the demands of this era, so they are indeed responsible for endangering or endangering the country (as cited in Azid et al, 2019). The phrase "21st century skills" implies a collection of fundamental abilities that educational institutions must educate in order to get students ready to live in a global society in the 21st century. Typically, the expression "21st century skills" refers to a systematic collection of skills which are not essential but also useful for both education and life in the twenty-first century (Nauman, 2017).

Currently, the idea of the labor force is one of an international market i.e., highly skilled individuals in affluent nations compete for employment with those with comparable credentials in lower-paying nations. Previously, work was regional as the only contenders for such positions were nationals of the home region (Ertesvåg, 2011).

The COVID-19 Pandemic has shown us that teachers in the twenty-first century unquestionably faced new obstacles as a result of the enormous global health pandemic. It should be highlighted that they are now increasingly responsible for the overall development of a student, laying the groundwork for advancement throughout life (Dahlback et al, 2020).

The world as we know it is changing daily, and many countries have made the



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transition to an intellectual community and an improved educational system with success. Many countries have integrated the nation's educational vision for the progress of the country. The governments are developing a vision to establish an education and training system that will produce more knowledgeable, well-rounded individuals who are capable of functioning as dynamic, innovative, and effective global citizens (Oviawe et al, 2017). The education sector creates its own sector plan in accordance with the national vision as a roadmap for achieving that of the country (Sajjad, 2010).

To achieve this, it will be necessary to integrate 21st century knowledge and abilities into the already taught conventional academic areas. This is necessary because we will not need a system of education that just aids pupils in recalling numbers and information; instead, the country needs to train them to be skeptical information seekers. Thus, it is determined that unless we work to incorporate new knowledge, talents, and abilities into the educational system of a technologically advanced world, we will be held accountable for endangering the safety of our countries (Jalaludin & Inkasan, 2014).

In light of the direct connection between the educational systems around the world and the world's rapidly changing priorities, preparing the young people for life beyond college and graduate school education is crucial. For this reason, examining Pakistan's educational system in relation to the development of 21st century skills is the aim of this research.

Challenges in the Current Education System: Political and Historical Perspective

Education is the most essential necessity of the world. A creative, open, and inclusive educational system that aims to produce a large number of graduates with a high level of literacy and transferrable skills is necessary for a worldwide economy (Nauman, 2017). A legacy of Pakistan's colonial rulers is the country's educational system. It hasn't been updated to reflect how the times have changed. Plato's education philosophy of idealism, which argues for an individual who is submissive to a just community. It is unclear what education's goal is. Ironically, the parliamentarians don't have a national goal for education on their agenda, and neither have political parties that are pro-reform. It is hardly surprising that since 1979, Pakistan has served as a breeding ground for extreme religious ideas backed by friendly nations (Azid et al, 2019).

The Pakistani educational system is one that experiences many ups and downs. Pakistan and its administration are making fruitless attempts to improve the country's educational system. According to Pakistan's existing failing, dropout, and matriculation rates, The system falls short of both the short-term and long-term requirements of a 21st century economical world (Sajjad, 2010).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment, passed by the parliament in April 2010, changed the status of education in Pakistan from a federal to a provincial responsibility. In several societal and economic domains, such as education, the provincial/area administrations have more freedom. At the federal level, the Ministry of Education and Training and Standards in Higher Education collaborates with international partners for inclusive growth and offers a forum for information sharing between the provincial/area departments of education in order to foster harmony, synchronicity, and synergy. The main service provider in Pakistan is the public sector, which oversees 12 academic years of official



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schools. It begins at the primary level and ends with the higher secondary school diploma. Pre-primary classrooms, also known locally as “Katchi” classes or Pre-K classes, are present in schools but are not recognized in terms of budgetary funding or examinations. Public education in Pakistan is outmoded, just like it is in many other nations. But the system has brought in new players, particularly in the tech sector. Students are urged to pick up practical skills through vocational education and application (Khan et al, 2019).

The private sector meets the educational needs of top class enrolled children with a variety of streams; While some opt to use national curricula, others prefer the Cambridge International Examinations curriculum. In metropolitan regions, most upper-middle class children attend expensive private schools which offer to cover international curriculum. They have trained and competent teachers working for them and provide all necessary amenities of the highest quality modern classrooms, and teaching-learning materials. However, only a small percentage of students can afford that standard of education (Javed et al, 2019).

General Musharaf's administration significantly improved Pakistan's educational policies (who himself was a strong advocate of Education). Dr. Atta Ur Rehman, an organic chemistry specialist and former chairman of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission from October 2002 to September 2008, was extremely influential in the advancement of education. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2019 report, Punjab's literacy rate rose from 61.9% to 64.7%, Balochistan's from 54.3% to 55.5%, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's from 54.1% to 55.3%. From 63.0% to 62.2%, Sindh's literacy rate has dropped (Nauman, 2017).

The mechanisms created in accordance with its 2030 vision and the National Standard Curriculum (NSC) have prioritized knowledge acquisition of fundamental skills. However, this method does not easily include the 21st century abilities necessary for success in the global economy, including problem solving and critical thinking. Additionally, the issue of students acquiring the necessary skills has been made worse by the disparities in areas like resource distribution, student streaming, and government support. Some pupils, particularly those from lower socioeconomic classes, lack the skills necessary for academic matriculation as well as employment in the global economy because some schools lack computer, scientific, and technology labs and libraries (Ansari & Wu, 2013).

Pakistan continues to have the second-highest proportion of children worldwide who are not in school. This is partly a result of Pakistan's terrible educational system and the inability of successive administrations to equip everyone with even the most basic education. Pakistan agreed that everyone should have access to educational opportunities that are suited to their fundamental learning requirements as a signatory to this Declaration on Education for All (EFA) (Omar et al, 2020). However, it is necessary to abandon the conservative teaching methods and adopt the contemporary philosophical ideas in Pakistan in order to transform the very ideology that guides the country's educational system and policy makers. Students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills are hampered when teachers dominate the classroom and see students as little more than empty vessels, and it makes it challenging for individuals to demonstrate initiative and responsibility while working well with others and communicating. Without a doubt, the majority of these students are fortunate to have the chance to maximize their knowledge with the aid of the top instructors,



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state-of-the-art equipment, and productive classroom and lab conditions (Nauman, 2017).

Most students who attend upgraded high schools are primarily male and come from the lower socioeconomic rung of the social ladder. They must undergo two years of remedial work to catch up since they are ill-prepared to handle the demands of a secondary level curriculum. The serious behavioral issues these students experience are added to this. Due to a lack of funding and resources in these schools, remedial instruction and behavioral intervention for these pupils will cost a lot of money, further complicating the teaching and learning process. Additionally, many adolescents struggle with major behavioral problems. The teaching and learning process will become even more challenging as a result of the lack of financing and resources in these schools, which will make remedial instruction and behavioral intervention for these students more expensive. The country has to start emancipating itself from colonial notions of schooling and moving away from a traditional viewpoint, and toward one that allows every school and every student an equal chance to achieve and participate in a knowledge-based economy. In addition, all schools and institutions should hire teachers since they have the necessary resources and facilities, and they will operate their classrooms as student-centered environments with appropriately dispersed class sizes after receiving training in the usage of 21st century skills (Ahmad et al, 2014).

A fundamental shift in Pakistan's educational paradigm is necessary if it wants to satisfy the needs of the global market for development and employment. It must ensure that at all levels, students will have access to excellent education with increased curricular flexibility, and the use of evaluation approaches that are responsive to the needs of the modern world (Knight and Rapley, 2007 as cited in Ansari & Wu, 2013).

Pakistan's educational system's shortcomings have prevented its students from competing successfully in the global market since the country lacks high-quality programs that give students access to 21st-century skills. Therefore, it is needed that Pakistani students attain their full potential and are suitably equipped to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the 21st-century educational systems.

Framework for 21 Century Skills

The utilization and implementation of new scientific and technical developments characterize knowledge economies, investing strategically in education and research, being open to social, cultural, and economic changes, and implementing best practices. Pakistan, although being a developing country, needs to develop in a way that meets the demands of the globalized market of the twenty-first century (Sajjad, 2010).

In 2002, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) organization sprang to prominence as one of the leading 21st century skills advocacy groups. P21 Framework, sometimes referred to as the Framework for 21st Century Learning. It was in fact established as a consequence of concerns raised about the lack of preparation of graduates for the twenty-first century. This framework placed a strong emphasis on introducing and incorporating digital-age competencies in teaching, and offers chances to corporate executives, legislators, and educational leaders for developing a comprehensive vision of education for the twenty-first



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century so that each person can successfully contribute to society as a citizen of the world and as an employee in the twenty-first century. It promotes educational institutions, administrators, and teachers to adopt 21st century skills in their facilities. This illustrates the crucial competencies that a person needs to acquire to succeed in both job and life. Additionally, the P21 paradigm combines literacy with having capabilities, competence, and knowledge (P21, 2011).

Although various models of skills for the twenty-first century have been put forth, the majority of scholars and practitioners concur that teaching and learning processes should incorporate the four 21st-century skills which are important for learners (Greenhill, 2010). These skills are critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, and they are referred to as 4Cs of 21st century skill. These four Cs examined the essential 21st-century capabilities that provide perceptive guidance and thorough comprehension for the variety of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Graduates with these skills can think critically, pose conceptual inquiries, solve issues, analyze, understand, and assess many viewpoints, as well as think back on their decisions and actions. For this case report, it is crucial to examine whether educators in Pakistan's educational system are cultivating and utilizing these skills or not.

Global Perspectives on 21st-Century Education

It is asserted that teacher education programs must be flexible, and up to date to meet the modern demands of the era, however, it has been very challenging for developing nations. Most importantly, the experts who deliver instruction in the classroom are crucial to the success of any educational effort. Any nation's education system's ability to succeed is largely dependent on the qualifications and delivery strategies of its teachers. Given this context, it is crucial to train teachers and build their competences in line with the key components of 21st-century learning skills. Among these, it is impossible to overlook the 4Cs of learning. They discuss the difficulty of creating educational experiences to address issues in the actual world that may not have certain answers. For this skill to be developed, pupils must be able to gather, organize, integrate, justify, and critically analyze huge amounts of data (Dahlback et al, 2020).

Best worldwide practices could serve as an amateur's inspiration for and reinforcement of effective educational systems. For example, in Malaysia, multiple national organizations and ministries work together to offer a unique representation of their system, and one of the main concerns for educating Malaysian educators in 21st-century skills is ICT (Hamdan et al, 2019). The effectiveness of the teachers' training, in particular their performance, is seen as a key aspect in Malaysia's improvement of its educational system. The government agencies collaborate only for the purpose of creating graduates who can meet the demands of the job in the twenty-first century (Omar, Zahar, & Rashid, 2020). However, South Africa serves as an illustration of a nation that initially lacked a national framework that could produce a workforce that was compatible. Among other significant issues, the inability to create a concrete and outcome-focused assessment of instructors' training needs had a cascading effect that resulted in practitioners' management and leadership abilities as well as their training abilities deteriorating (Teferra & Altbachl, 2004).

The effective adoption of 21st-century skills in rich countries has provided developing countries with a number of teaching methods. For instance, in the



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EU, assessors have the necessary training to impart 21st-century abilities while paying close attention to the aforementioned 4Cs. It is anticipated that a comprehensive national leadership framework with institutional ownership may resolve the problem (Omar et al, 2020).

Current Gaps in the Pakistani Education System

The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah envisioned the education system as the engine that would propel every national goal (Ahmad et al, 2014).

Numerous educational commissions were established, as well as committees, to increase the importance of education. Ironically, however, the implementation has been fairly subpar. As a result, rather than improving, the country's educational system has suffered greatly. The system has also been badly impacted by the growing gaps and separations between educational institutions and the community. For the education process to be high-quality, parental engagement is essential. The first school a kid attends is at home, and effective policy implementation would remain a pipe dream without parental participation in the educational process. This will also deal with the disparity problem (Azid et al, 2019).

A workforce that is flexible, highly capable, and inventive is needed in the modern economy. However, Pakistan's education system is still incredibly stratified and uneven (Ahmad et al, 2014), and the system every year grants thousands of degrees to students who are ill-equipped for the workforce or further study (Nauman, 2017).

Despite grand goals and declarations, Pakistan's education system has the following issues.

Consistency Issue

There isn't a single set of guiding concepts that the Pakistani educational system is built around. There are multiple educational systems operating in the nation at once. Additionally, there are various schools of thought because the curriculum is not uniform (Omar et al, 2020).

Education without Direction

Pakistan's educational system has not been able to mold students due to its directionlessness and fragility and guide its populace on strong political and social pillars. The system lacks unity and is more inclined toward broad education, which does not produce any skilled labor for the market. There is thus a rise in unemployment. It's possible that people will feel deprived as a result of this predicament (Sajjad, 2010).

Outdated Curricula

The educational system in Pakistan does not meet the demands of the contemporary world, and the curriculum is out-of-date and antiquated, and it requires pupils to memorize facts and statistics without considering the fact that education is about a person's whole development (Sajjad, 2010).

Lack of Professional Development of Teachers

In Pakistan, there aren't enough possibilities for teacher training. Despite the fact



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that there are several institutes in the country that provide teacher training. These organizations either lack funding or run inefficiently owing to a lack of finance and competent personnel, such as administrators and trainers. The training facilities that are available across the nation lack appropriate training standards (Sajjad, 2010).

Alarming Dropouts

There are currently 40 lac students in Pakistan who are not enrolled in school as a result of this trend's dramatic rise. According to Hayes (1989), this trend is partially attributable to the use of corporal punishment in schools, a dreary or unmotivating learning environment, and parents' bad parenting (Omar et al, 2020).

Examination System

In addition to being out of date, Pakistan's examination system lacks the capacity to thoroughly assess students' performance. The assessment system promotes cramming and memorizing, which minimizes the value of students' strong intellectual ability, including their critical thinking, reflection, and analytical abilities, and it fails to accurately reflect the performance and achievements of the students (Sajjad, 2010).

Inadequate Supervision Standards

The approach to school management is inefficient. In addition, the absence of supervisory activities is one issue and the monitoring procedure itself in schools and colleges has no positive effects on either teachers or students. Instead of offering support and advice for improving performance, the supervision system is more concerned with controlling and bothering the teachers (Omar et al, 2020).

Lack of Resources

For the educational process to work smoothly, resources like books, libraries, and physical spaces are crucial. In all of the nation's educational institutions, there are depressingly few reading materials, libraries, and book-related services. In addition, there are crowded classrooms, unqualified instructors, and poorly furnished laboratories. Because of all that is bad, there is pessimism and a subpar educational system (Omar et al, 2020).

Policy Implementation

There have been many different education policies developed since Pakistan's founding. The policies were highly ambitious, but they could not be fully implemented. Corruption, a lack of funding, and blatant contradiction in subsequent planning have all been issues for Pakistan's political regimes. Furthermore, teachers have been disregarded in the creation of the overall policy. They are disregarded as being inconsequential, and it has created a breach between the educational system and the teachers (Omar et al, 2020).

Inadequate Funding for Education Sector

One of the world's top 12 countries is Pakistan, according to the International Crisis Group, that spent less than 2 percent of their GDP on the educational



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sector. The amount of money budgeted for education has increased in many of the emerging nations in the region, including Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. However, it is steadily reducing in Pakistan (Khan et al, 2019).

After examining all of these issues, it is important to know how Pakistan may improve its educational system and address these concerns to supply graduates who will prosper in the global society of the twenty-first century.

Recommendations for Reforming Pakistan's Education System

Previous research indicates that to expand the education sector in accordance with global criteria, constant improvement is required. Pakistan and other nations need substantial changes to improve the current organization, teaching strategies, course offerings, and delivery methods in all educational establishments.

The literature review demonstrated that by making deliberate efforts to successfully plan and implement processes for change, nations, especially developing ones, may transform their educational system and eventually their economy. State-wide change necessitates the participation of all stakeholders at all levels, just like in the case of other nations.

This case study makes the following principal recommendations.

Curriculum Reform to Incorporate the 4Cs

It is imperative that policymakers spread awareness of the necessity for individuals and organizations to acquire 21st century skills and competences, and the matter should also be brought up with prominent leaders at various forums particularly in policy debate. The responsible ministry may take up the matter on a national level in order to make about an articulated for 21st century skills in at all levels in the educational sector. Considering how quickly the international community's objectives are changing, it is crucial that educational institutions will create a clear policy for the application of 21st century skills (Greenhill, 2010).

Investing in Teacher Training and Capacity Building

To equip their institutions with 21st-century competencies, teachers must learn the weaker or absent competencies in this area. Senior educators and administrators should assume responsibility for providing junior or inexperienced educators with the necessary degree of expertise about 21st-century teaching and learning techniques. In order to maintain the necessary input level, institutions' planned and funded activities for teachers' continuing education are crucial. These initiatives must include thorough teacher involvement in order to advance their communication skill, critical thinking and creativity, so that they will be able to foster these skills among youth (Ansari & Wu, 2013).

Addressing Inequities in Education Access and Quality

Pakistan's educational system ought to incorporate best practices from throughout the globe. All schools should be provided with the facilities and materials required for teaching and mastering the skills required for the current and future global marketplaces. Additionally, it should abandon the conventional exam-based evaluation model, allowing for more flexibility in the curriculum and



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assessment techniques. Institutions must also try to remove the obstruction barriers to handle the implementation process adequately. Through continual actions, this requires more than just a surface makeover, and requires careful planning and implementation of teacher evaluation systems that encourage choosing the appropriate pathway. This will only be effective if senior management and institution leaders are prepared to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Leveraging Technology for Skill Development

It is essential that educational institutions and schools put in place a robust monitoring and assessment system in addition to working toward applying these 21st-century learning abilities. One cannot remain stationary once they reach a milestone because technologies and management viewpoints are constantly evolving. The emphasis of this monitoring method must be on taking a rigorous and comprehensive approach to continuing to add value. Evidence-based teaching practices could aid teachers in achieving not just their particular professional objectives but also the fraternity as a whole in moving forward with global alignment (Hamdan et al, 2019).

Conclusion

The main idea of this paper is that education helps people grow socially, morally, spiritually, politically, and economically. It is an active force that supports every nation in achieving its broad national goals. It is well recognized that countries with well-developed social and political systems and graduates who are playing leadership roles in the comity of nations are those that have integrated 21st century skills into their educational systems. They are free to exercise their rights, and they are also politically and economically evolved and free. The educational system in Pakistan has not been able to adequately aid in the progress of the nation, and this factor has contributed to the rise of social instability in Pakistan. As matter of fact, the next generation lacks direction because of Pakistan's defective educational system, which has woefully failed to bring the nation up to the standard of a developed country. The aimless educational system is creating a workforce of degree holders who lack 21st century abilities including communication, critical analysis, inquiry, and creativity. Instead, the emphasis in the educational system has been on educating individuals with knowledge and information that is out-of-date and less applicable to the modern, fast changing reality. Graduates from Pakistani educational institutions lack the practical abilities required to put what they have learned into practice because of the conventional teaching and learning techniques utilized at those schools. Finally, this assessment comes to the conclusion that Pakistan's educational system has to be reformatted immediately in order to include the 21 competencies at all educational levels

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