



THE PIVOT REPORT: REIMAGINING EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN



“The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.”

DR. DAVID GRAEBER

Table of Contents

01	Introduction	01
	Executive Summary	02
	Conference Overview	02
	Keynote Speakers	03
	Moderators and Panelists	04
02	Key Findings: Pakistan's Education at a Crossroads	05
	Framing the Education Crisis	07
	Ensure learning, not just schooling	07
	Approach the challenge as political, not just technical	07
	Make equity the foundation of reform, not just an inspiration	08
	Aim for systemic change, not piecemeal efforts	09
	Enabling Systemic Reform	10
	Align Around Shared Purpose	10
	Measure Aligned Outcomes	11
	Empower Teachers	13
	Build System-Wide Leadership	15
	Strengthen Accountability for Learning	18
03	Recommendations	19
04	Works Cited	23

Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education development in Pakistan has seen numerous ideas and interventions. Yet, meaningful and sustainable reform that improves learning outcomes for all children remains a critical challenge.

In light of this challenge, Teach For Pakistan organized The Pivot, a landmark conference, bringing together local and global education practitioners, thought leaders, and Teach For Pakistan Alumni to envision an equitable and transformative future for Pakistan's children. This report captures the most compelling insights from that convening and offers recommendations for meaningful, systemic education reform.

Key discussions at The Pivot centered on actionable strategies to realign the education system for scalable student learning improvements. Participants agreed that Pakistan must move beyond isolated reforms to adopt a holistic, systemic approach grounded in a shared purpose, led by capable leaders across all levels of the system, and backed by data and accountability. This report outlines key shifts needed in how we frame the education crisis, articulate our vision for education, build leadership, and define effective accountability mechanisms. Finally, it recommends concrete actions to ensure these shifts take root and endure across political cycles.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Held in Islamabad, on 13th January 2025, The Pivot brought together a diverse array of visionaries, including academics, educators, practitioners, global leaders, and change-makers, who shared groundbreaking ideas and transformative experiences.

Dr. Farid Panjwani (Dean, AKU-IED) and Ms. Wendy Kopp (CEO, Teach For All) delivered the keynote addresses setting the tone for the conference. The honorable Education Minister of Balochistan, Ms. Rahila Durrani, along with Mr. Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani (Secretary, MoFEPT), Ms. Riffat Jabeen (Director Academics, FDE) and Dr. Fouzia Khan (Chief Executive Advisor, SELD, Sindh) shared valuable insights into the state's efforts to support education.

They were joined by stakeholders from across Pakistan's education system, representing academic and research institutions, private organizations, and international agencies. These included the LUMS School of Education, Institute for Development and Economic Alternatives, Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, Tabadlab, Pakistan Alliance for Math and Science, Teach For Pakistan, Zindagi Trust, Teach For Lebanon, The World Bank, United Nations Development Programme and UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The complete list of speakers can be found on next page.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Ms. Wendy Kopp
CEO & Co-founder,
Teach For All



Dr. Farid Panjwani
Dean, Institute for Educational
Development, Aga Khan
University

MODERATORS AND PANELISTS



Ms. Mehnaz Akbar Aziz
Educationist and Development Practitioner



Ms. Amna Akhtar
MERL Manager,
UNDP, Teach For Pakistan Alumna



Ms. Tooba Akhtar
Chief Program Officer,
Teach For Pakistan;
Teach For Pakistan Alumna



Ms. Khadija S Bakhtiar
Founder & CEO,
Teach For Pakistan



Dr. Faisal Bari
Associate Professor,
LUMS School of Education



Ms. Rahila Durrani
Minister of Education,
Balochistan



Ms. Izza Farrakh
Senior Education Specialist,
World Bank



Dr. Salman Humayun
Executive Director, Institute of Social and Policy Sciences



Ms. Riffat Jabeen
Director Academics,
Federal Directorate of Education



Mr. Nassir Kasuri
CEO, Beaconhouse International College; Chairperson, Board of Directors, Teach For Pakistan



Dr. Fouzia Khan
Chief Executive Advisor,
School Education and Literacy Department, Govt of Sindh



Mr. Salman Naveed Khan
CEO, Pakistan Alliance for Maths and Science



Dr. Rabea Malik
Senior Research Fellow,
Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives



Ms. Janine Weber-el Meouchy
Executive Director,
Teach For Lebanon



Dr. Irfan Muzaffar
CEO, Margallah Thought Collective



Mr. Umar Nadeem
Founding Partner,
Tabadlab



Ms. Zohra Nasir
Director Academics,
Zindagi Trust;
Teach For Pakistan Alumna



Dr. Soufia Anis Siddiqi
Assistant Professor,
LUMS School of Education



Mr. Mazhar Siraj
Executive Team Lead,
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office



Ms. Fatima Suleman
Head of Leadership and Training, Teach For Pakistan



Mr. Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani
Secretary,
Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training

Key Findings:

Pakistan's

Education

at a

Crossroads

Key Findings: Pakistan's Education at a Crossroads

Pakistan stands at a pivotal moment in its educational journey. The scale of the learning crisis is undeniable: 26 million children remain out of school¹, and four out of five ten-year-olds cannot read a simple sentence². With these children set to become the educators, leaders, and policymakers of tomorrow, inaction today will only compound the crisis, further limiting future opportunities for millions of children.

"Right now, 2 out of 5 people in our country are not literate and half of our children are out of school. If we project this issue forward by 15 to 20 years, we may find that every second person in our country is illiterate. At that point, we will be left behind in history."

- Dr. Farid Panjwani



And yet, despite the grim outcomes, the system's shortcomings cannot be attributed to a lack of effort. Across Pakistan, we have seen countless interventions supporting curriculum development, assessments, teacher training, and infrastructure improvement. Significant funding has been invested by the government and international agencies. The desire for improvement in education is widespread.

So, why in the face of so much activity, does meaningful progress remain out of reach?

At The Pivot, speakers turned to global research, real-world case studies, and their own experiences to confront this question. Their reflections highlighted the need for a fundamental rethinking of Pakistan's approach to education, and proposed key shifts to enable systemic reform.

¹Pakistan Institute of Education, *PES Report 2021-22* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Education, January 2024), www.pie.gov.pk/SiteImage/Publication/PES%20Report%202021-22.pdf.

²The World Bank, *Pakistan: Learning Poverty Brief* (Washington, DC: World Bank, June 2022), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099812207212211713/pdf/1DU0e0c38ddc0f77b04fda0a7ad0e2f4235d517a.pdf>

1. FRAMING THE CRISIS

Education reform in Pakistan has long focused on technical inputs - teachers, curriculum, assessments, textbooks, access, infrastructure, and financing - as the primary levers of change. The Pivot encouraged participants to move beyond inputs and rethink how we approach the education crisis. Speakers proposed four fundamental changes in how we frame the issue.

1.1. ENSURE LEARNING, NOT JUST SCHOOLING

With over 26 million children out of school in Pakistan, school access remains a vital concern and the primary focus of recent state reforms. While this focus is well-placed, the conference highlighted that increasing access alone is not enough.

Even for children who are enrolled, learning outcomes are alarmingly low. According to ASER 2023, only 17.9% of Grade 3 children can read a story in English and only 12.6% can solve a basic 2-digit arithmetic problem³. These figures point to a deeper crisis, one of learning, that is often overlooked.

The dominant assumption in policymaking has been that once children are in school, learning will follow. Yet, global and local evidence increasingly refutes this idea. As discussed at The Pivot and emphasized in the RISE Programme's research, increasing schooling does not always lead to improved learning outcomes. In fact, this approach can have the opposite effect. When students fall behind in the early years and receive little support to catch up, they are more likely to disengage and eventually drop out⁴. Studies from multiple countries show that education systems focusing only on enrolment, without parallel investments in quality, often see declining learning outcomes even among the students who remain in school.

Speakers at The Pivot argued that learning, not just schooling, must be the north star that guides Pakistan's education reforms. Prioritizing learning will not only push us to improve the quality of learning in schools, but also to find new ways of engaging out-of-school children in learning, whether through mainstream education, technological interventions, or alternative programs.

1.2. APPROACH THE CHALLENGE AS POLITICAL, NOT JUST TECHNICAL

The learning crisis in Pakistan is not just a result of weak policy implementation or technical shortcomings - it is deeply political. For decades, reform efforts have focused narrowly on technical fixes: changing curriculum and textbooks, introducing assessment frameworks, and restructuring training among others. But The Pivot reminded us that these changes will never be sufficient if they are not backed by political will, underpinned by strong public demand or civic will.

³ Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), *Annual Status of Education Report 2023 (National)* (Lahore: Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, 2024), https://aserpakistan.org/document/2024/aser_national_2023.pdf.

⁴ Lant Pritchett, Kate Newman, and Justin Silberstein, *Focus to Flourish: Five Actions to Accelerate Progress in Learning* (Research on Improving Systems of Education [RISE], 2022), https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2022/07.

Dr. Farid Panjwani argued that behind the education crisis in Pakistan lies a divided political will. While some segments of the country desire a critical, empowering education, others benefit from an under-educated population that does not question authority. Other speakers echoed this sentiment, stating that without a widespread social and political settlement to make learning a non-negotiable priority, reforms in education will continue to lack stability and coherence.

"Look at history. All grand transformations - from the abolition of slavery to women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, decolonization and the anti-apartheid struggle - were movements that had a political dimension."

- Dr. Farid Panjwani

In Pakistan's context, where changes in political leadership often lead to an overhaul of the previous administration's policies, this political settlement must also be sustained across regimes. Ms. Izza Farrakh emphasized that in other countries, across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, long-term reforms have only succeeded where political will was aligned and persistent.

1.3. MAKE EQUITY THE FOUNDATION OF REFORM, NOT JUST AN ASPIRATION

Article 25A of the Pakistani constitution guarantees free and compulsory education for all children. Yet, 77% of Pakistan's children experience learning poverty⁵.

A deeper look into learning data reveals that this crisis is not evenly distributed. Of the 26 million out-of-school children, 74% belong to rural backgrounds⁶. Only 25% of 5th graders in Pakistan's poorest quartile can read a sentence in English, compared to 41% in the richest quartile⁷. Gender disparities persist as well, with enrolment for girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, lagging approximately 15 percentage points behind enrolment for boys⁸.

Dr. Salman Humayun pointed to another group of learners that receives little attention: children enrolled in low-fee private schools, a segment comprising almost 47% of Pakistan's children⁹. Beyond these groups, there are still many others, such as children with disabilities and those from religious and ethnic minorities, that do not receive appropriate focus.

Without truly recognizing and accommodating all children, Article 25A will remain a lofty aspiration. We must problematize how we approach reform in education to question whether it is truly inclusive of the needs of all children.

⁵World Bank, *Pakistan: Learning Poverty Brief*.

⁶Pak Alliance for Maths and Science, *The Missing Third of Pakistan: A Tehsil-Wise Analysis of Out of School Children* (Islamabad: Pak Alliance for Maths and Science, 2024), https://mathsandscience.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/The-Missing-Third-of-Pakistan_2924.pdf

⁷ITA, *Annual Status of Education Report 2023 (National)*.

⁸Juan D. Barón et al., *Breaking Barriers, Improving Futures: Challenges and Solutions for Girls' Education in Pakistan* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024), <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/41637>.

⁹Pakistan Institute of Education, *PES Report 2021-22*.

1.4. AIM FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE, NOT PIECemeAL EFFORTS

Historically, reform in Pakistan has been in the form of isolated interventions designed to improve singular aspects of the education system in piecemeal fashion, often as time-bound projects restricted to a few regions. These efforts fail to recognize the interconnectedness of the education system and often end up being incompatible and contradictory.

For instance, Ms. Riffat Jabeen pointed out that while we push our curriculum and teacher training to focus on project-based learning, assessments remain focused on rote memorization. This leads to conflicting expectations, rendering the changes ineffective.

Speakers urged us to rethink how we conceptualize the education system: not as a collection of isolated components, but as a dynamic, interdependent structure. Ms. Khadija Bakhtiar emphasized that, "For reforms to be sustainable, it is not just one or two components of the system that have to be changed, but the entire ecosystem that surrounds our children must be dealt with and contended with together."

Dr. Fouzia Khan added that this ecosystem extends beyond schools to include other sectors and institutions. Children's ability to learn is shaped not just by the classroom, but also by their nutrition, health, safety, home environment, and community. This means that systemic education reform must be coordinated across ministries, departments, and levels of government.

"We clearly need a multi-sectoral approach because a child is also the responsibility of the health department, the local government, and the labor department."

- Dr. Fouzia Khan

While the shift to a systemic approach may seem difficult, examples of successful education systems across the world show that it is necessary. Whether through revolution (Cuba and Iran), or through gradual and incremental policy changes in policy (UK and Finland), countries were only able to transform education when they were able to enact holistic, systemic reforms.

Dr. Panjwani noted one common pattern across these examples: successful reforms were often preceded by independent, inclusive commissions or task forces that carefully studied the system and provided holistic recommendations that were accepted by all stakeholders. For instance, the 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk" in the United States and the 1948 "Sarkar Committee Report" in India shaped significant reforms in both countries. This idea provides a roadmap that Pakistan can also adopt as it shifts toward systemic reform.

2. ENABLING SYSTEMIC REFORM

The shifts in framing required point to a clear need: Pakistan needs systemic reform that changes how the entire system operates instead of tweaking parts of it. It requires alignment of purpose across all levels, from classrooms to ministries, and demands that every actor and institution pull in the same direction. Drawing from global best practices and local insights shared at The Pivot, this section outlines five foundational shifts that can begin to transform Pakistan's education system into one that consistently delivers learning for all children.

2.1. ALIGN AROUND SHARED PURPOSE

At the heart of Pakistan's learning crisis is a deeper crisis of purpose. The education system lacks a clear, shared vision of what education is meant to achieve. Without such clarity, reforms become fragmented, policies pull in different directions, and system-wide misalignment persists.

Speakers at The Pivot emphasized that in successful education systems around the world, all elements including curriculum, teacher training, assessments, and budgeting are aligned around a unifying purpose. In contrast, Pakistan's education system attempts to serve multiple, often contradictory purposes.

"If we look at our expectations from children, they are often contradictory. We expect them to be devout Muslims and obedient citizens. We also want them to be economically successful, earning in dollars if possible. At the same time, we expect them to be critical thinkers, independent-minded, and autonomous.

These goals, however, are often incompatible with each other."

- Dr. Farid Panjwani



To move forward, we must articulate a national purpose for education that can be collectively owned by all stakeholders. Dr. Panjwani proposed that to ensure an education that nurtures both the minds of our children and their hearts and souls, this purpose must integrate three interconnected dimensions:

- **Economic Purpose**

Education must enable individuals to earn a livelihood, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve financial stability and contribute to economic growth.

- **Social Purpose**

Education must cultivate responsible citizens who promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and active civic engagement.

- **Personal Purpose**

Education must foster intellectual and moral growth, encouraging students to develop their own values, sense of self, and critical thinking.

This call for a broader purpose is supported by data. Tabadlab's research, cited by Mr. Umar Nadeem, asked parents about the purpose of learning. 59% of parents emphasized the desire for their children to lead better lives. A significant number also expressed the desire for their children to contribute to society and serve the nation. These aspirations underscore the relevance of considering all three dimensions of education: economic, social, and personal.

2.2. MEASURE ALIGNED OUTCOMES

A national purpose for education holds little value without systems to track progress towards it. Without concrete indicators to assess progress, efforts risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

Speakers at The Pivot noted that Pakistan lacks a consistent and transparent framework to assess whether the education system is delivering on its goals. Mr. Salman Naveed Khan inquired, "Do we have a clear definition of what a ten-year-old in Pakistan should know or be able to do?" The absence of such a standard creates ambiguity in policy implementation and weakens accountability.

While initiatives like the National Education Assessment System (NEAS) and Punjab's Literacy and Numeracy Drive (LND) have attempted to generate data on learning outcomes, they remain fragmented, under-utilised, or unsustained.

Dr. Salman Humayun further highlighted that even when data is being collected, there are no systemic mechanisms in place to feed the collected information into meaningful reforms. In Punjab alone, approximately 78,000 observations are conducted every month. Yet despite this extensive data collection, there are no proper mechanisms to aggregate and decipher the findings effectively.

Mr. Umar Nadeem highlighted another key issue: "without data, decisions are left to personal whims and uninformed preferences". This leads to decision-making that can potentially cause further misalignment within the system.

Speakers called for a comprehensive, state-backed approach to measurement that can define age-appropriate learning benchmarks, track longitudinal progress, and feed insights back into the system.

ZOOMING IN: THE ROLE OF PURPOSE IN CLASSROOMS

The need to align around purpose is not limited to the highest levels of the system. It must also trickle down to the classroom level. Ms. Fatima Suleman shared insights from Teach For Pakistan classrooms, where students in under-resourced public schools demonstrated an average 4.4 years of growth within just 2 academic years.

In these classrooms, one pattern emerged: the presence of a collective and contextualized vision. Teachers took the time to understand their students' realities, challenges and aspirations. They also sought external research and perspectives to benefit from national and global insights on holistic student development. They used their findings to craft classroom vision informed by students' realities, responsive to their needs and aligned with ambitious universal standards.

This vision then translated into planning and practices. Teachers broke down their vision into smaller goals and targets. They used these to make yearly academic plans, unit plans, lesson plans, and classroom plans centered on student well-being. They designed formative and summative assessments to learn about students' needs and used the data generated to further refine their planning and teaching practices. By centering vision in their teaching practices, they encouraged students to follow suit. Students in these classrooms approached learning with an enthusiasm that stemmed from their vision.

To implement this effectively, Teach For Pakistan ensured support for teachers aligned to their vision. This alignment of effort across teachers, their support systems and students in the classrooms led to all practices pulling in one direction - toward learning.



2.3. EMPOWER TEACHERS

Teachers are the heart of the education system. No curriculum reform, infrastructure upgrade, or policy shift can succeed without the active engagement and empowerment of teachers. Yet, teaching in Pakistan continues to be an undervalued profession. It is often underpaid, under-supported, and rarely positioned as a career of choice.

At The Pivot, speakers examined the historical and structural reasons for this neglect. Zohra Nasir shared that teaching in Pakistan has long been seen as a missionary or maternal vocation, particularly for women, rather than a respected profession requiring deep expertise. This perception diminishes the urgency of investing in teacher capacity, voice, and well-being.

In order to move toward an education system that can truly deliver learning for all children, we must reform the profession of teaching in the following ways:

Recruitment

Teaching young and vulnerable students is difficult work and requires not just pedagogical expertise but also a specialized skillset and an unwavering commitment. Therefore, we must define comprehensive and rigorous standards for recruiting teachers that can assess candidates for the knowledge, skills, and values necessary.

"In corporate settings, candidates are rigorously evaluated for their suitability, yet in teaching, we rarely ask, "Why do you want to be a teacher?" or "What competencies do you bring?" If we don't recruit with clear competencies in mind, even the best training programs won't be fully effective."

- Ms. Tooba Akhtar



Training

Teaching and nurturing students requires deep self-reflection and preparation by the teacher. Prior to placement in schools, teachers must master instructional and pedagogical skills, while also cultivating self-awareness, resilience and commitment. Additionally, throughout the duration of their teaching service, they must continue to expand their capacity to teach, reflect, adapt, and solve problems.

This calls for a focus on both pre-service and frequent in-service training comprising both theoretical and practical components to ensure teachers acquire the knowledge required to teach while also learning through practice and observation.

Ongoing Support

To enable teachers to achieve transformational outcomes, they must be provided consistent support and mentoring. One global best practice to ensure teacher support is to provide dedicated coaches that go beyond technical support to help teachers build the motivation required to persist against all odds.

"If we want teachers who care about educating both the heart and soul, then someone must care about the heart and soul of the teacher."

- Ms. Fatima Suleman

Accountability

Support for teachers must be coupled with accountability mechanisms aligned to student learning and development.

If we want teachers to focus on ensuring student learning but hold accountability for indicators such as attendance and pass rates, we incentivize teachers to compromise on learning.

Compensation

Teaching is a demanding profession. Teachers across the public and private sector plan for and teach multiple classes a day, looking after hundreds of students while also carrying any administrative work required. In many areas, they do this in schools that lack the resources needed for their work. To attract committed and capable teachers, we must ensure that teachers are compensated appropriately and are provided the conditions necessary for their work.

Voice

Dr. Rabea Malik pointed out that despite teachers making up the largest workforce in Pakistan, the education system often places them at the bottom of the hierarchy of decision-making. Policies are made for teachers, not with them.

Their vantage point at the heart of delivering education makes their experience and insight invaluable in ensuring successful policies. We must create channels, through research and advocacy, for teachers' voice and feedback to be incorporated in policy-making.

"Researchers and policymakers should act as bridges, bringing teacher voices into decision-making spaces."

- Dr. Soufia Anis Siddiqi

2.4. BUILD SYSTEM-WIDE LEADERSHIP

Systems do not change on their own; people change them. Every sustainable reform, every well-functioning school, and every successful education initiative is ultimately driven by committed individuals who act with vision, purpose, and courage.

Drawing on his research on successful public sector schools in Pakistan, Dr. Faisal Bari noted that in every functional school, the common element was the presence of at least one individual - a headteacher, teacher, or community member - who went beyond their call of duty to really advocate for the school.

Discussing these individuals, speakers highlighted six key attributes of leaders who drive meaningful change:



"The ideas for transforming education already exist; what we need are bold, innovative individuals who have the courage to put those ideas into action, challenge the status quo, and push through resistance to create meaningful change."

- Mr. Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani

1. A high level of competence

Leaders must have the necessary skills and expertise to deliver, communicate, and execute as required by their role.

2. A strong sense of self:

Leaders must deepen self-awareness and remain open to learning.

3. Ability to convene and mobilize

Leadership is about collective progress, not individual brilliance. Leaders must bring together people who might not otherwise work together.

4. A strong sense of responsibility

A leader must take responsibility for achieving their ultimate purpose, going beyond their role when needed.

5. Ability to take calculated risks

Leaders must have the courage to take calculated risks for themselves and the larger community.

6. A strong ethical foundation

Leadership involves clarifying personal values and motivations and identifying the principles that shape one's actions.

The scale of the learning crisis requires large-scale, purpose-driven reform across all components of the system. To enact this, we need leaders at all levels of the system.

Yet, in our current education system, where many actors are themselves the product of our failing education system, examples of this kind of leadership are few and far between. A concerted effort is required to build this kind of leadership through intentional interventions.

Speakers noted that one successful example can be found in the work of the Teach For All network. Existing across 60 countries, this model of leadership development recruits top graduates and places them in under-resourced schools for a two-year teaching Fellowship, where they immerse themselves in the reality of education inequity, while building the leadership required to tackle it.

At The Pivot, Teach For All CEO Wendy Kopp shared the results of a study assessing the impact of the Fellowship on participants:

"The results showed growth in five key dimensions:

1. Participants' belief in their students' potential increased.
2. Their own self-efficacy grew - they developed a stronger sense that change was possible and they could make a difference.
3. Their understanding of the nature of the problem and its solutions transformed. Many entered the program thinking of educational inequity as a technical fix, believing funding was the main solution, but they came to realize it was a complex, systemic issue requiring mindset shifts and adaptive change.
4. Their priorities shifted, influencing their career trajectories.
5. Their networks grew: they built relationships with each other that enabled long-term collaboration."

- Ms. Wendy Kopp

Given the scale of leadership required, efforts to develop it must go beyond supporting independent initiatives and push to integrate leadership development into our education agenda. Schools and universities must be tasked with ensuring that our youth is set up for leadership by the time they complete their education.

"In Pakistan, we are often raised to equate leadership with obedience and responsibility rather than risk-taking. However, leadership involves stepping into discomfort, making difficult decisions, and sometimes going against the grain to create meaningful change. That's why leadership development must start early.

By the time people graduate, they should be ready to take that step toward leadership, making undergraduate years crucial in shaping future leaders."

- Dr. Faisal Bari

ZOOMING IN: BUILDING LEADERSHIP AT TEACH FOR PAKISTAN

The kind of leadership that unites as a collective force, strong in numbers and aligned in vision, cannot occur naturally; it must be developed with intentionality.

Over the last decade, Teach For Pakistan has built this leadership through a Fellowship model predicated on embedding high-potential individuals in the toughest challenges of our education system, standing alongside the people who face them. These formative relationships and grassroots understandings shape why and how Fellows go on to lead, grounding their vision and values in the lived realities of inequity.

Today, Teach For Pakistan's Alumni movement is 352 strong and growing. Collectively, these Alumni have expanded opportunities for more than 1.8 million children by augmenting and furthering the work of the country's largest non-profits, making essential contributions to large-scale provincial reforms in textbooks, assessments, teacher recruitment, and teacher training.



Fatima Jamil Khan
Alum 2014

Promoting inclusivity, access and empowerment for people with disabilities



Kashan Hanif
Alum 2014

Deployed technology-enabled blended learning in schools



Taimoor Abdullah
Alum 2020

Driving impactful solutions to transform teaching and learning across Pakistan.



Zain Murtaza Maken
Alum 2014

Improved school participation and teaching practices in low-performing districts



Syeda Mariam Asaad
Alum 2014

Increased access to education, teacher training, infrastructure development, student enrolment campaigns



Anam Palla
Alum 2011

Transformed government school into a model school and led Sindh's updated teacher evaluation policy.



Ayesha Jamshaid
Alum 2019

Developed the Digital Schools Program to expand learning access for out-of-school children



Huda Ahmed
Alum 2011

Pioneered trauma-informed education in Pakistan



Afrah Qureshi
Alum 2011

Empowering out-of-school children with essential literacy and numeracy skills.



Nouman Alam
Alum 2021

Founded Climate Class Connection to build student climate leadership and train educators in climate education.



Shehnila Parveen
Alum 2021

Transforming Pakistan's public education through model schools to create child-centered classrooms



Hina Saleem
Alum 2013

Piloted a non-formal school program for out-of-school children; informed a policy brief on rural inclusion in school

2.5. STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LEARNING

Currently, no single stakeholder is held accountable for student learning outcomes, allowing poor performance to persist without consequences and necessary course corrections. This problem is the symptom of a distributed responsibility model, where education is devolved to the provincial level and decision-makers are often not the implementers of policies and vice versa.

"If four out of five children cannot read, which official should be held accountable? The reality is that there are either too many people at different levels or no one at a central level."

- Mr. Umar Nadeem

Effective accountability requires clarity. Each actor in the education system must have clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Teachers must be accountable for delivering instruction and ensuring student learning. School leaders must foster collaborative and inclusive environments. Policymakers must ensure that systems, training, and resources are aligned to support these goals.

However, accountability cannot be imposed in isolation. It must be preceded by enablement. Teachers, for instance, should only be held accountable for learning outcomes once they are provided with manageable class sizes, adequate training, aligned curricula, and meaningful assessment tools. As Ms. Riffat Jabeen shared, classrooms with 80+ students make it nearly impossible to deliver individualized instruction. Holding teachers responsible in such conditions, without addressing systemic constraints, is both ineffective and unjust.

Accountability must also be aligned with the system's purpose. Dr. Salman Humayun noted that many of the current metrics used to gauge success (teacher attendance, school infrastructure, or exam pass rates) are poor proxies for actual learning. Ms. Fatima Suleman added that relying on one-time evaluations or compliance checks undermines the very learning outcomes we seek to improve. Instead, accountability should be based on ongoing patterns of behavior and performance, supported by regular feedback and developmental support.

Speakers advocated for a shift from punitive to developmental accountability. This would involve using learning data not to penalize educators, but to guide professional growth and improve practice. It would also require a reimagining of the data ecosystem itself: shifting from rigid one-time assessments toward dynamic, quantitative and qualitative observations, multi-year trends, and continuous feedback loops.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Insights from The Pivot reaffirm what global and local evidence already suggests: isolated, technical fixes are not enough. Pakistan needs a coherent, systemic approach to education reform—anchored in learning, equity, and leadership. Based on discussions at the conference, we propose the following recommendations to guide future action.

1. REBRAND AND EXPAND THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY TASK FORCE

In May 2024, the Prime Minister of Pakistan declared an education emergency in response to the schooling crisis. This spurred the creation of a National Education Emergency Task Force responsible for recommending projects that would help get children into schools. However, to truly meet the current needs of our system, the mandate assigned to this task force must be expanded.

The current task force must be transformed into a long-term National Education Reform Commission. Its mandate should go beyond school access to designing a comprehensive, cross-sectoral charter for education reform oriented toward improving student learning.

This body must include impartial and respected experts from education and related sectors. It must also include a diverse mix of actors who can represent interests of all children. These experts must adopt a systemic approach, conducting a thorough review of the many components of our system and the interactions between them, to propose reforms that are coherent and aligned.

The commission should be given a 20-year horizon to analyze, propose, build consensus for, and implement reform. It must secure formal buy-in from all major political parties and the military, and must be granted constitutional protection to ensure continuity across government changes.

2. ARTICULATE A NATIONAL PURPOSE FOR EDUCATION

To ensure reform efforts are coherent, they must be aligned toward a single purpose for education. Currently, Pakistan faces a crisis of purpose: we have multiple purposes for education and many of them are contradictory.

We must launch a nationwide consultation to co-create a unifying vision for education in Pakistan. This consultation should engage all key stakeholders, lifting their diverse voices. Through multiple conferences and workshops, we must engage universities, chambers of commerce, teacher unions and associations, parliamentarians, youth associations, and local government representatives across the country. This process should also seek to include the perspectives, perceptions and voices of children themselves.

Their insights on the purpose of education must be used to articulate a national purpose that, enables the National Education Reform Commission to shape future policymaking.

The national purpose of education must also be shared back with the larger public through campaigns aiming to build consensus on a single purpose of education.

3. GENERATE STATE-BACKED EDUCATION DATA

To ensure our education system is set up to fulfill its purpose, we need reliable data that informs policies, determines progress and evaluates the impact of various reforms. For a long time, efforts to generate data have been limited to time-bound projects that focus on a few key indicators but don't set up long-term processes to gather, analyze and share data with relevant stakeholders.

The establishment of the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) in 2021 has been a positive development on this front. PIE has begun producing high-quality education data and assessments with remarkable speed. The challenge ahead is to sustain and institutionalize this effort to ensure that it does not remain a one-off initiative but becomes a permanent source of evidence. It is equally important to build channels that can ensure relevant data reaches schools, policymakers, civil society, and the public in accessible ways, and that they are encouraged to use it.

4. REIMAGINE THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND EXPAND PATHWAYS INTO TEACHING

Teachers are instrumental actors in the education system. Yet, efforts to strengthen the profession are complicated by two realities: the political complexity of reforming policies and practices in a system with many competing interests; and an acute human resource challenge. We need far more teachers than can be recruited through existing pipelines.

In the long run, Pakistan must pursue a clear vision of elevating and professionalizing teaching through:

- Robust recruitment systems that enlist teachers based on merit, skills and the necessary values required to deliver a holistic education.
- Both pre-service and ongoing in-service teacher training that go beyond instructional and pedagogical skills to also cultivate self-awareness, problem-solving, resilience and a commitment to purpose.
- Access to dedicated coaches who can support teachers in navigating challenges and building the motivation required to persist against all odds.
- Accountability mechanisms that are aligned to student learning, instead of indicators such as attendance and pass rates.

- Channels, such as research and advocacy, that can incorporate teachers' voice and feedback into policy-making.
- Competitive compensation that can attract and retain committed and capable talent.

In the short term, we need flexibility to bring high-caliber people into classrooms through alternative pathways so that, while we build a stronger professionalized teaching force, children are not left waiting for the teachers they urgently need today.

5. BUILD A SPECIALIZED EDUCATION WORKFORCE IN GOVERNMENT

Government departments responsible for education must also be staffed with a specialized workforce. Reviving the education cadre is essential to bring pedagogical and system expertise back into government. These officials should receive leadership and technical training, including in the areas of curriculum design, assessments, school oversight, teacher development and be offered career protections and professional growth pathways to attract and retain capable talent.

6. DEVELOP CIVIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY IMMERSION

To implement systemic reforms across the education system, we need distributed leadership: individuals dedicated and capable of enacting change, present at all levels of the system. Therefore, we must ensure that our educational institutions are instilling the necessary values and skills in our youth to prepare them to become leaders.

We must embed civic education throughout the educational journey of a student, and mandate meaningful community service for all university programs. Before they graduate, students must deeply immerse themselves within underserved communities to understand and co-create solutions for the challenges faced by our people.

This immersion in the lives of others, will build the values required and the task of generating solutions, will build the skills necessary to lead future change.

7. ESTABLISH A CROSS-MINISTERIAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

In a decentralized education system, it is often unclear who is ultimately responsible for ensuring each component of the education system is performing as needed.

A robust performance evaluation framework must be introduced for all ministries with a stake in education outcomes (including Education, Health, Finance, Planning, and Child Protection). This framework must clarify the roles of each ministry and its actors in ensuring student learning and well-being, and assign clear, measurable targets linked to this purpose. The accountability framework should be anchored within the Prime Minister's Office for oversight and accountability.

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