

## The History of Educational Policy in Pakistan

TAHIRA YASMEEN

Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

DAVID A. TURNER

University of South Wales, UK

### Abstract

This article examines the evolution of educational policy in Pakistan from 1947 to 2000 through the lens of Karl Popper's philosophy of critical rationalism, specifically his model of problem-solving and the cyclical nature of societal reforms. Educational reforms in Pakistan during this period reflect Popper's theory, which posits that policies aimed at solving current problems often generate new challenges, leading to an iterative process of problem-solving and reform. The early post-independence years focused on national integration and curriculum development, while later reforms oscillated between modernization efforts and religious influences. Each phase of policy development was shaped by assumptions about the link between short-term educational initiatives and long-term societal transformation, although these assumptions were rarely empirically validated. The lack of sustained political commitment to reforms, coupled with instability, limited the ability to evaluate the long-term impacts of educational policies. By applying Popper's framework, this analysis highlights the dynamic interplay between educational policy and broader social, political, and religious forces in Pakistan, and underscores the importance of critical evaluation and flexible policy-making in achieving sustainable educational development.

**Keywords:** Educational Policy Reform, History of Education in Pakistan, Religious Influence, Critical Rationalism, Karl Popper's Theory, Socio-Political Context.

### Introduction

Our purpose in this paper is to analyse educational policy in Pakistan after 1947 from a Popperian perspective. That is to say, we treat educational policy as a proposed solution to a problem. We argue that policies are best understood in relation to the analysis of the situation in which they were proposed; that policies are apt responses to the situational analysis. (Popper, 1994: 180) This does not commit us to the view that any policy was an appropriate solution to the problems facing the country at the time. In trying to understand those who advanced policies, we face the possibility that they were trying to solve the wrong problem, or a problem that they understood only imperfectly. In Popper's words:

In order to understand their (more or less inadequate) actions, we have therefore to reconstruct a wider view of the situation than their own. This must be done in such a way that we can see how and why the situation as they saw it (with their limited experience, their limited or overblown aims, their limited or overexcited imagination) led them to act as they did – that is to say, adequately for their inadequate view of the situational structure. (Popper, 1994: 193)

Educational policies may be advanced as putative solutions to educational problems, or to wider problems in society, as when an expansion of education, or a change in the nature of education, is proposed as a way of stimulating the economy. And whether intended or not, educational policies may have impact beyond their initial scope in the education system. Thus, by looking at educational policy in Pakistan as a response to perceived problems, we locate educational policy in a wider national context, with the proposed solutions to problems bringing about changes which themselves constitute new problems.

Prior to 1947, education had been devolved to provincial level, and in those provinces in which the Congress held sway, a Gandhian notion of education had been established, *Nai Talim*, or the Wardha Scheme. Although this was notionally a secular programme based on universal ethical principles, or perhaps because it was notionally a secular programme based on universal ethical principles, it was seen as a threat by Muslims, and rejected by the Muslim League. The main complaints were that, "Congress governments have used their power to effect a 'spiritual revolution,' a change in the values of life according to the Gandhian philosophy of simple life and non-violence, in which the Muslims do not believe: witness the Wardha Scheme of Education, the *Vidyamandir*, the encouragement of the spinning wheel and cow-protection". (Appadorai, 1941: 13)

In principle, there was the possibility for modifying the curriculum in areas where the Hindus were not in the majority:

*Vidya Mandir* does not denote, as some Moslems (sic) seem to apprehend, a temple with an idol set up in it for worship. It simply signifies a 'house of learning'. As education will be given through the medium of the mother-tongue of the child, there will be Hindi *vidya mandirs*, Bengali *vidya mandirs*, Tamil *vidya mandirs* and so forth, according to the needs of different localities, while Urdu schools can be given the Arabic name '*Madina-tul-Ilm*' (seat of learning), if the Muslims (sic) who start them, so desire. (Sinha, 1939: 729)

However, as the only places where the Wardha Scheme had been implemented before independence, only models that incorporated Hindu values could be found in practice, and the Muslim community saw this as a threat to their culture, presented in the guise of "universal ethical principles". This indication of how a post-independence Congress was likely to behave may have been a powerful motivation for establishing a separate Muslim state.

## Methodology Approach

This study employs a qualitative, historical-analytical approach to explore the evolution of educational policies in Pakistan from 1947 to 2024. Data were gathered from a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including national education policies, official documents, academic publications, and government reports. A document analysis method was used to examine key themes, policy shifts, and reform trajectories over time. This paper also incorporates Karl Popper's critical rationalism as a theoretical lens to interpret the adaptability and openness of educational policy decisions. This approach allows for a contextualized understanding of policy development within socio-political and ideological frameworks.

## Independence: 1947

Although Muhammad Ali Jinnah had initially opposed the foundation of the Muslim League, and had subsequently remained a prominent member of Congress and advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, by the 1940s he was a prominent leader of the Muslim

League and pre-eminent among those calling for a separate Muslim state. As noted above, concern over education, and the possibility of exercising religious freedom within a system dominated by Hindus, may have played an important part in his shifting political position.

By the 1940s, Jinnah was already a very ill man, and he must have known that anything that he hoped to achieve would have to be achieved quickly. In that sense, a simple message, that there was a need for a separate state that was identified and defined in terms of religion, offered the most direct route to partition, and an environment that really provided for Muslims to flourish, in the absence of Hindu domination.

It seems likely that, had he lived long enough, Jinnah would have sought to rebalance education, to include more secular and scientific elements. One of his first acts as the first Governor General of the newly independent Pakistan was to convene the First All Pakistan Conference on Education, which took place at the end of November, 1947. In his address to the Conference, Jinnah emphasised the need for an education system that promoted scientific and technical knowledge, and could form the foundation for the modernisation of the new state. (Khan and Naushin, 1997) Although not denying the role of religion in education, this represented a shift in emphasis toward an education that was more directly addressed to the economic, secular and development needs of the new country.

In terms of our Popperian analysis, it is clear that, in the run up to the achievement of independence in 1947, the most pressing problem was to create a sense of national identity that would galvanise the movement, and ensure the birth of the new state. Jinnah took up the most potent symbols of unity of the new Pakistan, using religion to form the backbone of the Independence movement.

Although that represented a solution to the immediate problem, it had the unintended consequence of giving conservative religious forces a dominant position within the education system. That represented a new problem, which Jinnah sought to solve by redressing the balance between the religious and secular elements of education, and emphasising the scientific and technical strands of education. This would undoubtedly have provoked resistance and opposition from conservatives in any circumstances. However, in the event, Jinnah did not live long enough to carry his proposed reforms through, and religion retained its predominant position in the education system.

Although these are not the only problems that have shaped educational policy over subsequent decades, the twin, or opposed, problems of securing national unity and identity by emphasising religion and of securing economic development and modernity by emphasising science and technology have remained as a leitmotif of policy-making in Pakistan. The interplay of these two problems, combined with other problems that have arisen in the specific historical processes that have shaped Pakistan, will be traced in the sections of this paper that follow.

### **Ayub Khan: 1958 – 1969**

The economic and social development of Pakistan had been slow in the years immediately following independence. When Ayub Khan seized power in a military coup in 1958, his first instinct was to try to address the balance between modernists and traditionalists. The problem he faced, as he saw it, was that religious conservatism was opposed to modern industrial and social development. He could anticipate the resistance that he would face from religious traditionalists, who up to that point had been relatively prominent in society, and in the councils that were advising on constitutional developments, and he believed that he could overcome that resistance by promoting a more liberal form of Islam that would be compatible with modernisation. To that end, he introduced laws that struck at the heart of conservative Islam, seeking state regula-

tion of such matters of family organisation as marriage and divorce, and inheritance. (Ansari, 2011)

This approach was successful up to a point, and a number of major infrastructure projects that supported the economic development of Pakistan were completed. This was achieved at a cost, however, and the result of the measures that marginalised religious traditionalists was that in the late 1960s, Ayub Khan faced significant social and political unrest. The regime faced growing dissatisfaction and unrest due to economic challenges, political repression, and demands for more democratic governance.

In an effort to overcome the problem that his regime was seen as repressive, and that there should be a move toward democracy, Ayub Khan sought legitimacy through the electoral process; he stood for election to the role of president, a position he had previously occupied only with the support of the army. Seeking the support of a broader electorate, he reversed some of the previous legal provisions, and gave religious traditionalists a larger role in the processes of government. (Ansari, 2011)

As time progressed, it became clear that many of those measures were merely cosmetic, and that Ayub Khan was still pursuing his agenda of modernisation, including the promotion of a more liberal form of Islam, and political unrest increased again. In order to maintain his grip on power, he needed a mechanism that would overcome division and create a sense of national unity. Since before independence, the most potent instrument for achieving this had been an appeal to religion, but with the religious traditionalists feeling marginalised, and sceptical about the sincerity of Ayub Khan, this was not an approach that was available to him.

One of his approaches to mitigate this unrest was to promote nationalism, which involved stirring up anti-Indian sentiment. In the short term, promoting nationalism and anti-Indian sentiment did help unify various factions within Pakistan against a common perceived external enemy. It also temporarily diverted public attention from domestic issues. But while it may have provided a temporary unifying effect, this approach did not address the underlying socio-political issues. The strategy of fostering nationalism through anti-Indian sentiment also led to significant unintended consequences, namely the 1965 war with India.

The heightened anti-Indian rhetoric and military posturing contributed to increased tensions with India, culminating in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. The war did not achieve its objectives for Pakistan and resulted in significant loss of life, economic strain, and further political instability. The failure to address domestic unrest and the subsequent military defeat in the 1965 war weakened Ayub Khan's regime, and ultimately led to his resignation in 1969, under pressure from widespread protests and political opposition.

In summary, Ayub Khan's approach of stirring up anti-Indian feelings as a way to promote nationalism and address social and political unrest was not successful in the long term and led to significant unintended consequences, including a detrimental war with India and further internal instability.

Against this backdrop of national politics, Ayub Khan's policies also had implications for education. Social policies, such as establishing a minimum age for marriage, or establishing new norms around the terms of marriage and the rights of women and children, implied a role for education in establishing new societal norms. Similarly, in the later period, the promotion of national unity through militarism implied the adoption of certain nationalistic rituals in schools and other educational institutions.

However, lack of resources has always been a serious constraint on educational reform in Pakistan, and the increased spending on the military that accompanied the heightened anti-Indian rhetoric meant that there was still less money to invest in education. Consequently, while the need to 'improve' education to support national unity increased, the resources available decreased as an unintended consequence of the policy that Ayub Khan pursued.

### **Nationalization of Private Schools: 1969 – 1971**

During the period from 1969 to 1971, the Pakistani Government, under the leadership of President Yahya Khan, sought to tackle the significant disparities in educational access between different socioeconomic groups. The education system as it existed in 1969 was highly unequal, with private schools generally providing advanced quality education to affluent families, while public schools, especially in rural areas, struggled with inadequate resources and poor infrastructure. The government's objective was to create a more equitable education system where every child, regardless of their background, could receive a standardized and high quality education (Qadeer, 2006).

However to address these above highlighted disparities, the government implemented a policy of nationalizing private schools, bringing all educational institutions under state control, thereby standardizing the curriculum, ensuring uniformity in educational practices, and making education more accessible to the broader population. By centralizing the management of schools, the government aimed to eliminate the inequalities that had characterized the education system and to provide a consistent quality of education across the country (Haque, 2008). The nationalization policy achieved some of its intended goals, particularly in terms of increasing access to education. By bringing private schools under government control, more children from lower-income families were able to enroll in schools that were previously unaffordable. This led to an expansion in the number of students receiving education, particularly in urban areas where private schools had been concentrated.

Despite this, the success of the nationalization policy was limited by several critical issues that were largely unintended consequences of the policy. Firstly, the government did not allocate the necessary resources to maintain the same level of quality that private schools had previously provided. The influx of students into the newly nationalized schools strained existing facilities, leading to overcrowding and a deterioration in the quality of education (Qadeer, 2006). Without the investment from private sources, or their replacement by public funding, standardisation did not result in a raising of quality.

Secondly, there were issues of management and accountability. The transition from private to public management was not smooth. Once the private mechanisms of accountability, and the discipline of the market were removed, many schools suffered from bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of accountability, and poor governance, which further contributed to the decline in educational standards. Thirdly, and finally, teachers who had previously worked in private schools often faced reduced salaries and benefits under government control, leading to demotivation and a decline in their performance. This had a negative impact on the overall educational experience for students (Haque, 2008).

Therefore The Single National Curriculum (SNC) policy, implemented in 2021 across all provincial-level public and private educational institutions in Pakistan, aimed to enhance the quality of education by standardizing the curriculum. However, the policy encountered significant challenges during its implementation, largely due to inadequate planning to address the disparities between the curricula of private and public schools. Popperian theory emphasizes the need for applying temporary solutions to eliminate errors, and in this context, the failure to effectively bridge the curriculum gap highlights the necessity for continuous evaluation and refinement. The lack of a comprehensive strategy to address these disparities ultimately impeded the policy's success in establishing a uniform and high-quality educational standard across the nation (Memon & Aijaz, 2022).

Analyzed through the lens of Karl Popper's theory, the initial policy hypothesis that nationalization would standardize and improve educational access and quality proved to be only partially successful. While the policy did expand access, the decline in quality highlighted the need for ongoing policy evaluation and adjustment. The gov-

ernment needed to address the resource and management challenges that were the unintended consequences of their policy, to achieve the dual goals of equitable access to high-quality education (Popper, 1963). The nationalization of private schools between 1969 and 1971 was a well-intentioned effort to address educational disparities in Pakistan. However, the outcomes were mixed, with improvements in access overshadowed by a decline in educational quality due to resource constraints and mismanagement. This experience underscores the importance of continuously testing and refining educational policies to ensure they meet their intended objectives, as advocated by Popper's approach to policy-making.

During the years 1969 to 1971, the Pakistani government undertook the nationalization of private schools to address inequities in educational access. The goal was to create a standardized education system that would be accessible to all, regardless of geographic location. However, this policy faced significant challenges. While access to education improved, particularly in rural areas, the quality of education suffered due to resource limitations and poor management. This situation exemplifies Karl Popper's philosophy, which suggests that policies, like scientific theories, must be rigorously tested and continuously revised based on their effectiveness in practice (Popper, 1959). The experience of Pakistan's educational reforms during this period underscores the importance of adaptability in policy-making, where theoretical approaches must be critically evaluated and adjusted in response to real-world outcomes (Qadeer, 2006).

### **Education Reforms Following Nationalization: 1972 – 1977**

The principle problem that faced the education system during this period was the decline in educational standards. Following the nationalization of private schools in the early 1970s, the Pakistani education system experienced a noticeable decline in standards. The nationalization policy, while successful in increasing access to education, led to significant challenges in maintaining the quality of education. The swift growth of the public sector put significant strain on the existing infrastructure, leading to overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of teaching materials, and a decline in teacher morale due to limited resources and ineffective management. The resulting drop in educational standards became a central concern for government policy during this period, prompting efforts to mitigate the negative effects of the nationalization process (Haque, 2008; Qadeer, 2006).

In response to the declining educational standards, the government under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto implemented a series of reforms aimed at addressing these challenges. The primary focus of these reforms was on improving the physical infrastructure of schools and enhancing the quality of teacher training. The government allocated resources to construct new schools, renovate existing ones, and provide essential amenities such as furniture, sanitation, and electricity. This investment in infrastructure was a direct response to the issues identified earlier, where the nationalization of private schools and insufficient investment had led to overcrowding and a deterioration in educational facilities (Burki, 1980; Mahmood, 2000).

In addition to infrastructure improvements, teacher training programs were introduced to upgrade the skills and qualifications of educators, with the goal of enhancing the overall teaching and learning experience. However, this approach highlights a potential oversight in the problem analysis. As previously noted, the primary issue was a decline in teacher morale due to reduced salaries and deteriorating working conditions. While overcrowding may have suggested a shortage of teachers, the root of the problem was not necessarily inadequate training but rather low morale. The emphasis on further training might have been intended to deflect blame for declining educational quality onto teachers, rather than addressing the underlying issues that were impacting their performance (Haque, 2008; Qadeer, 2006).

The reforms included efforts to standardize teacher qualifications and increase their salaries in order to motivate better performance and attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession. The government argued that without well-trained and motivated teachers, the improvements in infrastructure would not translate into better educational outcomes (Haque, 2008). However, seen from the Popperian perspective, it would seem that inadequate problem analysis resulted in solutions (policies) that were poorly focused, and addressed issues of secondary importance.

The education reforms of 1972-1977 led to some temporary improvements in education. The investment in infrastructure resulted in better-equipped schools, particularly in urban areas, and the emphasis on teacher training helped improve the quality of instruction in some regions. For a brief period, these efforts seemed to reverse the declining trend in educational standards. However, the long-term success of these reforms was undermined by several persistent issues.

The education reforms implemented between 1972 and 1977 brought about some short-term improvements in the education sector. The government's investment in infrastructure led to the development of better-equipped schools, particularly in urban areas, while the focus on enhancing teacher training contributed to an improvement in instructional quality in certain regions. For a time, these efforts appeared to mitigate the decline in educational standards. However, the sustainability of these reforms was significantly compromised by persistent issues that were not adequately addressed.

Corruption within the education sector, including the misappropriation of funds designated for infrastructure projects and teacher salaries, severely undermined the effectiveness of the reforms. Much of the financial resources intended to enhance educational facilities and training programs were either misused or embezzled, resulting in incomplete or substandard infrastructure and insufficient teacher development (Haque, 2008; Abbas, 2007). This widespread corruption led to the failure of many reform initiatives to achieve their intended outcomes, ultimately hindering the long-term progress of the education system.

The implementation of reforms was often inconsistent, with significant disparities between different regions of the country. Rural areas, in particular, continued to suffer from inadequate infrastructure and poorly trained teachers, exacerbating the existing inequalities in the education system (Qadeer, 2006).

The problems of corruption and poor implementation of policy both arose as a consequence of the failures of accountability that we identified to be a result of the nationalisation of private schools in the preceding period. But government policy addressed the problems of infrastructure and teacher training instead, thereby providing only partial solutions to the problems that the system faced (Haque, 2008).

The political environment during this period was volatile, with frequent changes in government and widespread unrest. This instability disrupted the continuity of education policies and hindered the sustained implementation of reforms, leading to a lack of long-term progress (Haque, 2008). It may also have meant that the issues of accountability, in particular, were harder to address than some other areas of reform where policies were less contentious. Analyzing these outcomes through Popper's theory, the initial hypothesis that improving infrastructure and teacher training would lead to a reversal of declining educational standards was only partially validated. While there were short-term gains, the failure to address systemic issues like corruption and inefficient implementation revealed the limitations of the reforms. This underscores the need for continuous policy evaluation and adaptation, as well as the importance of addressing underlying systemic problems to achieve lasting improvements in education. (Popper, 1963).

The education reforms undertaken between 1972 and 1977 in Pakistan succeeded in achieving some temporary improvements in infrastructure and teacher quality. However, these gains were overshadowed by persistent issues such as corruption

and inefficient implementation, which limited the long-term impact of the reforms. The experience highlights the need for comprehensive and sustained efforts to address both the symptoms and root causes of problems in the education system, in line with Popper's principles of policy-making.

But there is also an indication here that the way that policies fail can shape the problem analysis, and therefore the policies that are introduced to tackle those problems. It was widely perceived that the decline in educational quality, and the failure to reverse that decline, were a consequence of corruption. This was viewed as a moral problem that went beyond the education system alone, and infected the whole body politic. Since the problem was identified in moral terms, the solution, when it came, was also framed in moral terms, as the need to increase the influence of religion and morality in the country as a whole.

### **Islamization of Education under Zia-ul-Haq: 1978 – 1988**

During General Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1978-1988), Pakistan's educational policy underwent a significant shift, emphasizing the incorporation of Islamic values into the education system. Zia-ul-Haq's broader agenda of Islamization across various sectors of society aimed to align the education system with Islamic principles. The existing education system was viewed as insufficiently aligned with Islamic teachings, leading the government to revise the curriculum to foster a more religiously-oriented society. This shift was driven by the belief that issues such as corruption and failed reforms were rooted in personal morality rather than institutional governance, necessitating a focus on moral and religious education (Nasr, 2001; Jalal, 1995).

Key changes included making Islamic Studies (Islamiyat) a mandatory core subject across all educational levels, from primary schools to higher education institutions. The curriculum was expanded to include Islamic history, Quranic studies, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad alongside other academic subjects (Rahman, 2004). Additionally, Arabic language courses were promoted, and religious content was integrated into other subjects such as social studies and history (Saeed, 2013). The government also supported the expansion of madrassas (Islamic religious schools) by providing financial assistance, which further entrenched religious education in the country (Zaman, 2002). These measures ensured that all students, regardless of their field of study, received a comprehensive foundation in Islamic teachings (Nasr, 2001).

The Islamization of education during Zia-ul-Haq's era had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, the introduction of Islamic Studies as a core subject and the proliferation of madrassas significantly increased the focus on religious education. Students received more structured and systematic instruction in Islamic teachings than in previous years, reinforcing their cultural and religious identities (Nasr, 2001; Rahman, 2004).

However, this increased emphasis on religious education had unintended consequences, particularly in the allocation of resources and instructional time. As more attention was devoted to Islamic Studies, other critical subjects such as science, mathematics, and the humanities were overshadowed. This imbalance led to a decline in the overall quality of education, particularly in preparing students for diverse careers and participation in a globalized economy. Karl Popper's theory of the open society emphasizes the importance of a well-rounded education that fosters critical thinking and diverse knowledge for societal innovation and health (Popper, 1963). The disproportionate focus on religious education during this period hindered the development of critical thinking skills and comprehensive knowledge in other key areas (Ali, 1987; Jalal, 1995).

The curriculum changes implemented during this period had lasting effects on Pakistan's education system. While religious education gained prominence, the



neglect of other subjects created gaps in students' overall education, affecting their competitiveness in higher education and the job market. This also contributed to a growing divide between religious and secular education streams (Saeed, 2013; Zaman, 2002). According to Popper's theory of problem-solving and piecemeal social engineering, the policies introduced during this period brought about short-term changes in the education system, although their long-term impact on broader societal improvement was questionable. The success of these policies hinged on the assumption that a direct link existed between religious education and societal morality. However, global evidence suggests that the relationship between religious commitment and public morality is not particularly strong, and the hypothesis that incorporating Islamic values into education would create a more morally aligned society was not rigorously tested.

While the Islamization of education under Zia-ul-Haq succeeded in increasing religious education, it also produced unintended consequences, such as a diminished focus on other critical subjects. This underscores the importance of continuously evaluating and adapting educational policies to meet broader educational goals without compromising essential academic disciplines (Popper, 1963). Additionally, the emphasis on religious education contributed to perceived gender inequality, as it made it more difficult for girls and young women to access education on equal terms. This set the stage for subsequent efforts to address these inequalities (Khan, 2015).

### **Benazir Bhutto's Initiatives: 1988 – 1990**

Upon becoming Prime Minister in 1988, Benazir Bhutto was confronted with the critical issue of gender disparity in education. Despite advancements in various sectors, girls—especially those in rural and conservative regions—had significantly less access to education compared to boys. This disparity was rooted in entrenched cultural norms that favored boys' education, alongside economic challenges and insufficient educational infrastructure for girls. The gender gap in education was not merely a social concern but also a substantial obstacle to national development, as it limited the empowerment and active participation of half of the population (Shaheed, 1991; Weiss, 1990).

In addressing the challenge of gender disparity in education, Benazir Bhutto's administration implemented several initiatives aimed at enhancing girls' access to education and reducing gender inequality. The government prioritized the construction of schools specifically for girls, with a particular focus on rural areas where educational opportunities were scarce. These schools were intended to provide safe and accessible environments conducive to learning for girls (Sathar & Kazi, 1997). Additionally, to boost enrollment, the government emphasized the training of female teachers, recognizing that the presence of women educators could alleviate parental concerns about sending their daughters to school. These initiatives were part of a broader strategy aimed at closing the gender gap in education and encouraging greater female participation in society (Khan, 2007).

In response to the economic barriers impeding girls' education, the government introduced scholarships and financial incentives aimed at reducing the costs that kept many families from enrolling their daughters in school. By providing these supports, the initiative sought to encourage families to prioritize their daughters' education over domestic responsibilities or labor (Bari, 2000). Additionally, the government launched public awareness campaigns designed to shift societal attitudes toward girls' education. These campaigns highlighted the benefits of educating girls, both for individual families and national progress, with the aim of changing cultural norms and demonstrating the broader value of female education in contributing to the country's development (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993).

The initiatives introduced by Benazir Bhutto's administration had a varied impact, demonstrating both achievements and limitations. There was notable progress

in increasing girls' school enrollment, particularly in urban areas where cultural resistance was less intense. The creation of new girls' schools and the hiring of female teachers significantly contributed to this progress. Financial aid and scholarships also alleviated economic constraints for some families (Jalal, 1995; Weiss, 1990). However, persistent challenges remained in rural and conservative regions, where entrenched cultural norms and limited resources hindered the full achievement of the government's goals.

Despite these advancements, the programs encountered considerable cultural resistance, particularly in conservative and rural areas where traditional gender roles were deeply ingrained. Many families were hesitant to send their daughters to school due to concerns about safety, prevailing social norms, and doubts about the value of educating girls. This resistance affected the overall effectiveness of the initiatives in these regions (Jalal, 1995; Bari, 2000; Khan, 2007). The success of Benazir Bhutto's educational initiatives was significantly limited by financial constraints. The government struggled to secure sufficient funding, which impacted the full implementation and sustainability of the programs. This led to incomplete infrastructure projects, inadequate teacher training, and limited effectiveness of the incentives and awareness campaigns (Sathar & Kazi, 1997). These financial limitations diminished the overall impact of the reforms, despite the government's commitment to advancing girls' education (Jalal, 1995).

Although there were some improvements in girls' school enrollment in the short term, the long-term sustainability of these gains remained uncertain due to persistent cultural and economic barriers. The initiatives needed continuous support and resources to maintain progress, but these were not always forthcoming (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1993). According to Popper's theory, the initial assumption that targeted interventions could significantly reduce gender disparities in education was only partially confirmed. Popper's theory stresses the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation of policies to address new challenges and unforeseen issues. While the programs made strides, particularly in urban areas, the entrenched cultural and economic obstacles highlighted the necessity for continued policy adjustments and additional resources to achieve the desired outcomes fully (Popper, 1963).

Benazir Bhutto's efforts between 1988 and 1990 represented a significant attempt to tackle gender inequality in education in Pakistan. Although these initiatives led to improvements in girls' enrollment, especially in urban areas, their overall impact was constrained by ongoing cultural resistance and financial limitations. This experience underscores the complexity of effectively addressing gender disparity and emphasizes the need for continuous, comprehensive efforts to overcome both cultural and economic barriers to girls' education. From the perspective of Popper's theory, these initiatives illustrate that while targeted interventions may achieve short-term progress, long-term and systemic change requires persistent adaptation and adequate resource allocation to address enduring challenges (Popper, 1966).

### **Nawaz Sharif's Government and Privatization: 1990 – 1993**

By 1990, the education system in Pakistan was perceived as highly inefficient, a consequence of inadequate investment over the preceding two decades under various governments. The public education sector faced numerous challenges, including outdated curricula, deteriorating infrastructure, underfunded schools, and low teacher morale, which contributed to a decline in education quality. The system struggled to meet the rising demand for education and address disparities between urban and rural areas (Husain, 2001; Khan, 2007; Qureshi, 2007).

In response to these issues, Nawaz Sharif's government, during his first term as Prime Minister from 1990 to 1993, pursued a policy aimed at increasing private sector involvement in education. The government sought to address inefficiencies by

promoting the establishment and expansion of private schools, aiming to boost the overall capacity of the education system and introduce competition to elevate standards (Mahmood, 1999). Regulatory barriers for private educational institutions were reduced, making it easier to set up new schools and encouraging private investment in education (Chaudhry, 2004). In addition, the government sought to foster partnerships between the public and private sectors to improve educational infrastructure and resource availability. These partnerships were expected to leverage private sector efficiency and investment to enhance the quality of education (Mahmood, 1999; Chaudhry, 2004).

The shift towards privatization and deregulation during Nawaz Sharif's tenure resulted in several significant outcomes. The policy led to a notable rise in the number of private educational institutions, especially in urban areas, thereby increasing educational choices for students and easing the burden on the public education system (Mahmood, 1999; Qureshi, 2007). This growth brought innovations in educational practices, such as enhanced facilities and modern teaching techniques, which benefitted those who could afford private schooling.

However, the expansion of private education also exacerbated educational inequality. Private institutions, often equipped with superior resources, were primarily accessible to students from wealthier families. Meanwhile, public schools continued to suffer from inadequate funding and poor management, widening the gap between private and public education (Khan, 2007; Qureshi, 2007). This emphasis on privatization deepened the divide between those with access to high-quality private education and those reliant on under-resourced public schools, reinforcing existing social and economic disparities (Qureshi, 2007).

The shift towards increased private sector involvement in education raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of the overall education system. While the expansion of private schools improved access for some students and introduced new educational practices, the fundamental issues within the public education system remained unresolved. This discrepancy continued to pose challenges in providing equitable educational opportunities across different socio-economic groups (Husain, 2001; Khan, 2007).

Evaluated through the lens of Karl Popper's theory, the hypothesis that private sector involvement would rectify inefficiencies in public education yielded mixed results. The policy achieved success in enhancing educational access and fostering innovation, yet it also highlighted the persistent and growing inequalities between private and public schools. This situation underscores the necessity for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of educational policies to ensure a balanced approach that addresses both access and quality while promoting equity throughout the education system (Popper, 1963).

Nawaz Sharif's privatization initiatives from 1990 to 1993 expanded access to education and introduced greater variety in educational options. However, these improvements were accompanied by notable disparities between private and public schools. The unequal distribution of resources highlighted the need for more comprehensive policies that address both accessibility and quality throughout the entire education system (Khan, 2007).

### **Benazir Bhutto's Second Term: 1993 – 1996**

During Benazir Bhutto's second term as Prime Minister (1993-1996), the education sector faced significant challenges. The privatization policies from the previous period had drawn resources away from the public sector, exacerbating existing problems. Consequently, the public education system struggled with a shortage of trained teachers and inadequate resources. This shortage was particularly severe in rural and under-developed areas, where teacher training programs were often outdated and did not

align with contemporary educational needs. This deficiency in teacher preparation hampered the effectiveness of instruction and limited the quality of education provided (Khan & Saeed, 1999).

The shortage of teachers significantly impacted the quality of education, constraining students' learning opportunities. Schools, particularly in less affluent areas, struggled with a lack of essential educational resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, and other classroom supplies. This shortage undermined effective teaching and limited the educational experiences available to students (Ahmed, 1996).

In response to these challenges, the government took several steps to improve teacher training and educational resources. They launched various initiatives to enhance the skills and qualifications of educators, including workshops and specialized courses for in-service teachers. Additionally, the government undertook reforms to upgrade teacher training colleges and institutions, ensuring that they offered relevant and up-to-date training (Nawaz, 1995).

The government also focused on enhancing the availability of educational resources in schools. They launched programs to provide free or subsidized textbooks, particularly targeting disadvantaged areas. Investments were made to improve the physical infrastructure of schools, including the provision of essential classroom materials and equipment. The aim was to increase funding and allocate resources effectively to address the most critical needs in the education sector (Husain, 2001).

Despite these efforts, the initiatives introduced during this period achieved only partial success and were met with several challenges in implementation. While the government made strides in improving educational resources and infrastructure, the introduction of teacher training programs led to improvements in the skills of some educators. However, the reach of these programs was limited, and many teachers, especially in remote areas, did not benefit from these enhancements. This discrepancy highlighted the ongoing difficulties in achieving widespread and equitable improvements across the education sector. Progress was made in providing textbooks and educational materials, but distribution remained uneven. Many schools continued to experience shortages of essential resources, affecting their ability to deliver quality education (Chaudhry, 1999).

Efforts to reform the education system were significantly constrained by limited financial resources, impacting the scale and effectiveness of training programs and material distribution. Issues such as inefficiencies and corruption further compromised the delivery of resources and training, leading to delays and inconsistencies. Resistance to change from some educational institutions and local authorities also hindered the adoption of new programs and materials. Consequently, while certain regions and schools saw improvements, others continued to face challenges with inadequate resources and training (Weiss, 2002).

From Popper's perspective, the hypothesis that enhancing teacher training programs and providing educational materials would remedy deficiencies in the education sector received partial validation. The reforms introduced during Benazir Bhutto's second term did achieve some improvements in teacher training and resource allocation. However, they also exposed the necessity for continuous refinement and additional support to address implementation challenges and ensure broad, effective improvements. Efforts made during this period aimed to tackle the shortage of trained teachers and the lack of educational resources. While these initiatives resulted in notable progress, their overall effectiveness was limited by issues in implementation, insufficient funding, and inconsistent impacts across various regions.

### **Nawaz Sharif's Second Term: 1997 – 1999**

During Nawaz Sharif's second term as Prime Minister, a significant challenge in Pakistan's education sector was the deteriorating state of educational infrastructure. Many

schools, especially in rural and underserved regions, were in poor condition, lacking essential facilities such as clean water, electricity, and proper classrooms. This inadequate infrastructure severely impacted the quality of education and contributed to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates. The deteriorating physical environment of schools negatively affected students' learning experiences, highlighting the urgent need for infrastructure improvements (Khan, 2003). In response to the extensive infrastructure issues, the Nawaz Sharif government initiated several development projects focused on upgrading and modernizing educational facilities. These efforts included constructing new schools, renovating existing structures, and equipping schools with essential amenities such as furniture, sanitation facilities, and educational technology. The government aimed to create a more supportive learning environment by improving the physical conditions of schools, which was expected to boost student engagement and academic performance. (Nawaz, 2001). By modernizing educational infrastructure, the government aimed to tackle some of the fundamental issues contributing to educational inequity and poor outcomes in the public education system.

Despite these ambitious plans, the development projects yielded limited success. Political instability during this period was a significant factor in this outcome. Frequent changes in government, political unrest, and economic challenges caused substantial delays in project implementation. Many initiatives faced indefinite postponements or cancellations due to inadequate political support and financial constraints. Additionally, corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies exacerbated the difficulties in executing these projects, resulting in minimal improvements to the educational infrastructure (Rizvi, 2000). This situation highlights the need for adaptable and resilient policy frameworks. Although the theory that enhancing infrastructure could improve educational outcomes was valid, its success was contingent on stable political conditions and effective execution. The challenges faced during this period underscore the necessity for policy designs that can endure political and economic fluctuations to ensure sustained progress.

### **The Early Reforms of Pervez Musharraf: 1999 – 2000**

When General Pervez Musharraf came to power in 1999, Pakistan faced significant challenges with an outdated education system. The curriculum was considered outdated and not suited to the needs of a modern, technology-driven world. The lack of integration of Information Technology (IT) in education was particularly concerning, as global economies increasingly relied on technological advancements. Modernizing the curriculum and incorporating IT education became essential to equip students with the skills necessary for the 21st century. (Khan, 2003).

In response to these issues, Musharraf's administration focused on updating the education system by integrating IT education into schools and colleges and revising the curriculum to include modern subjects and innovative teaching methods. Initiatives were undertaken to establish computer labs in educational institutions, provide IT training to educators, and incorporate computer science into the curriculum at various levels. These efforts were intended to equip students with critical IT competencies, ensuring that graduates could meet the demands of a rapidly changing global workforce. Additionally, the curriculum changes aimed to make the educational content more relevant and in line with international benchmarks (Mumtaz, 2004).

The early reforms introduced by Musharraf's government resulted in some positive developments in the education sector. The integration of IT education was particularly effective in urban regions, where schools were better positioned to implement these initiatives. This led to increased access to technology for students and a significant improvement in IT literacy among the younger population. Additionally, the updated curriculum made education more relevant to current societal and economic needs, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience (Zaidi, 2005).

However, despite these initial successes, the long-term effectiveness of these reforms remained in doubt due to challenges related to sustainability. Persistent issues such as limited resources contributed to this uncertainty. In many rural areas, schools were unable to maintain IT education or fully implement the revised curriculum due to inadequate infrastructure and resources. These disparities led to inconsistencies in the quality of education between urban and rural regions (Mansoor, 2006).

Although IT education was introduced, the continuous training of teachers and the upkeep of technological infrastructure were not adequately addressed, creating challenges in maintaining the initial progress. Additionally, Pakistan's broader political and economic instability further complicated the consistent implementation and expansion of these reforms. This instability posed a significant threat to the sustainability of the achievements made during this period (Hussain, 2007).

From the perspective of Popper's theory, the hypothesis that modernizing education through IT integration and curriculum updates would result in significant and lasting improvements was partially validated by the early positive outcomes. However, the sustainability issues uncovered gaps in policy design and execution, which needed to be addressed through continuous evaluation and adaptation. This case highlighted the need for developing robust strategies capable of enduring implementation challenges to achieve long-term success (Popper, 1972; Hussain, 2007).

The early reforms introduced by Pervez Musharraf's government represented an important move towards modernizing Pakistan's education system, particularly through enhancements in IT education and curriculum relevance. However, the sustainability of these reforms remained in question, primarily due to ongoing resource constraints and the lack of continuous policy refinement. This situation highlighted the necessity for consistent investment in resources and the adaptation of policies to ensure long-term educational progress (Mansoor, 2006; Hussain, 2007).

## Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis examines Pakistan's educational reforms from 1947 to 2000 through the lens of Karl Popper's theory of conjectures and refutations. The period witnessed a series of policy shifts, each aimed at addressing various challenges within the education system. The study highlights two recurring themes that align with Popper's perspective: the cyclical nature of problem-solving in educational reforms and the often untested assumptions underlying these reforms.

From 1947 to 2000, Pakistan's educational policies evolved significantly. The early years focused on establishing a framework for modern education, while subsequent decades saw various reforms aimed at improving quality and accessibility. Key periods include the post-independence era, the introduction of religious education under General Zia-ul-Haq, and the attempts at modernization and privatization in the later years.

The first key theme is that the solutions implemented in each period often created the problems that future reforms needed to address. This cyclical pattern is evident from the historical record. For instance, the emphasis on religious education during the 1980s, intended to address societal corruption, led to increased polarization and resistance to secular reforms. Similarly, the modernization efforts of the 1990s, while aiming to enhance technical skills, did not sufficiently address the issues of outdated infrastructure and disparities between public and private schools. Each reform effort, while well-intentioned, tended to address immediate issues but often failed to resolve underlying problems, leading to new challenges in subsequent periods.

The second theme is the reliance on assumptions about the links between short-term educational reforms and long-term societal outcomes. Policies were frequently based on the belief that improvements in one area of education would automatically lead to broader societal benefits. For example, the introduction of enhanced

religious education was presumed to foster societal integrity, and increased educational opportunities for women were expected to spur economic development. These assumptions were rarely subjected to rigorous testing, leading to a disconnect between policy intentions and actual outcomes. Popper's theory underscores the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation of policies, rather than reliance on unverified assumptions

Furthermore, political instability and frequent policy reversals hindered the development of long-term, sustainable educational reforms. The constant shifts in policy direction meant that the long-term impacts of reforms could not be fully assessed or realized. The oscillation between opposing views—such as privatization versus nationalization and religious versus modern curricula—illustrates the challenge of achieving stability and coherence in educational policy.

### *Correspondence*

Dr. Tahira Yasmeen  
School of Education  
Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan  
Email: [tahirayasmeen.edu@mul.edu.pk](mailto:tahirayasmeen.edu@mul.edu.pk)

## References

- Abbas, S. (2007). Education and corruption in Pakistan: Impact on the quality of education. *Journal of Educational Research*, 10(2), 35-50.
- Ali, S. M. (1987). *Education in Pakistan: A survey*. National Book Foundation.
- Ansari, Sarfraz Husain (2011) "Forced Modernization and Public Policy: A Case Study of Ayub Khan Era (1958-69)" in *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.45-60
- Appadorai, A. (1941) "Minorities and the Administration with Special Reference to India" *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 13–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42742870> accessed 31 July 2024
- Bari, F. (2000). *Women's education in Pakistan: Present scenario, issues and problems*. ASR Publications.
- Burki, S. J. (1980). *Pakistan under Bhutto, 1971–1977*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chaudhry, F. M. (2004). Public-private partnerships in education: The Pakistani experience. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24(3), 215-229.
- Haque, N. U. (2008). *Education policy in Pakistan: A historical overview*. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.
- Haque, R. (2008). *Education reforms in Pakistan: A way forward*. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.
- Husain, I. (2001). *Pakistan: The economy of an elite society*. Oxford University Press.
- Hussain, S. (2007). *Political instability and its impact on educational reforms in Pakistan*. Routledge.
- Jalal, A. (1995). *Democracy and authoritarianism in South Asia: A comparative and historical perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Khan, Akhtar Hasan, and Naushin Mahmood (1997) "Education in Pakistan: Fifty Years of Neglect [with Comments]." *The Pakistan Development Review*, vol. 36, no. 4, 1997, pp. 647–67. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41260063> accessed 31 July 2024
- Khan, S. (2003). *Educational Reforms in Pakistan: A Historical Perspective*. University of Karachi Press.
- Khan, S. (2007). *Zina, transnational feminism, and the moral regulation of Pakistani women*. UBC Press.
- Khan, S. R. (2007). *Education, inequality, and poverty in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Mahmood, S. (2000). *Pakistan: Political roots and development 1947–1999*. Oxford University Press.



Mahmood, T. (1999). Privatization of education in Pakistan: An analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Education*, 16(1), 15-29.

Mansoor, N. (2006). *Challenges in implementing educational reforms in Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.

Memon, A. A., & Aijaz, A. (2022). Impact and challenges of Single National Curriculum implementation in Pakistan: A critical analysis. *Journal of Education Policy and Practice*, 30(2), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402454.2022.2025230>

Mumtaz, K. (2004). *The impact of IT integration on education in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.

Nasr, V. (2001). Islamization, the state and development: The case of Pakistan. *The Middle East Journal*, 55(2), 211-226.

Nawaz, M. (1995). Teacher training and educational reforms: The Bhutto government's approach. *Pakistan Journal of Educational Research*, 18(2), 77-91.

Nawaz, M. (2001). *Educational infrastructure and policy in Pakistan: An analysis of the Sharif era*. University of Karachi Press.

Popper, K. R. (1963). *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*. Routledge.

Popper, K.R. (1972) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Clarendon Press

Popper, K.R. (1994) *The Myth of the Framework: In defence of science and rationality* (London: Routledge)

Qadeer, M. (2006). *Pakistan-social and cultural transformations in a Muslim Nation*. Routledge.

Qureshi, M. A. (2007). The impact of privatization on educational inequality in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27(2), 159-174.

Rahman, T. (2004). *Denizens of alien worlds: A study of education, inequality, and polarization in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.

Rizvi, H.-A. (2000). *Military, state and society in Pakistan*. St. Martin's Press.

Saeed, S. (2013). *Politics of desecularization: Law and the minority question in Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press.

Sathar, Z. A., & Kazi, S. (1997). Women's autonomy in the context of rural Pakistan. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 36(4), 229-256.

Shaheed, F. (1991). The cultural articulation of patriarchy: Legal systems, Islam, and women's status in Pakistan. *South Asia Bulletin*, 11(2), 45-57.

Shaheed, F., & Mumtaz, K. (1993). *Women in Pakistan: Two steps forward, one step back?* Vanguard.

Sinha, Bipin K. (1939) "The Wardha Education Scheme" *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 87, no. 4514, pp. 728–32. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41359351> accessed 31 July 2024

Weiss, A. M. (1990). The consequences of state policies for women in Pakistan. *Asian Survey*, 30(5), 509-527.

Zaidi, S. A. (2005). *Issues in Pakistan's economy: A political economy perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Zaman, M. Q. (2002). *The Ulama in contemporary Islam: Custodians of change*. Princeton University Press.