

## **Educational Opportunities in Pakistan – Access Makes the Difference**

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### **scholars singing**

“Educational Opportunities in Pakistan – Access Makes the Difference” is a co-production of Abdul Hafeez from Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation and Peter Koppen from Deutsche Welle, the German International Radio Station.

### **bell ringing and children run into government school**

Classes start at a state-run school in Terai Payan, just a few kilometres from Peshawar, the capital of the Northwest Frontier Province. The students rush inside and make themselves comfortable – on the floor. There are no benches or chairs to sit on.

### **English-lesson**

The teacher gives an English lesson, students from both class 4 and 5 repeat the sentences. Most of them are wearing shabby school uniforms, textbooks are shared by two and three. Ishtiaq Hamid is dissatisfied with the situation.

### **Hamid (Voice over)**

*“We the teachers are trying to improve the standard but the problem is the people who live in the village, the parents they don’t care about how their children are doing in school, they don’t even come here once in a year. So how are we going to improve if there is no feed-back ?”*

Surprisingly the teacher gives us his point of view in Pashtu, his mother-tongue. He apparently feels uneasy answering in English. His students don’t care.

### **Voxpop (Voice over)**

*“When I come to school, I feel very happy, and we learn our lessons. Whatever the teacher tells us, we try to apply it in our daily life.” – “ We feel very good when our teacher gives us a lesson, and we stay clean.” – “I like going to school in neat and clean uniform, because if I stay at home, my parents give me a bowl to collect rice from our neighbours. So it is better to be in school.”*

These children have the opportunity to go to school. Many don't. Half of the Pakistani population is illiterate. The main reasons: Lack of awareness and poverty. The consequence: A class-system of education, laments Syed Mazhar Ali Shah, Managing Director of the Frontier Education Foundation in Peshawar.

### **Ali Shah**

*“There are two classes, at one level those people living below poverty line who can't afford getting their children in good education institutions. The second class is that of moneyed people who can afford to send their children to big institutions. This dichotomy still remains in this country and we have to finish it off, we have to bring it to a par, so that every soul of this country, every child in this country should have the same opportunity of equal quality education. This problem exists right from the creation of this country, every government is trying to reduce this bridge between the two segments of society, but unfortunately, we haven't achieved satisfying results.”*

### **radio spot on education**

This radio spot is part of an education campaign currently run by the Pakistan government. “We want to read – Education for All. Let's go and make it possible” is the message spread nation-wide. Previous efforts to improve the educational indicators were without much success. On the United Nations Human Development Index which measures factors like poverty, life expectancy and education, Pakistan still ranks way behind other countries of the region.

### **street noise**

In the busy city of Lahore the rush hour never ends. 8 million residents have to face daily pollution. In the midst a few young guys struggling to make their living. Most of them never went to school.

### **Voxpop (Voice over)**

*“I am a shoe-polisher, I am 17 years old and my name is Gulzada. I never thought of education and I just grew older without going to school. My parents never did anything for my education.” – My name is Kashif, I'm a sanitary worker and I am 15 or 16 years old. Now there is no need for me to get educated anymore because I'm old enough.” – “I'm Idris, I went up to class 8 and now I'm 15 years old. I work in a juice-shop. We are 12 brothers and sisters, but only 3 of them go to school.”*

The provincial government of Punjab has installed a Literacy and Non-Formal Education Department in 2002 to improve the literacy rate. Abid Safeed is secretary of the department in Lahore and knows much is to do.

### **Safeed**

*“The literacy rate in Pakistan is very disappointing. One reason I may point out is that the population growth is one factor. Besides that is economic factors and the drop-out from the formal schools. And the drop-out rate is quite alarming, around 50% or so. Drop-out has various factors: Economic factors, the socio-economic prevailing our country, the societal attitudes and the most alarming thing is that the literacy rate among the females is very discouraging.”*

Especially in the remote areas schooling is a problem for girls. They are the first to stay at home.

### **Safeed**

*“The girls drop out because of the various socio-economic reasons. One is, they help their mothers at home, help their mothers bring up the children, help the mother in the household affairs, and secondly the conservatism prevailing in some of our far flung areas leads to such a thing that the girls, when they grow up, they should not be outside their houses, should not go to the schools or it is not safe for them to travel a longer distance – not-availability of schools for them around there. And thirdly, some of these girls even work on the field with their parents.”*

Hence Shabbir Shah, Chairman of the Viqarun Nisa Girls School in Rawalpindi, wants the society to focus on educating the females in Pakistan.

### **Shabbir Shah**

*“Unless you teach the mother, the rest of the family in our culture will remain illiterate. So it must start with the girls who are the future mothers and once you teach the mother you will find the family as the whole, all her siblings and so, the will become educated, or at least literate.”*

Poor facilities is another cause for low enrolment rates, says Muhammad Zameer, principal of a small government school near Rawalpindi.

### **Zameer (Voice over)**

*“I am the only teacher here for five classes. There is no electricity, no water, no furniture, the students have to sit on the floor. I have applied for further staff for this school to the ministry of education, but haven't received any reply at all.”*

The barriers for children having access to schools are multi-faceted. But an increasing number of concerned parents is not willing to wait for government help anymore. They are taking things into their hands to provide quality education for their children. Communities open free or low-cost schools in areas

where there are none or few. In Kot Radha Kishen, a less-developed community one hour's drive from Lahore, this was the birth of a citizen school.

### **Akhtar**

*“This trust has been formulated for the improvement and the development. So we thought that there is need of education for this area because many families began migrating from this small town to Lahore and the big cities. There was no quality standard education around here. So we thought that there should be a good institution that could cater the quality education at a minimum affordable price to the inhabitants of the area.”*

### **classroom**

Like Dr. Noor Ahmed Akhtar, the manager of the development trust, many parents decided to stay after the school was established. Coasters pick and drop students from surrounding villages within the range of 15 kilometres, scholarships are given to students from poor class families, the teachers are highly qualified. A father of two kids in Kot Radha Kishen is happy he stayed.

### **Father**

*“I was just planning to shift to Lahore for the studies of my kids when this school opened. I think, it is good for us, we have a nearby school of that standard, a standard that is delivered in Lahore. The other schools are not delivering that education that can change our generation. We have to give our generation a modern education, a progressive education to change our next generation. But the governmental schools and the small traditional private schools in our little towns, they are just delivering the formal education, just formalities that doesn't change our next generation.”*

So lack of adequate resources often leave parents with no opportunities but to rely on private schooling. In the past 20 years private institutions have mushroomed in Pakistan, offering foreign curriculum and English instead of Urdu as the medium of instruction. Their number has increased from about 3.300 in 1983 to over 36.000 in 2002. Rainhard Sauer from the German Agency for Technical Cooperation has the reasons for this growth..

### **Sauer**

*“The private school sector over the past years has developed deeply into the middle class and even the upper section of the lower classes. The current estimate is that approx. 25% of the overall primary school enrolment is in private schools and this shows that this caters for a growing middle class. The difference between the private schools and the government ones is that there is more discipline, the teacher is there, it is private management. Whereas at the government schools, there are a lot of problems of quality, the teachers may not*

*be in school punctually, they are posted in places where they are not resident, it's difficult for them to live there, and the small private school entity organises that better."*

One of the really big private educational institutions in Pakistan is Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore. It's an upper-class college, with English naturally being the medium of instruction. Maha Farooq, a 22 year old student, is doing her masters in mass communication. She thinks profound English knowledge is essential if one wants to play a role as a global player.

### **Farooq**

*"We should have pride in our national language, it's part of our identity, but see, Pakistan is a developing country. Since English is the basic standard in all the world, in order to compete with all the others, we need to learn that and compete in that. After that, once we reached that standard, of course we can emphasise on our own national language. But right now we have to get at equal terms with international standards."*

### **Lesson Virtual University**

Knowledge beyond boundaries is the idea of the Virtual University of Pakistan. As the name indicates, this institution delivers education with a modern approach: broadcast television and the internet are the platforms for information and education. "Welcome to our website. You are watching Lectures 1, Introduction to Computing." Any subject can be studied across the country as well as overseas, explains Dr. Naveed Malik, rector of the newly established university. All students need is the dedication to learn.

### **Malik**

*"One of the focus areas in our curriculum is to provide an enabling education so that students after graduation not necessarily run out seeking for jobs. Education should enable them to maybe set up an enterprise of their own. So we are teaching them entrepreneur skills, basically it is an enabling education so we hope that our graduates would become in general job-creators, not job-seekers."*

### **music**

The Pakistani education system has created a class system: At the heights are private boarding schools highly expensive and professional equipped feeding students to Western standard. Then elite English-medium institutions that prepare pupils for professional colleges and universities. More to the bottom is the Urdu-medium public system currently creating hordes of Bachelors and Masters who are fit for little but clerkship. Then young Pakistanis coming out of

religious seminaries or madressahs whose knowledge is mostly limited to non-secular education. And then for the poor, there is no education at all.

A path Pakistan should not move on, believes Professor Dr. Khalid Alavi from the International Islamic University in Islamabad.

### **Alavi**

*“There is an elite system in Pak, in which the educational institutions are catering for the class which is well to do. They have established a private school system. They are beyond the reach of the common man. The public system has comparatively deteriorated. So I believe the public system should be strengthened and if there is a private sector, it should not be decided by the system of wealth but on the basis of intellect and merit. In fact this elite system is dividing the nation into two groups – the ruling elite and the common man which is harmful for the solidarity of this country because we are creating permanent division in society. There is anger among the common man that their schools are day by day neglected.*”

Professor Muhammad Ayyaz, Principal of the Divisional Public School of Rawalpindi, has been in the teaching profession for 36 years. When he took over in 2001, he started restructuring the school, opening two fully equipped computer-labs for boys and girls, installing washrooms and air-conditioners, raising the salary of teachers and awarding scholar-ships to talented students. His institution is doing well, the school fees cover all expenses. But he never forgot that his roots lie in a far flung village where access to schools never was easy.

### **Ayyaz**

*“Those who can afford, let them go to public schools. But for the common people, let the government establish schools for them. It should be the responsibility of the government to provide education for each and every child. Those who can afford for other institutions, well, let them go. But let the government provide facilities for the common people.”*

Mainly in the rural areas, a drop in quality education has to do with low budgetary allocations, meaning teachers are paid low for their work. Thus the frustration rate is high in the teaching profession, says Muhammad Saeed Shahid from the Institute of Education and Research at the Punjab University in Lahore.

### **Shahid**

*“If we want to improve the teaching profession, we have to give more socio-economic status to teachers. It is a tragedy that people with a higher scores and better qualification don’t like to join the teaching profession – this is a world wide problem, not only in Pakistan – because the salaries of the teachers compared to other professions are low. If we want to improve the quality of*

*teachers here, and also teacher education, we have to give more socio-economic status to teachers.”*

Rubina Zaheer, vice-director of the private City-School chain, agrees. She knows that quality teaching is interlinked with the socio-economic satisfaction of teachers. So whoever wants good teachers has to pay for them – access to quality education in Pakistan is not a bargain.

**Zaheer**

*“If you are talking about the majority, then obviously it’s the opportunity that makes the difference, it’s the environment that makes the difference, it’s the learning support that’s provided to the child from school and back home that makes the difference.”*