

# Education in Pakistan

**By: Nadeem Khan**

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Education has never been Pakistan's strong point. As part of his program to overhaul Pakistan's institutions in the 1970s, Zulifkar Ali Bhutto nationalized private educational institutions, many of which were gifts by philanthropists. The government then wasted little time in quickly dissolving these schools into nothingness. The resulting mediocrity soon gave way to apathy, a phenomenon further compounded by the "quota system." This obstacle in the way of an equitable merit-based system exists even today.

The result of these measures is the travesty that passes for education in Pakistan. There are basically three kinds of schools: the elite private institutions that cater to the upper class; the government-run schools serving the lower echelons of the population and the Madrassah, the religious school.

Private schools have become a necessity for contemporary Pakistani society since the government has failed to provide quality education for its population. A majority of parents, even those from lower income brackets, send their children to private schools so they can receive an education that will enable them to be competitive.

Also, most Pakistanis want their children to learn English. Private schools offer all instruction in English while government schools offer instruction in either Urdu or the local provincial language.

The feudal state of Pakistani society has prevented meaningful educational reforms from taking place. And, in many rural areas where the local tribal chief's word is law, schools will not function without his say so. There are many cases where chiefs will not allow any schools in their "jurisdiction."

Budget allocation for education is another important issue. There is no doubt that like many underdeveloped nations, Pakistan faces financial constraints for various reasons. Still, the government allocates less than 3% of the total annual budget for education. The current military government has apportioned a meager 2.9 % for the fiscal year 2001-2002.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO), proposes an underdeveloped nation allocate at least 4% of its total GDP for education. Chad, one of the poorest nations in the world, has allocated 6% for education in its last budget.

The condition of government schools all over the country and the quality of education being imparted there are going from bad to worse, day by day. Thousands of government schools are "ghost schools," existing on paper only. The buildings, mostly in rural areas, that were meant to house these schools are either dilapidated due to negligence or have been converted into otaqs (drawing rooms) for the local wadaras (land owners).

Thousands of "ghost" teachers have been drawing salaries from the education departments of the four provinces. They do not do any actual teaching since there are no functioning schools. They simply show up to collect their salaries on the appointed day.

According to a survey conducted by the education departments of Sindh and Punjab provinces in 1998, some 700 primary and secondary schools and 18,000 teachers were found "ghost" in Punjab and 340 schools and 7,000 teachers in Sindh.

Currently, the government claims Pakistan has a literacy rate of 47%. However, independent analysts and educational organizations put the actual figure at about 20%.