



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

Paving the Way for Educational Excellence in Pakistan: Policy, Curriculum, Access

Analysis Report



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PRESIDENT

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd)

SEMINAR COORDINATOR

Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd)

EDITED BY

Sarah Siddiq Aneel

REPORT COMPILATION

Asad Ullah Khan

RAPPORTEURS

Shah Muhammad, Shaza Arif, Usman Haider & Zahra Niazi

LAYOUT

Hira Mumtaz

All correspondence pertaining to this document should be addressed to CASS, Islamabad through post or email on the following address:

Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies

☎ +92 051 5405011

📧 cassthinkers

📘 cass.thinkers

✂ @CassThinkers

✉ cass.thinkers@casstt.com

🏠 Centre for Aerospace
& Security Studies

Old Airport Road, Islamabad, Pakistan
www.casstt.com



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Contents




Introduction	1
Executive Summary	2
Key Takeaways	4
Proposed Way Forward	5
Summary of Proceedings	6
Opening Remarks	6
1. Quality of Education and Challenges in Higher Education.....	6
2. Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities.....	9
3. Curriculum Development and Controversies.....	11
Concluding Remarks & Vote of Thanks	14
Annexures	16
Profiles of the Speakers	16
Press Release.....	18

Introduction

The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad has a tradition of initiating timely, well-informed and policy-relevant debates on subjects of national and international importance through publications, conferences, seminars, webinars and guest lectures by leading diplomats, policy experts, senior civil and military officers, scholars and media. These policy debates are closely followed not only by policymakers/experts, relevant institutions, academia and media but also by the international community.

In order to debate the challenges facing the education system, CASS organised a seminar titled, '***Paving the Way for Educational Excellence in Pakistan: Policy, Curriculum, Access***' on 6 March 2024.

The key aspects which were covered during this seminar included the following:

-  Quality of Education and Challenges in Higher Education
-  Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities
-  Curriculum Development and Controversies

Eminent speakers included Dr Faisal Bari, Dean LUMS School of Education, Lahore; Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, CEO International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning (iFEEL), Islamabad; and Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani, Chairperson Department of International Relations, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. The proceedings were moderated by Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd), Director Non-Traditional Security at CASS, with vote of thanks and concluding remarks delivered by Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President of CASS.

Executive Summary

The seminar addressed key issues including the quality of education and challenges in higher education; out-of-school children and regional disparities and curriculum development. It also offered a platform to discuss the effects of the 18th Amendment on education policies, the viability of a unified syllabus, and the practicality of maintaining distinct educational streams in Pakistan's diverse landscape.

Introducing the seminar, **Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd)** emphasised the cumulative impact of neglecting education, noting Pakistan's significant lag in achieving primary and secondary education targets and the challenges facing the higher education sector, including political interference and insufficient resources obstructing the nation's pursuit of developing a comprehensive, skilled workforce and significantly limiting the educational sector's contribution to national development.

In his address, **Dr Faisal Bari** highlighted critical issues within Pakistan's education system, pointing out the nation's significant struggle in fostering critical thinking skills, such as thoughtfulness, judiciousness, the ability to embrace ambiguity, and the capacity for evidence-based reasoning. Dr Bari emphasised the transformative role of technology in higher education, particularly in the context of the new wave of automation. He warned of the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to automate and eliminate numerous jobs, underscoring the urgency for educational reform. He further argued that the future of Pakistan hinged on a technology-centric education system. He stressed the need for substantial improvements at the school level, specifically in pedagogy and curriculum development and called for holistic strategies to incentivise and regulate universities by revamping the Higher Education Commission (HEC), ensuring that policies are aligned with the evolving demands of the workforce and broader society.

Speaking on the subject of 'Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities', **Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui** shared that the existing educational infrastructure in Pakistan was insufficient to support the inclusion of its 26 million out-of-school children. Ms Siddiqui stressed the urgent need for launching an education campaign with the same intensity and urgency as the response to the COVID crisis, highlighting the potential of community mosques to play a significant role in raising awareness and sensitising the populace about the importance of education. She advocated for educational organisations to form partnerships with leading universities across Pakistan, suggesting that such collaborations could significantly enhance children's opportunities for higher education; and for university students to be motivated to undertake education-centric social work. Additionally, Ms Siddiqui pointed out the necessity to bridge the gaps between formal, informal, and hybrid modes of education, ensuring a more cohesive and accessible learning environment for all. She proposed a simple yet effective approach of 'one room-one subject-one teacher' to address complex educational challenges.

In addressing the controversies surrounding curriculum content, **Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani** highlighted the necessity of removing political biases from the curriculum development process to better meet the changing needs of a dynamic society. She underscored the fact that, since 1947, Pakistan had witnessed the formulation of approximately 25 education policies. She called for sustained policy implementation, arguing that the strategic goals of education should not fluctuate with the shifting political landscape. She underscored the importance of implementing measures to ensure the curriculum is inclusive, relevant, and fosters critical thinking, while also respecting Pakistan's diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. She advocated for a strategic revision of the education system, aiming to make it more reflective of and responsive to the country's complex identity and future needs.

In his concluding remarks, President CASS **Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd)** underscored the profound impact of education on national security, spanning both traditional and non-traditional realms. 'If we want to ensure our security, it is imperative to bring our out-of-school children into the educational fold,' he stated. President CASS also urged the country's leadership to transcend short-term electoral interests and invest in policies with benefits that may only be realised over time. He reinforced that educating (*tarbiyat*) was a collective responsibility of teachers, parents, and society. He laid emphasis on the significance of Industry-Academia linkages, which have become increasingly vital in addressing the rapid social and technological changes occurring globally. He said that, realising this change and developing an education hub with special focus on industry-academia relationship is important. He gave examples of initiatives undertaken by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), including Air University-Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) collaboration and the concept of National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) which would link many educational institutions with a variety of industries.

The seminar witnessed active participation from a diverse audience, including retired military officers, scholars, and students.

Key Takeaways

- Education is a cornerstone of national development necessitating immediate attention and strategic planning beyond political gains. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents and society is essential to tackle challenges and foster a conducive learning environment.
- Education has to be tackled in a wholesome manner; encompassing formal schooling, home environment and societal influences. A holistic approach is required for nurturing future generations towards positive outcomes.
- Due importance to the education must be a national priority for Pakistan. Failure to address educational deficiencies could severely impact the country's socioeconomic development.
- The challenges to Pakistan's education system require a systematic approach that encompasses reforms at multiple levels, from primary schooling to higher education. This includes not only improving infrastructure and curriculum but also fostering a culture of critical thinking, innovation, and adaptability among students.
- Academia-Industry linkage is of paramount importance for seamless fusion between educated/skilled manpower and industries to enhance productivity in a variety of fields.
- It is vital to encourage cross-disciplinary learning and breaking down educational silos to equip students with versatile skills necessary for a rapidly evolving job market.
- Recognising the interconnectivity of different aspects of education such as objectives, curriculum, teacher training, and examination systems is crucial for implementing effective education policies that address the diverse needs of learners and society as a whole.
- Understanding how changes in educational objectives over the time have influenced curriculum development and societal narratives is essential for addressing biases, promoting inclusivity, and fostering critical thinking among students.
- There is an urgent need to address the education crisis for out-of-school children on a war footing. Collaboration between educational organisations, universities, and community stakeholders is crucial for effective intervention and progress.
- The challenges in the education system, including gender disparities, infrastructure deficiencies, and societal barriers, require an all-inclusive approach. There is need to address not only academic needs but also social and cultural barriers to ensure inclusivity and accessibility in education.
- The importance of empowerment and advocacy in addressing systemic issues such as child begging and gender inequality in education must not be ignored. Advocating for policy changes and empowering communities through education can drive sustainable progress and positive societal transformation.



Proposed Way Forward

- There is a need to improve the educational infrastructure in order to provide a conducive learning environment to students.
- When an educational policy has been made after thorough deliberations; it should not be changed with every change in government.
- The state must emphasise collective responsibility across stakeholders, including government, parents, institutions, and society, to address issues like rote learning, mafias in education, and holistic child development.
- Government must prioritise strengthening the schooling system which includes addressing issues such as poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and outdated curricula. This could involve comprehensive reforms aimed at improving the quality of education from primary to secondary levels.
- There is a pressing need for significant improvements in teaching methods (pedagogy) and the content covered (curriculum) in schools and universities. This would involve incorporating modern teaching techniques, promoting critical thinking skills, and updating course materials to align with evolving societal needs and global trends.
- Focus should be on revamping the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to effectively regulate universities and incentivise them to produce better educational outcomes. This could entail introducing new performance metrics, enhancing accountability measures, and fostering innovation and excellence in higher education institutions.
- Prioritising inclusive curriculum development that acknowledges diverse historical narratives, cultural contributions, and promotes critical thinking, human rights, and gender equality can help address biases, foster tolerance, and prepare students for the complexities of modern society.
- A well-thought-out plan must be made linking education institutes to the industry.
- Implementing a stable set of educational objectives over a longer term, regardless of political changes, can provide consistency and direction to the education system, fostering a more cohesive and effective approach to curriculum development and implementation.
- Investing in comprehensive teacher training programmes, that equip educators with the skills to teach critical thinking, will promote inclusivity.
- Partnering educational organisations with prominent universities can facilitate higher education prospects for out-of-school children and engage university students in social work, akin to the model of 'Teach for America'. This collaboration can enrich educational initiatives and provide valuable resources and expertise.
- Utilising accelerated learning programmes for informal education can bridge gaps in education and expedite the schooling process, offering an opportunity for children who missed out on formal education to catch up quickly. These programmes can be instrumental in addressing the urgent need to enroll out-of-school children.
- Implementing a programme where each classroom has one dedicated teacher per subject can enhance the quality of education and facilitate personalised learning experiences. This approach, coupled with robust monitoring and quality assurance systems, can significantly improve educational outcomes.

Summary of Proceedings

Opening Remarks

MODERATOR: Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd)

Director Non-Traditional Security, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad

The moderator, Air Vice Marshal Nasser Wyne (Retd) began the seminar proceedings stating that issues related to Water, Education, Economy, and Population (WEEP) had far-reaching effects on Pakistan. CASS, Islamabad, was determined to explore remedies to these issues through experts' recommendations. In the context of challenges related to education, he pointed towards Pakistan's poor world ranking on human development and literacy rates. Under these circumstances, he urged that there was a need for declaring an 'educational emergency' in the country.

1. Quality of Education and Challenges in Higher Education

SPEAKER: Dr Faisal Bari

Dean, LUMS School of Education, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore

Transformation of Pakistan's Higher Education

Dr Bari stated that the massive expansion in Pakistan's higher education took place due to private sector investments, which began in the 1980s and 1990s. Soon, private sector universities made the education sector the fastest-growing industry of Pakistan. He highlighted various governments' political initiatives to establish a university in each district. To support his argument, he cited the 2023-24 Caretaker Government's approval of charters for 20-32 universities in parliament with little or no debate. Pakistan already has approximately 250 higher education institutions, with nearly half of these in the private sector. He was of the view that this could have been beneficial if the quality of education and firm regulatory aspects were also given due importance.

The ratio of students transiting from school, colleges to universities was very low, either due to financial reasons or inability to qualify for university level education. Only 6-7% children who were enrolled in grade one transitioned to universities, however he shared that the HEC had now set a goal to increase this figure to 15% in the near to mid future.

Need for Diversification in Education Disciplines

According to Dr Bari, universities were continuously adding new disciplines to their curricula to keep up the pace at which new subjects were emerging the world over. However, it was also important for universities to give due importance to cross-disciplinary work. Education silos that had been created in major disciplines like

engineering, economics, social sciences etc. needed to be broken down, especially for undergraduate education. Though specialisation is important but at the undergraduate level, there was a need for diversification. Dr Bari further talked about the 21st Century skills that were essential for students and that skills such as reading, writing, comprehension, communication, and the ability to deal with and interact with others, had become much more critical. These had to go along with special subjects like IT and digitalisation.

Role of Technology in Higher Education

According to Prof. Bari, technology had gained prominence in education due to the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation, and that such subjects were not applicable to universities alone but needed to be introduced right at the school level. He pointed out that a new wave had emerged; poised to completely alter future job market requirements. Discussing MIT economist Daron Acemoglu's work 'Fall of Nations', the speaker shared how Acemoglu had remarked in a lecture that countries with high population such as Pakistan and India, would encounter substantial challenges due to AI's potential to automate and eliminate numerous jobs. Consequently, unless labour and youth possessed the skills and adapted to new job demands and transitioned to a variety of sectors; high-population countries would confront significant issues as far as skill level and jobs were concerned.

Online Education: A New Revolution in the Making

Dr Bari was of the opinion that future of the education sector belonged to online education. He said that it would solve various problems, including teaching students who could not attend school. Much work had been going on in this regard, especially at the university level such as distance learning, online learning, synchronous or non-synchronous learning, etc. 'It is of paramount importance that our university structures adapt to this changing scenario', he said.

Pakistani Education and Creativity

Dr Bari talked about creativity in education by quoting Marshall Gregory:

The properties of an educated mind are thoughtfulness and judiciousness. The mental power to travel back and forth between the making of useful distinctions and the making of insightful confluences. The ability to live with cognitive dissonance. The cognitive ability to pay prolonged analytical attention to the subcomponent parts of complex structures. The willingness to look for evidence, wait for it, and yield to it when it does appear. The maturity to endure complexity and ambiguity rather than erasing them by either rushing to judgment or by resorting to stereotypes and the recognition that happiness is not the same thing as self-indulgence.

These were properties that students should have been taught; however, sadly, most institutions in Pakistan lacked this capability. There was a miserable failure to develop

thoughtfulness, judiciousness, the ability to live with ambiguity, work on evidence, wait for it, and then yield to it.

Poor Schooling Standards

Dr Bari highlighted the prevailing issue of poor schooling in Pakistan, noting that around 95-96% of children received substandard education, with 50-60% attending government schools and the rest enrolled in low-cost private schools. Sharing a World Bank statistic, he revealed that on average, eight years of schooling only yielded four years of education. The dire situation persisted through secondary education, where many students failed to grasp basic literacy. This deficiency plagued them into university, revealing a systemic flaw in educational foundations.

Rote Learning: Key Problem in Pakistan's Education System




Criticising the reliance on rote learning, he asserted that it was a major reason for the downfall of Pakistan's education system. Exams like matriculation, FSc, and to some extent A-levels, perpetuated this issue. Rote learning hindered critical thinking, essential for thoughtfulness and judiciousness. The emphasis on job acquisition over nurturing critical thinking stymied innovation. Efforts were directed towards job preparation rather than cultivating critical thinking skills, impeding the development of innovation and thoughtfulness among children.

Need to Learn from Other Nations

Dr Bari emphasised the importance of learning from the educational trajectories of other nations, highlighting that historically, countries did not initiate educational investments when affluent. Examples included Japan's Meiji Revolution in 1865; the United States' typical school movement spanning two to three centuries; and Britain and Germany post-industrial revolution. These nations commenced educational endeavours during times of relative poverty. The first American rural schools typically accommodated 10-15 students. In 1865, Japan embarked on school construction and sent individuals abroad to bring back knowledge. Although early beginnings were not hampered by financial constraints, countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka followed suit, with Sri Lanka, for instance, opting not to establish new private schools in the 1960s. Approximately 98% of Sri Lankan children attended public schools, indicating a significant commitment to public education.

Way Forward

Dr Bari suggested the following road map to improve Pakistan's education system and inculcate critical thinking:

-  Strengthening the school system should be a top national priority.
-  Substantial improvements in pedagogy and curriculum are a must.
-  Children should be taught in the same schools to facilitate communication, as different languages, systems, thoughts, mind-sets and worldviews could hinder interaction.

- 🎓 The Higher Education Commission (HEC) should be revamped; a new system should be introduced to regulate universities and incentivise them to produce better results.
- 🎓 Pakistan's make or break was linked to education; thus, failure to address educational issues would bode poorly for the nation's future.

2. Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities

SPEAKER: Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui

CEO iFEEL, Islamabad

Journey Towards helping Out-of-School Children

Ms Siddiqui highlighted that she shifted from a technical field of Information Technologies (IT) to social service to work for out-of-school children. She saw immense potential in those children at her maid's house and started teaching them. Her work grew enormously as she reached out to people and involved them in charity schools. She shared the work of her organisation and maintained that early action was necessary because it was difficult to enrol a child who had crossed the threshold age. It was also important to provide training to teachers from different provinces and to train people on how to establish such organisations.

Problems in the Education System

There are 26 million out-of-school children in Pakistan and their enrolment is an uphill task, as the country needs as many schools as have been made since the inception of Pakistan. She explained that public and private schools operated quite differently. Public schools were well-resourced and well-built but there was no will to teach on the same lines as those in the private schools. Ms Siddiqui also expressed her apprehension that the figure of 26 million would likely rise in the future. There was also issue of gender disparity in the education system. Female literacy was a mere 52% whereas male literacy was over 70%. According to her, putting children on tuition was counterproductive because tuition raised the cost of education for parents while wasting children's time. The student-teacher ratio across provinces also painted a dismal picture. Talking about Sindh, she argued that the system did not have the capacity to take more children. The terrain and far-away schools in Balochistan made it difficult for students to attend schools. In addition, students usually faced issues in terms of electricity, water, hygiene and washrooms. Private schools faced financial burdens as they were compelled to build and enlarge boundary walls due to security concerns. The burden was ultimately borne by parents.

Province-Wise Out-of School Children

Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui pointed out that Punjab had 11.3 million out-of-school children out of the total figure of 26 million. School infrastructure in Punjab remained underutilised whereas the issue could be resolved through political will. The figure in Sindh was 7.63 million but sadly there was no political will to lower this figure. She added that power circles did not allow education to flourish because it would enable students to have thoughts and opinions. However, the education level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had improved substantially, with noticeable improvement in government schools. The scenario in Balochistan was entirely different due to its tough terrain. According to her, the figure of 0.08 million out-of-school children in the capital Islamabad was alarming considering that it was the hub of ministries. There were two to three slums in every sector, having a large number of out-of-school children.

Child Begging and the Role of Mafias

The speaker stressed that child begging was a major factor behind non-enrolment in schools. She stated that children were usually brought into urban centres to beg from rural areas. Their fathers were either dead or drug addicts. In some cases, families were also complicit. Ms Siddiqui stated that she tried to go into those colonies and found out that some influential people were also forcing children to beg. She had meetings at the Senate and ministerial level to resolve this issue but could not do anything as some powerful mafias were involved.

Challenges to the Girls' Education

Ms Siddiqui emphasised that being a girl was itself a hurdle to girls' education. She maintained that the parents believed there was no use in educating girls. There were some cultural differences as well. In order to tackle this, her team came up with different packages for various marginalised, ethnic and minority communities. Girls from these communities were eventually able to complete matriculation and the parents became more open to the idea of female education. However, she lamed that some girls were also prevented from education because they were involved in domestic work.

Organisational Efforts

Sharing her organisation's experience, Ms Siddiqui stated that it was vital to have a flexible education schedule so that those students who could not give up child labour could also attend classes. She argued that corporal punishment was still ongoing but her organisation had taken steps to curtail it. Language barriers and learning disorders were also addressed. She stated that various organisations were working on these areas. Mosques were also involved in Sindh and Balochistan. She stressed that there should be zero tolerance for violence and corporal punishment by training teachers in good manners and ethics.

Way Forward for Enrolling Out-of-School Children

Ms Siddiqui called for educational work to be done on war footing, the way COVID-19 was dealt with. She enlightened that educational organisations should collaborate with prominent universities. This could pave the way for these children's prospects of higher education in universities. Moreover, university students should be motivated to undertake social work. The model of 'Teach for America' could offer insights as it makes it necessary for university and college students to spend time in public and primary level schooling. Ms Siddiqui stated that involving students in social service as per this model was essential. In addition, there was a need for pushing formal, non-formal and hybrid modes of education. She recommended the implementation of accelerated learning programmes for informal education. Breakthroughs could also be made through robust monitoring and quality assurance systems. Lastly, she called for the implementation of a one room-one subject-one teacher programme. She emphasised the role of mosques to turn this programme into a reality.

3. Curriculum Development and Controversies

SPEAKER: Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani

*Chairperson, Department of International Relations,
Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi*

Main Pillars of Education System

Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani highlighted that since 1947, Pakistan had introduced roughly 25 education policies. She emphasised that the core pillars for achieving quality education across these policies include the Aim/Objectives/Vision; Curriculum and Textbooks; Teacher Training and Service Conditions; Examination System; and Medium of Instruction. Dr Kayani noted the interconnectedness of these pillars but chose to focus her presentation specifically on two key areas: objectives of the education policies and curriculum.

Shifting Objectives of Education Policies

Dr Kayani highlighted the shifting objectives of national education policies over time. She mentioned that in 1947, Pakistan's mission and vision were to foster national unity and citizenship. However, by 1979, there was an ideological shift. The speaker further added that the implementation of these policies necessitated the revision of curricula to align with Islamic principles, reorientation of teachers based on Islamic ideology, and centrality of mosque and Madrassa education in the lives of Pakistanis.

Education Policies and Changing Governments

Taking the discussion of changing objectives further, Dr Kayani pointed out that as soon as the government in Islamabad changed, it introduced a new education policy to align with its political agenda. Moreover, policy changes were also observed in response to shifts in the international scenario. With each new education policy came new objectives and a new curriculum. She cited the example of the 1980s when, with a new government, the objective shifted towards fostering national cohesion based on faith, religion, and cultural harmony through the deliberate use of the education process. Similarly, with the onset of the 21st Century, new objectives were introduced, such as Education for All, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, inclusivity, and critical thinking, among others. These developments led to further curriculum changes and provided a new direction for educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, to implement these policies. She was convinced that each new policy set unrealistic targets and agenda; and also cited political instability; lack of consensus among policymakers; and lack of planning with a futuristic approach as major problems in the education sector.

Content of Textbooks

a) Conflictual Projection of Muslim Identity

Dr Saima A. Kayani further pointed out the existing problems with the content of textbooks in Pakistan. She referenced the advent of Islam in the subcontinent, mentioned as beginning in 712 A.D. with the arrival of Muhammad Bin Qasim, as the start of 'our' history, while giving less attention to the references of Mehrgarh in Balochistan, Mohenjo Daro, and Harappa civilisations. She asserted that they did not consider themselves as the heirs of the Indus Valley civilisations. The speaker also highlighted that their textbooks negated Hinduism and Buddhism as part of their past, focusing instead on the arrival of Islam in the subcontinent as the start of a 'we vs them' narrative. She noted that contributions of non-Muslims in the curriculum were largely missing, and the Independence Movement was portrayed as being solely fought by Muslim leaders and Muslims. The speaker cautioned that this kind of content inculcated prejudices and extremism among the youth of Pakistan, impeding tolerance and interfaith harmony in society.

b) Missing Important Concepts

Dr Kayani stated that Pakistani textbooks did not mention important concepts such as human rights, citizens' rights and duties, freedom of speech, democracy, and cultural diversity. The speaker also added that the importance of the state and its constitution, and its role in giving identity to its citizens, also needed to be taught at the school level. She revealed that textbooks of Pakistan Studies and History were loaded with religious explanations rather than from the perspective of political science or international relations, which ultimately propagated rigid ideologies. Pakistan was not mentioned as

a nation-state but rather as an ideological state, and religion was presented politically rather than as a simple belief system.

c) Gender Bias

Dr Kayani expressed concerns that textbooks were gender-biased. Women were shown in the kitchen cooking, while men were projected as driving cars or doing jobs as doctors, engineers and soldiers. As per the speaker, women were underrepresented in the curriculum. She referred to an incident where a textbook was rejected in 2003 that showed a husband and wife helping each other in household work. This reflected gender bias and could lead towards extremism.

d) Cultural Misperceptions

Dr Kayani also highlighted prevalent cultural misperceptions regarding Pakistan, particularly the assumption that Pakistani culture was derived from the Arab world. She clarified that while Islam indeed originated in the West, the roots of Pakistani culture also lay in Central Asia. This influence was evident in various aspects of life, including furniture, food, names, and traditions, which, despite their Central Asian origins, are often mistakenly attributed to Arab influence due to the spread of Islam. She lamented that the failure to accurately define and recognise Pakistan's unique cultural heritage indicated a challenging journey ahead in reclaiming and celebrating its true cultural identity.

Impact on Research Culture

According to the speaker, students attributed extremism and the destabilisation of Pakistan to foreign influences; and upon entering universities, they often lacked awareness of research methodologies, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of global developments. The speaker believed that the omission of crucial aspects from school curricula, coupled with frequent changes in government and their ensuing policies, contributed to widespread confusion. Additionally, the quality of research suffered due to these circumstances. At the higher education level, faculty members were expected to transform the mindsets of students. She posited that the role of society at large was crucial for the holistic development of individuals.

Way Forward

Dr Kayani stressed that curriculum development should be driven by clear objectives and begin at the school level to effectively counteract extremism while fostering a culture of research and critical thinking. She advocated for education policy objectives to remain consistent, irrespective of changes in the country's political landscape, and highlighted the importance of aligning these policies with global future trends. On the topic of inclusive education, she acknowledged its value but noted the challenges in addressing the needs of disabled students, particularly the deficiency in teacher training for such inclusivity. Dr Kayani reiterated the necessity of nurturing critical thinking from an early age, in tandem with creating a conducive learning environment.

She also advocated for the introduction of sports facilities and the promotion of sports to cultivate a spirit of sportsmanship among students. Concluding her presentation, Dr Saima A Kayani asserted that a holistic overhaul of the education system was essential. She underscored that education plays a crucial role in building a tolerant and peaceful society devoid of extremism, but this effort requires collective action of the entire society.

Concluding Remarks & Vote of Thanks

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd)

President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad

Emphasising the need for substantially improving Pakistan's education system, Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd) stressed that the issues being faced by the system could not be neglected as the 26 million out-of-school children represented Pakistan's future generation. Moreover, Air Marshal Khan, while expressing the magnitude of challenges facing the country's education system, reiterated the viewpoint of one of the speakers that there was a need to establish an equal amount of additional infrastructure for the education system than was currently present. According to him, a lack of education would affect Pakistan's national security, spanning both non-traditional and traditional domains. Hence, educating the 26 million out-of-school children was imperative to ensure the country's security.

President CASS observed a significant dichotomy; education represented a long-term objective, whereas politicians, preoccupied with immediate results to showcase before the next electoral cycle, often neglected it. This focus on short-term gains was identified as a key reason for the lack of attention towards the education sector's challenges. Despite the common practice of pledging improvements to the education system in election manifestos, these commitments seldom materialised into effective action. He expressed disappointment over the insufficient attention given to an issue of such monumental importance. He stressed that it was crucial for leadership to demonstrate foresight, prioritising the nation's educational needs over immediate electoral advantages and committing to policies in the education sector that might require time to yield visible results.

According to Air Marshal Khan, education and training (*taleem-o-tarbiat*) of the citizenry was a collective responsibility of educational institutions, parents, and society, as an individual's time was divided among the three. None could shy away from this collective responsibility. He also stated that while the presence of mafias in various systems was often discussed, the seminar revealed that mafias had also influenced the education sector. He laid emphasis on the significance of Industry-Academia linkages, which have become increasingly vital in addressing the rapid social and technological changes occurring globally. He said that, realising this change and developing an education hub with special focus on industry-academia relationship is important. He gave examples of initiatives undertaken by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF),

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including Air University-Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) collaboration and the concept of National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) which would link many educational institutions with a variety of industries.

At the conclusion, President CASS expressed his gratitude towards the seminar organisers, audience, and former Air Chief of the Pakistan Air Force for gracing the event with their presence.

Annexures

Profiles of the Speakers



Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan, HI (M), SBt (Retd)
*President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies,
Islamabad*

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan has rich experience in aviation and industrial management, diplomacy, and negotiations. During his service, he remained on various important command and staff appointments, including Vice Chief of the Air Staff and Chairman Pakistan Aeronautical Complex Board. He has also served as Pakistan's Air Attaché in New Delhi, India. He is the co-author of 'The Aviation City' and 'Milestones' about the growth of military aviation industry in Pakistan and its way forward.



Dr Faisal Bari
Dean, LUMS School of Education, Lahore University of
Management Sciences, Pakistan

Dr Faisal Bari is an economist with over twenty years of research/teaching experience. He is an Associate Professor of economics at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore, Pakistan, where his areas of teaching and research relate to the economics of education, inclusive education, philosophy of education, microeconomics, game theory, and industrial organisation. He was also the Dean for the School of Education at LUMS (2020-2023). He is CEO (Jan 2024-) and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS). Previous to this, Dr Bari was CEO for IDEAS (2015-2020), Executive Director for Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (2004-2006), and Visiting Assistant Professor of Economics at Yale University, New Haven (2000-2001). A former Rhodes Scholar (Pakistan-1988), Dr Bari has a BA (honours) from Oxford and a doctorate from McGill University. His research has been published in numerous journals/books. He is a regular columnist for the daily Dawn, Pakistan.



Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui
CEO iFEEL Islamabad, Pakistan

Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui is the CEO of iFeel (International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning). She is a highly qualified and experienced educator, having earned her BCS from FAST-NU Islamabad and Masters in IT from NUST. Her passion for education has driven her to establish iFeel, a charity dedicated to providing quality education to underprivileged children. As the founder of iFeel, Ms. Mahrin is committed to training teachers and establishing new branches of Out-of-School children's schools all over Islamabad. Her tireless efforts are changing the lives of countless children, giving them a chance to achieve their dreams and build a brighter future for themselves and their communities.



Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani
*Chairperson, Department of International Relations, Fatima
Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan*

Dr Saima Kayani has more than two-decade experience of teaching and research and is currently serving as chairperson department of International Relations at Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) Rawalpindi. Dr Kayani established Peace and Conflict Resolution Centre at FJWU and is the Director of the PCRC. She acquired her postdoctoral research experience from the University of Cambridge, UK. Dr Kayani regularly contributes in research journals and participates in different national and international seminars and conferences. She is also a member of statutory committees of various universities of Pakistan and is consulted as a subject specialist of IR. Her areas of interest area diplomacy, peace, and nation branding.

Press Release



'Pakistan needs to address education challenges on war footing.'
– CASS Seminar Speakers

The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad successfully hosted a pivotal seminar titled *'Paving the Way for Educational Excellence in Pakistan: Policy, Curriculum, Access.'* The seminar brought together esteemed speakers including Dr Faisal Bari, Dean, LUMS School of Education at the Lahore University of Management Sciences; Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, CEO International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning (iFEEL); and Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani, Chairperson Department of International Relations at Fatima Jinnah Women University. The proceedings were moderated by Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd), Director Non-Traditional Security at CASS, with a vote of thanks and concluding remarks delivered by Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President of CASS.

The seminar addressed key issues including the quality of education and challenges in higher education; out-of-school children and regional disparities and curriculum development. It also offered a platform to discuss the effects of the 18th Amendment on education policies, the viability of a unified syllabus, and the practicality of maintaining distinct educational streams in Pakistan's diverse landscape.



Introducing the seminar, ***Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne*** emphasised the cumulative impact of neglecting education, noting Pakistan's significant lag in achieving primary and secondary education targets and the challenges facing the higher education sector, including political interference and insufficient resources; obstructing the nation's pursuit of developing a comprehensive, skilled workforce and significantly limiting the educational sector's contribution to national development.

In his address, **Dr Faisal Bari** highlighted critical issues within Pakistan's education system, pointing out the nation's significant struggle to foster critical thinking skills, such as thoughtfulness, judiciousness, the ability to embrace ambiguity, and the capacity for evidence-based reasoning. Discussing the transformative role of technology in higher education, particularly in the context of a new wave of automation, he warned of the potential for Artificial

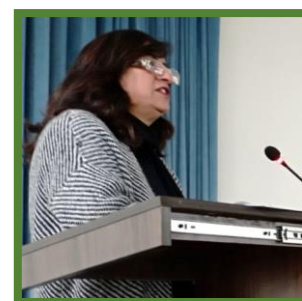


Intelligence (AI) to automate and eliminate numerous jobs, underscoring the urgency for educational reform. He further argued that the future of Pakistan hinges on its education system. Dr Bari stressed the need for substantial improvements at the school level, specifically in pedagogy and curriculum development and called for holistic strategies to incentivise and regulate universities, ensuring they are aligned with the evolving demands of the workforce and the broader society.



Speaking on the subject of 'Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities', **Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui** shared that the existing educational infrastructure in Pakistan was insufficient to support the inclusion of its 26 million out-of-school children. Ms Siddiqui stressed the urgent need to launch an education campaign with the same intensity and urgency as the response to the COVID crisis, highlighting the potential of community mosques to play a significant role in raising awareness and sensitizing the populace about the importance of education. She advocated for educational organisations to form partnerships with leading universities across Pakistan, suggesting that such collaborations could significantly enhance children's opportunities for higher education. Additionally, Ms. Siddiqui pointed out the necessity to bridge the gaps between formal, informal, and hybrid modes of education, ensuring a more cohesive and accessible learning environment for all. She proposed a simple yet effective approach of 'one room-one subject-one teacher' to address complex educational challenges.

In addressing the controversies surrounding curriculum content, **Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani** highlighted the necessity of removing political biases from the curriculum development process to better meet the changing needs of a dynamic society. She underscored the importance of implementing measures to ensure the curriculum is inclusive, relevant, and fosters critical thinking, while also respecting Pakistan's diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. In her final remarks, Dr Kayani advocated for a strategic revision of the education system, aiming to make it more reflective of and responsive to the country's complex identity and future needs.





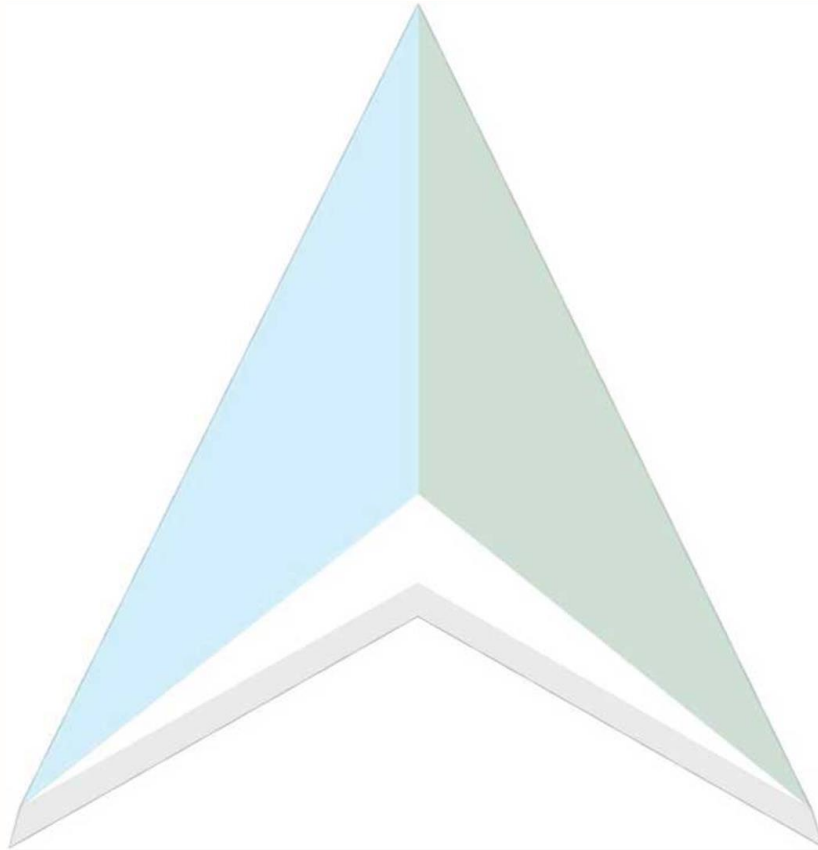
In his concluding remarks, President CASS **Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan** underscored the profound impact of education on national security, spanning both traditional and non-traditional realms. 'If we want to ensure our security, it is imperative to bring our out-of-school children into the educational fold,' he stated. President CASS also urged the country's leadership to transcend short-term electoral interests and invest in policies with benefits that may only be realised over time. He reinforced that educating (tarbiyat) was a collective responsibility of teachers, parents, and society.



The seminar witnessed active participation from a diverse audience, including retired military officers, academics, and students, who engaged in a candid Question and Answer session, enriching the discussion on this crucial issue.







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📍 Old Airport Road,
Islamabad, Pakistan

☎ +92 051 5405011

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