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Pakistan, Education and the 21st Century: A Critical Review

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About the Book

Pakistan, Education, and the 21st Century is a comprehensive document of its type in which the author has pinned down the educational challenges in the Pakistani context. In addition, he has suggested practical steps for urbanized educational practices and opportunities. The book is a treat to read to all those who are connected with education at either level, i.e., teachers, students, heads and policymakers alike. It is an insightful exploration to comprehend education in the context of the 21st century. It is one of the rarest attempts of its type on the part of Dr. Shahid Siddiqui, who has been connected with the educational landscape of Pakistan for 4 decades at varied levels. The most striking aspect of this book is that it is concise and pertinent, the language is simple, and the expression of the author is persuasive. The book is well-structured, thematically connected, and practically an insightful document that briefly and persuasively outlines the current scenario, challenges, and prospects of education in Pakistan.

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Review of the Book

Pakistan, Education, and 21st-century (Pakistan, Taleem aur Ikkeesvin Sadi) is a comprehensive document outlining the persistent problems that surround the education policy and setup in Pakistan. It is written by a renowned author, intellectual, educationist, critic, and linguist Dr Shahid Siddiqui, having a diverse and extensive experience of teaching, researching, writing, and administration with relevant to the Pakistani education system. According to Shahid Siddiqui, education deterioration in Pakistan is due to the educational disparities that are prevalent from multiple school systems, low literacy, conservative pedagogical practices, commercial prospects in education, decline, and low values of local languages. In addition, there is a lack of a holistic approach in the education system, i.e., in classroom practices as well as in curricula.

The under-view book *Pakistan, Education, and the 21st Century* enables thought-provoking insights into the Pakistani educational landscape given the challenges and opportunities offered by the 21st century. The book not only unleashes the complexities, challenges, and issues of Pakistani educational setup but also enables readers with insightful exploration and practical steps for redressing the challenges and issues and to make education a quality and inclusive education. The book initiates with the contextualization of the Pakistani educational system, tracing its evolution from 1947 till date. Dr. Siddiqui has aptly delineated the factors that navigated the entire educational practices and policies, highlighting challenges and issues that continued to hinder inclusive and well-rounded education. One of the most striking features of the book is that it has depicted multifaceted layers of issues in the educational system of Pakistan, which range from inadequate funding to outdated curricula, socioeconomic factors to improper implementation of educational policies.

To make his book illustrious in the sense that stands out high is that he not only diagnoses the issues but also presents the solution and roadmap to come out of the challenges. He proposes innovative and inclusive strategies to reform Pakistan's education system through teacher capacity enhancement training, inculcating critical thinking, and creativity among learners. Mr. Siddiqui emphasizes shaping the future of Pakistan through reshaping the education system by bringing a change to meet the needs of the 21st century, and it is only possible if students are equipped with digital and technological literacy along with nourishment of creative thinking, problem-solving and higher order skills enhancement. In all, the book under review is a compelling read to comprehend the dynamic of the Pakistani educational system and its implications for reshaping the future of the nation. Being an amalgam of scholarly insights and practical steps, the books lend a valuable hand to let teachers and policymakers advance educational excellence in Pakistan.

The book consists of 11 chapters that deal in detail with the overall persona of the Pakistani system of education ranging from education and modern practices, the fundamental issues of education in Pakistan, education in the 21st century, education and society, education not being a priority in Pakistan, the role of language in education, the role of universities in education, teacher persona in the education system and role of research and education to bring change in the society. The book is highly structured, researched, and thematically well-knitted. It is a powerful voice to root out socio-economic disparities and to bring change in society through education. In addition, the book laid stress on critical pedagogy, impactful communication, and non-conventional curriculum development to bring change in society through reforms in the education system.

Another key aspect of the book under review is that instead of merely commentating, the author has analyzed relevant policy documents about the sociocultural context, thus pointing out the gaps, challenges, contradictions, and issues which were prominent in education policies since 1947. Thus, bringing into play the historical context of issues that resulted in the

current situation relevant to education in Pakistan. Though lofty aims and goals like increase in enrolment, upshot in literacy rate, equality in education, compulsory vocational training, teacher training, inculcation of Islamic values, global exposure and character building were set up in all the educational policies yet none of those materialized in Pakistan. The under-view book is an insightful exploration of the field of education, highlighting its challenges and issues and suggesting ways out on the part of the author, being himself a teacher, educationist, and administrator.

The book has not only highlighted the issues and challenges that are prevalent in the educational landscape of Pakistan but has also given a comprehensive overview of how to make Pakistani education in line with the ever-evolving needs of the 21st century. On one hand, Shahid Siddiqui has outlined the causes of the challenges in the educational landscape such as right from the beginning the slogan for free and compulsory has not been materialized, Urdu has not been made the official language despite being mentioned so in the constitution, out of schools children estimated up to 25 million despite all rhetoric assertion, failure to provide state of the art educational setup on the part of governments, investment on higher education is decreasing with every passing year, lack of funds constraint on research, and overall education has been neglected in all aspects from policymaking to allocating funds and execution of the educational policies that resulted in disparities and current state of affairs.

To make his points more convincing, logical, and practical, the author has quoted the % of GDP, which never increased from 2.3% of the total GDP despite the claims to increase it up to 7% from 2015. On the other hand, the author has highlighted the factors that lead to ineffective implementation of policies and lack of resources reserved for education. According to the author of the book, the key is the fact that education was and is not a priority in Pakistan. Lack of ownership and political will, challenges about capacity building, unreliable and inconsistent data, lack of resources, and lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms are some of the prime factors that contribute towards the shabby situation in the country. After highlighting the challenges, and the contributing factors behind the shabby situation in Pakistan about the educational situation the author has projected several practical steps and suggestions to improve the situation as part of the education system for more than 4 decades as a teacher and administrator.

To Shahid Siddiqui, to improve the situation and make the education system in line with the ever-evolving challenges of the 21st century, it is imperative to make education a top priority. Not only education but a quality education is the need of the hour that must be away from the conventional trends and tone. The education system must be such that fosters creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and higher-order learning among learners rather than merely attaining degrees and paper qualifications. It must promote social, emotional, and leadership skills among learners along with collaborative and communication skills to pursue effectively in the 21st century. Dr. Shahid Siddiqui asserted the fact that it is indispensable for policymakers, curriculum and assessment designers, parents, and students to shun the outdated concept of rote memorization just to pass the exam rather than soft skills such as empathy, equity, respect, collaboration and inclusive learning environment need to be promoted and projected to uplift the situation to a considerable height.

Contribution of the Book

The under-view book has delved into multifaceted aspects of the Pakistani system of education, i.e. curriculum, teachers' training, assessment mechanism and governance of the overall ecosystem of education. The author's analysis in the book is based on empirical evidence, and these are devised from the most accepted practices internationally. The books and the author's analysis are based on a critical assessment of the current educational scenario of the country. Dr. Siddiqui is not shy of criticizing what is wrong in the system, as he has highlighted inequitable access to education, poor quality instruction and the inability to

integrate technology into the education system. The author has adopted a historical perspective to make the readers understand the evolutionary context of the situation in Pakistan.

It has assisted the author in depicting the current situation and contextualizing it in the historical context to lay stress on the need to address the challenges encountered. Dr. Siddiqui's approach is based on comparative analysis as he has compared the Pakistani education system with those countries that are advanced as far as the educational landscape is concerned to make the policy makers aware of the best practices and potential opportunities to incorporate in the current educational scenario of Pakistan. To nurture and reform the educational scenario of Pakistan, Dr. Siddiqui has proposed several policy recommendations, i.e. reforming curricula, revitalizing teachers' training, integrating technology, and incorporating research and innovation by investing in infrastructure.

To Siddiqui, the curriculum can be reformed through standardization, innovation, relevance, and mother tongue-based instruction. Quality of teaching can be revitalized through quality content, impactful training, professional development and welfare initiatives for the teachers. Infrastructure can be molded through investment, equitable distribution of instructional resources and promoting accessibility of the technology across the country. Assessment can be manifold through a holistic and inclusive approach and employing data-driven decision-making. Governance can be revolutionized by leadership, decentralization, transparency, and accountability. Research and innovation can be incorporated through funding, creating research centers, international collaboration, integrating technology and involving the private sector.

Conclusion

The book is a valuable insight to comprehend the educational system of Pakistan, the challenges, issues and the factors contributing to this unproductive situation or situation. In addition, it is a practical guide and empirical roadmap to make the Pakistani educational system reformed and in line with the educational practices of the 21st century to move ahead. In the view of the author of the book under view, education, rather a quality and inclusive education, is a tool to bring change in society and make our children steer through the ever-evolving complexities of the 21st century. In addition, the author has commenced the highest persona on the role of teacher, being the center or hub of all educational activities. The teacher is the one who has the power to act as a changing agent to reform the educational landscape in Pakistan.

About the Author

Dr. Shahid Siddiqui is a renowned intellectual, educationist, critic, researcher, columnist, writer, linguist, and ex-Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University. He was born in Rawalpindi and earned an M.A. in English from Gordon College with Distinction, did an M.Ed. TESOL from the University of Manchester on a British Council Scholarship, and later did a PhD in English Linguistics from the University of Toronto on a Canadian Scholarship and Post Doc. From renowned Oxford University on Charles Wales Scholarship. He is known as a mentor, researcher, administrator, author, and intellectual who has expertise in these areas for more than 4 decades. He has served at AKU, LUMS, GIKI, NUML, and AIOU. Currently, he is serving at the School of Economics as Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Media Studies & Design. He has been a regular columnist at Dawn and The News. At present, he is writing for daily Dunya. He is the author of several English and Urdu books which include *Rethinking Education in Pakistan: Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilities*; *Education, Inequalities, and Freedom: A Socio-political Critique*; *Language, Gender, and Power: Policies of Representation and Hegemony in South Asia*; *Education Policies in Pakistan: Politics, Projections, and Practices* and *Dream Don't Die* in English and books in Urdu include *Pothohar: Khitta-e-Dil-rubaa*, Toronto; *Dubai aur Manchester*; *Pakistan, Taleem aur Ikeesvin Sadi*; *Mausam e Khush Rung*; *Zair e Asman*; *Adhay Adhoray Khuab* and *Adh Pachadhay Sufnay*.

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