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**CURRICULUM AND COMPETENCE: EVALUATING  
PAKISTAN'S EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGAINST  
GLOBAL STANDARDS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this article is to critically analyse the educational framework of Pakistan in order to gauge the effectiveness of its educational framework and its competence to global standards. It pinpoints the areas of Pakistani education's alignment with or differences from the international best practices in curriculum development and educational outcomes. It describes the contents of the curriculum, pedagogies, assessment, and technology, and compares them with those of systems in OECD countries and emerging economies. This research employs a review of literature on existing research, policy analysis, and comparative case studies of educational practices in specific countries. The results have revealed important gaps in the Pakistani educational system, specifically in logical thinking, creative thinking, and the abilities to resolve issues. The study also investigates the influence of socio economic factors on educational access and quality, which results in disparity that leads to challenge of educational equity and inclusion. Moreover, the paper elaborates on the challenges faced by Pakistan while implementing educational reforms including institutional resistance to change, lack of professional development of teachers, and poor infrastructure. One of the recommendations is the need for Pakistan to modernize the curriculum and enact policy to reform the current educational system while also investing in educational technology and programs for teacher training to ensure that the Pakistani educational system becomes aligned to the global standards. In summary, "Curriculum and Competence: Evaluating Pakistan's Educational Framework against Global Standards" is an elaborate evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Pakistan's Education System. Thus, it generates actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders to improve the quality and relevance of education in Pakistan and put it at par with the global standards.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Educational Framework, Global Standards, Curriculum Development, Educational Outcomes, OECD, Educational Equity, Pedagogical Approaches, Curriculum Modernization, Educational Reform.

**Introduction**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which boasts a vast population of approximately 220.9 million individuals, currently holds the position of 157th out of 189 countries in terms of human development indices

(Zulfiqar, 2021). The situation concerning the education status of the country is sadly lagging behind that of several neighboring countries in the region, such as Bangladesh, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Within this context, significant deficiencies exist in the curriculum of Pakistani educational institutions, coupled with a notable resistance to necessary changes. Consequently, a vast majority of the population finds themselves enrolled in public schools, which have undergone a myriad of interventions over the past five decades in an attempt to reform and improve the educational landscape (Arshad et al.2021). The focus of major education policies enacted between 1972 and 2006 has been centered primarily on essential aspects such as access to education, the quality of educational offerings, and governance structures within the educational framework. Notably, one substantial adjustment, which has been referred to by various names since 1972, revolves around the curriculum itself (Shaturaev, 2021).

This curriculum has not only been shaped by significant international events but has also been heavily influenced by the socio-political ideologies imposed by various regimes throughout the years. A particularly resonant statement from the past articulates a notion that remains relevant today: "Pakistan as a nation has historically been the heart of world civilizations and is distinctive because of its diverse cultures. Thus, the educational framework within the Islamic Republic of Pakistan ought to embody both Islamic content and the rich, proven history of our beloved country." Despite the persistent interventions aimed at enhancing the educational system, such measures have fallen short when it comes to clearly defining the essential knowledge, skills, values, and competencies that ought to be incorporated into the curriculum framework for the holistic development of children in Pakistan. The glaring absence of a robust vision and targeted focus has misled the Pakistani curriculum towards a trajectory of shallow growth rather than substantive educational progression (Gul & Khilji, 2021).

This study embarks on a critical examination of the current scenario, assessing whether Pakistan's economic objectives, job market dynamics, and social aspirations are effectively intertwined with the educational board's defined curricula across various educational levels, all through the lens of a competency-based approach. In doing so, the study underscores the pressing need for a quality framework and identifies opportunities for educational bodies to move forward with determination and efficiency. The primary focus of the study is dedicated to evaluating the present standard of education and pinpointing the underlying weaknesses within the educational frameworks by drawing comparisons with established global standards, specifically regarding competency acquisition. The analysis reveals that every strategy, sub-strategy, and initiative has already been executed or is currently in the piloting phase, all aimed at achieving the desired educational outcomes. Additionally, the localized educational framework of Pakistan's Punjab province, which is one of the major provinces in the country, has not been

extensively covered in existing literature, highlighting a significant gap in research that this study aims to address.

### **Methodology**

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, placing considerable emphasis on the comprehensive collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. For the qualitative analysis, data was meticulously gathered through well-structured questionnaires, which aimed to capture a diverse array of insights from participants. In contrast, for the quantitative aspect of the research, data was compiled from various school textbooks, as well as from the national curriculum and training materials specifically related to social studies. It is crucial to note that this research primarily focuses on the perspective of the researcher, intentionally narrowing the scope to exclude other stakeholders. This method of incorporating only one or two viewpoints can be justified in research that is exploratory in nature and seeks to generate hypotheses.

To ensure that the intermediate education schools selected for the study reflect a broad spectrum of contexts, specific stratifications were employed. These included the gender of both the school and the educators involved, the distinction between public and private sector schools, and considerations of geographical distribution. The study utilizes three distinct approaches to data collection: an extensive document analysis encompassing existing curricular frameworks, a thorough examination of textbook contents, and an assessment of educational policies; a database survey conducted among educators using a carefully structured and designed questionnaire; and finally, interviews conducted with a carefully selected sub-sample of educators, chosen based on the initial findings from the survey.

In order to draw meaningful insights, comparative analyses of the local curriculum are undertaken, aiming to ascertain the degree of distance of local educational frameworks from international standards of global competence. These standards can be identified on the basis that they are part of the curricula in the developed countries of the world. These comparative analyses are framed within the conceptual frameworks concerning competency and global competence and specifically employ the comparison of the local intermediate school social studies curriculum against the existing international standards of global competence. In addition, the format of the questionnaire is loosely based on the education norms in form of collaboration of educational processes. In addition, the ethics of the research process also plays an important role in this case, regarding the possible impediments such as scientific flaw, moral virtue, professional honesty, and the obligation of confidentiality all throughout the study. Therefore, these ethical principles should guide everything about the research to ensure credibility of the research as well as trust on its findings.

### **Comparative Analysis**

In this section, different components of the curriculum in Pakistan are painstakingly analyzed with great attention to detail, highlighting various aspects that could be considered strengths, as well as those that are

glaring weaknesses. A robust comparative approach is taken in each category, pitting local educational standards against the global ones established in various advanced contexts. To exemplify this point effectively, some best practices from curriculums currently in place in various countries around the world are shared through brief yet insightful case examples. Contrasting these globally recognized best practices against the results produced by the state-provided teaching in Pakistan yields a much clearer view of the presently existing curricular framework locally. It becomes increasingly clear that while the curriculum we currently possess might not be completely obsolete or irrelevant in its entirety, significant improvements are both necessary and highly possible (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). In particular, some crucial features are notably missing from the Pakistani curricular framework, such as the explicit goal to foster critical thinking and creative abilities among students. Backing the findings with concrete evidence helps to deliver a strong and compelling message, and a thorough comparison with more creative curricular alternatives leaves little argument standing for clinging stubbornly to the status quo. The aim is to empower key stakeholders such as policymakers, curriculum developers, and academicians to form an informed opinion concerning quality improvement measures (Ifenthaler et al.2021). In essence, this section provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the current status quo to effectively justify the undeniable need for substantial change.

Certain features of the curriculum, such as the pronounced tendency to overburden the course with an excessive number of definitions and examples, deviate significantly from the ideal practices that are generally recommended for effective education. This overemphasis on the central role of the exam system detracts from teachers' focus, diverting their attention away from the critical objective of delivering on the actual goals set forth by the curriculum. Furthermore, as an evaluative tool, the examination is highly unsatisfactory and fails to provide meaningful insights into students' understanding and capabilities. Research has increasingly focused on pivotal issues such as the topical relevancy of content being taught, potential improvements in various pedagogical approaches, and a thoroughly reworked exam-driven evaluation system that reflects actual learning outcomes. The cases of other countries are presented as shining examples of best practices, showcasing scenarios where successful teaching and learning genuinely occur—this serves to argue compellingly that if significant progress is demonstrably possible in these countries, then logically it ought to be possible in Pakistan as well, particularly since teachers and educational conditions are more or less comparable globally. A data-driven approach was meticulously employed to rigorously evaluate the standards of curricular input, and this involved comparing global norms regarding what should ideally be included in the curriculum to the curricular output as indicated by current enrollment figures across educational institutions. In doing so, a thorough analysis was undertaken to systematically separate various quantities, thereby focusing specifically on the intricacies of applicability

in a real-world context. The modern theory of management was effectively utilized, juxtaposing established global curricular input standards with the actual curricular output being delivered within Pakistan's schools. This method incorporated up-to-date data about the enrollment figures or demand for academic supplements to identify whether what is being taught in schools aligns with what students genuinely wish to acquire for their academic supplement needs. A structured and methodical approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive, data-driven overview of the current status quo in Pakistan's educational system. This analysis aims to justify the urgent and extensive changes and reforms that are critically required to enhance the quality of education provided in schools significantly.

### **Challenges in Educational Reform**

The education system in Pakistan is tasked with the difficult and complex process of overcoming reform and improvement, where the challenges of not just the system itself, but of deeply entrenched challenges within the society, must be addressed. Years of sustained neglect and a persistent lack of sufficient resources, along with institutional and infrastructural inertia, plus a significant dearth of relevant training for practitioners and staff are exceedingly daunting obstacles that hinder progress (Shah et al.2022). Closely linked with these issues is the deeply embedded culture that rewards rote learning and focuses heavily on exam performance, prioritizing memorization over critical thinking and creativity. Moreover, a conservative pushback from the broader society against changes in the existing educational system significantly contributes to the slow pace of progress (Jabali et al.2024). This resistance means that, while most stakeholders may nominally agree to the necessity for reform, they often wish for the least amount of interference with their own lives, practices, and established systems. Inspiration for meaningful reform must ideally come from within the polity, as has been emphasized by various policymakers over time. These aspirations for better educational outcomes are compounded in Pakistan by the presence of vague national educational policies, wherein systemic changes are of little concern to those who believe that merely transferring resources to address equity issues alone could achieve better results without reforming the core issues.

Additionally, curriculum development efforts that are initiated unilaterally by experts, without securing the "ownership" of key stakeholders and the end-users of the educational system, are likely to be doomed from the outset (Wienand et al., 2024). An effective reform process hinges on a collective morale for reform and the active engagement of all governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and community presences throughout the nation. At the same time, it is clear that alongside the process of globalization, educational reform no longer constitutes just a sovereign agenda; it must also align itself with global educational paradigms, standards, and innovative practices. The rapid acceleration of technological advancement in the last few decades has made it evident that the

educational framework in virtually every country now requires significant changes if it is to remain relevant and in sync with the demanding requirements of the twenty-first century (Chan2023). The integration of technology as a tool for learning, teaching, and administrative processes is not only beneficial but essential for fostering a more robust educational system that prepares students for the challenges ahead.

### **Case Studies**

Given that the National Curriculum is often described as ‘opaque’ and difficult to decipher, an important question arises: what kinds of curricula and coursework are students actually encountering in various schools across Pakistan? Analysis of school grants and available data suggest that the textbooks utilized in classrooms may provide far more insight into the realities of actual curricula and education than the official curriculum or reform documents, assuming those documents are even in distribution at all. In this section, several representative examples of ‘what is going on inside schools’ will be detailed, specifically focusing on how curricula, competencies, and instruction/assessment are manifesting in practice. Recent research conducted in the domain of basic education has argued that greater emphasis should be placed on examining the internal functioning and day-to-day practices within schools, and this is precisely the objective that the studies in this section aim to fulfill. It is important to mention that the case-study schools and educational initiatives included here are often seen as “success stories” for varying reasons; nevertheless, they continue to face significant “challenges” and “problems” that must be acknowledged and addressed (Wheelahan and Moodie2024). By shedding light on these aspects, we can begin to better understand the complexities of the educational landscape in Pakistan and the varied experiences of students within it.

One compelling case study worth examining closely is the Qualcore System implemented in Karachi, which has demonstrated significant effectiveness in its educational approach. Another noteworthy example is the Ghulam Fatima Urban Girls School located in the vibrant city of Lahore (Mahmood, 2024). Furthermore, there exists an illustrative instance of the Punjab Compulsory Primary Education Programme, which specifically targets underprivileged students in urban slum areas, providing them with crucial educational opportunities to enhance their prospects for the future. In Rawalpindi, the Alif Laila Book Bus Society has notably achieved considerable success over the past nine years in markedly improving educational standards and resources in village schools situated in Chakri, which lies in Punjab Province. In the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, certain selective government high schools have been able to “successfully” cultivate educational environments and attitudes that closely align with what our competencies documentation thoroughly outlines. One prominent example of such a school is Government High School No. 1 in Mardan, which has garnered attention for its positive outcomes. Additionally, within the same province, Baacha Khan School employs a more sophisticated and

comprehensive approach to quality assurance (QA), which, in contrast to other methodologies, could offer important lessons and insights for broader application. Moreover, there is a variety of assistive devices that have been developed and implemented for students with disabilities, which have proven crucial in enabling these students to engage fully with mainstream schools in the picturesque region of Gilgit Baltistan.

### **Recommendations**

The educational framework of Pakistan has been analysed thoroughly in this paper, taking into account the global best practices, which have been applied successfully in different contexts. Upon the comprehensive framework, several valuable lessons emerge and reveal areas of the gaps and room for the improvements. With this fundamental understanding of the issues, several good recommendations for improving this educational system are proposed. The first one stresses on the urgency of curriculum reform so that it reflects international best practices. Based on a thorough gap analysis, this recommendation for reform comes forward with what is good in the current framework: 'what is good' and 'what needs improvement' to achieve constructive progress. The reformed curriculum ought to incorporate the best practices identified and at the same time be futuristic. Skill development should be strongly emphasized and students should be provided with the requisite socio emotional competencies important for thriving in the 21st century.

Additionally, the integrated use of technology in both teaching and learning processes must be a core component of the updated curriculum. Since Pakistan possesses its unique context and dynamics, it is paramount that all efforts made towards these reforms adapt and modify the curriculum documents in accordance with the socio-cultural, political, and various other pertinent contextual factors present in Pakistan. Secondly, the proposed reforms should place a strong focus on the crucial issue of pedagogical practices, which includes the training and professional development of teachers. It is recommended to adopt globally recognized certification systems for teachers to ensure a standard of excellence in education.

Thirdly, the reforms should also encompass the management of education at the local level, actively involving the school community in the management processes, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. Policymakers are, therefore, urged to bring about systemic change that traverses from the federal level down to the local level. This systemic reform should be underpinned by the establishment of provincial and district curriculum hubs aimed specifically at developing the necessary cross-curriculum thematic areas that would be vital for the Content and Language Integrated Learning session plan applicable across all grade classes (Meng et al.2021). The involved provincial hubs will take on the important role of training teachers in the effective delivery of curricular subjects as well as relevant co-curricular subjects. The local hubs will also bear the responsibility of providing essential training to grassroots-level stakeholders and will ideally be headed by a nominal headteacher, ensuring that leadership is both recognized and

accessible. The Education Project Implementation (EPI) will provide critical support through continuous monitoring, on-the-job training, as well as assessment of teachers' performance (Tiwari & Fahrudin, 2024). Concurrently, the District Education Authority (DEA) and the District Monitoring Unit (DMU) will take charge of consolidating and coordinating the entire learning program, with a particular emphasis on formulating school improvement plans and establishing a comprehensive overall monitoring and evaluation strategy to ensure that the educational reforms yield the desired outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the discussion on curriculum and competence key insights and recommendations has been underscored. The key findings underline the need for urgent educational reform. Pakistan's failure to do so is a binding constraint on global economic competitiveness. There is no substitute for 'getting the basics right,' and we reiterate that our curricula need to come in line with global standards if the children of Pakistan are to reap the full benefits of a competence-based curricular design. In particular, the efforts with learning outcome-based curricula and a shift away from solely knowledge-based content need significant and urgent attention.

This research is cognizant of the difficulties associated with reform. We have identified a few of the root causes preventing the national curriculum bodies from taking the necessary next steps. There are, however, multiple promising case studies that we have incorporated into our discussion, which bring positive alternative models from textbooks and national curricula elsewhere. We have yet to see challenges from the excitement and anticipation that the case studies have sparked. Similarly, one of the convincers in a fast-paced era of evidence-based policy-making is proof of concept. Fortunately, this also lies within the case studies. Curriculum development and publishing can be a multidimensional space, bringing in multiple stakeholders from federal and provincial governments, donors and impact investors, bilateral and multilateral development organizations, sectoral professionals, the private sector, and more. We hope that our report creates a multidimensional community of interest that comes forward to play a part in the transformative change needed. Government, we hope, draws on the suggestions of this report to profoundly think forward. Looking ahead, the possibilities for further research are legion. A closer analysis of the rival curriculum wings and publishing houses of Pakistan presents frontiers. Reaching out to students themselves to gauge the impact culture of schoolbooks and their pricing at home might have on the child's willingness to engage in learning is another very useful study. Further research that creates depth from the broad curricular-to-assessment-to-career journey presents itself most potently. In sum, we conclude that our policymakers have their work cut out for them. This is the first report of its kind. While we staunchly believe that curricular reform ought not to be a scarce endeavor, it is quite obvious that Pakistan needs an educational shake-up the likes of which it has never before seen.



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