**The education paradox**

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In his address at Allahabad in 1930, Allama Iqbal preached that an ideal state would be one that created its own culture and politics. Following this, Pakistan was created in 1947 and the first education conference took place under the then education minister, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, resulting in the publication of two volumes of a single education policy.

It is important to understand the purpose of education before diving into any debate about education systems and curriculum. One of the main purposes of education is to preserve the harmony of civic life, emancipation of an individual from various constraints of ignorance, development of a statistical sense of creativity in people, allowing science and technology to progress, and empowering decision-makers to prepare their citizens towards the productive workforce.

It is also the collective duty of parents, philosophers, politicians, psychologists, religious authorities, scientific elites, and local councillors to work towards developing a good quality education system. These stakeholders must work collectively towards achieving the current standards of education which aim to take advantage of the competitive international economic markets as well as to create a notion of sensibility towards our social and civic life.

Prior to the SNC, at least seven prominent education policies have been established from 1947 to 2017 that aimed to address the problems, concerns and challenges of the education sector in Pakistan. The key emphasis of these initiatives was on access to education, the quality of education, the elimination of gender inequalities from education, the administration of education, science, technology, technical and vocational education.

These education policies failed to achieve what they set out for and could not be fully implemented, and based on past statistics on literacy rates, it would not be incorrect to say that the idea of improvement in education existed largely in rhetoric than in practicality. The politics of education was introduced as a subject in the 1990s, aiming to critically analyse education systems across the world.

The year 2018 marked a new beginning for Pakistan when a new political party took over, with Imran Khan as prime minister. One of his priorities for the state was to decrease the gap within the social classes of Pakistan that have existed for generations and in order to do so, he envisioned a uniform level of education that applied to all classes, so that no one was at a disadvantage when it came to economic and social opportunities.

With the arrival of Imran Khan as the head of government, a goal to achieve a ‘single national curriculum’ was established. It aimed to provide equal opportunities of education to the youth, regardless of their class and where they chose to study. This would include religious madrassahs, government schools and private institutions.

The single national curriculum derives its content from the provisions of the Quran and Sunnah, the visions of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal, the laws and policies of Pakistan, scientific and mathematical subjects, information technology, as well as analytical, creative, activity-based classroom injunctions.

The purpose of establishing the single national curriculum was to rid society of the class-based system that existed with the education sector and replace it with one that is accessible to all, ensuring equal treatment and opportunity regardless of class.

In the past, education has not been a priority area for governments and inadequate budget allocation led to limited resources, especially in public institutions that are now notorious for poor facilities. Dilapidated buildings, untrained teachers, no running water, unkempt sports grounds and demotivated staff members are a common sight when visiting any public education institute.

Those who could, managed to send their children to private schools in hopes for quality education, but this remains a very small part of the population. With over two million people in Pakistan living below the poverty line, it is not even a far-off dream for many children to go to private schools. The operation of multiple education systems at once resulted in the social divide that Khan’s government aims to bridge through the SNC.

While the SNC provides some hope for the improvement of education quality in Pakistan, it faces numerous challenges, especially with regards to the lack of consensus among stakeholders about its quality. But this is not unusual since Pakistan is a country of numerous cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities.

An ideal curriculum must take into account the concerns of all citizens, rather than a majority, and cannot be used as a tool to force populist ideologies on the people. This can be an opportunity for Imran Khan to bring all stakeholders to the table to agree on a neutral ground, and use education to bridge the social divide that rots our society.

While the SNC is currently in its infancy, and experts are still in the process of implementing it holistically across different levels, we must also highlight the issue of outdated teaching methods that has contributed to the deteriorating education quality in Pakistan. With the standardisation of curriculum, it would be wise to explore the possibilities of standardised teaching modules that could be used to train teachers throughout the country, maintaining the same level of quality education that the SNC aims to achieve.

The education system is flawed to its very core, compounded with the lack of willpower from our past rulers who failed to prioritise the youth. There is no quick solution to this problem; however, the SNC provides us with some glimmer of hope of improvement in the long run. It is encouraging to see that the principles on which the SNC is based, are the same on which our country was founded. However, elitists in the country are making another effort to sabotage and undermine yet another effort for improving the education system in Pakistan as they did with previous policies.

A good education policy at this point would also pay special attention to its implementation phase, install checks and balances within the system and take into account the international standards of education, only then can we hope to secure the future of generations to come.

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