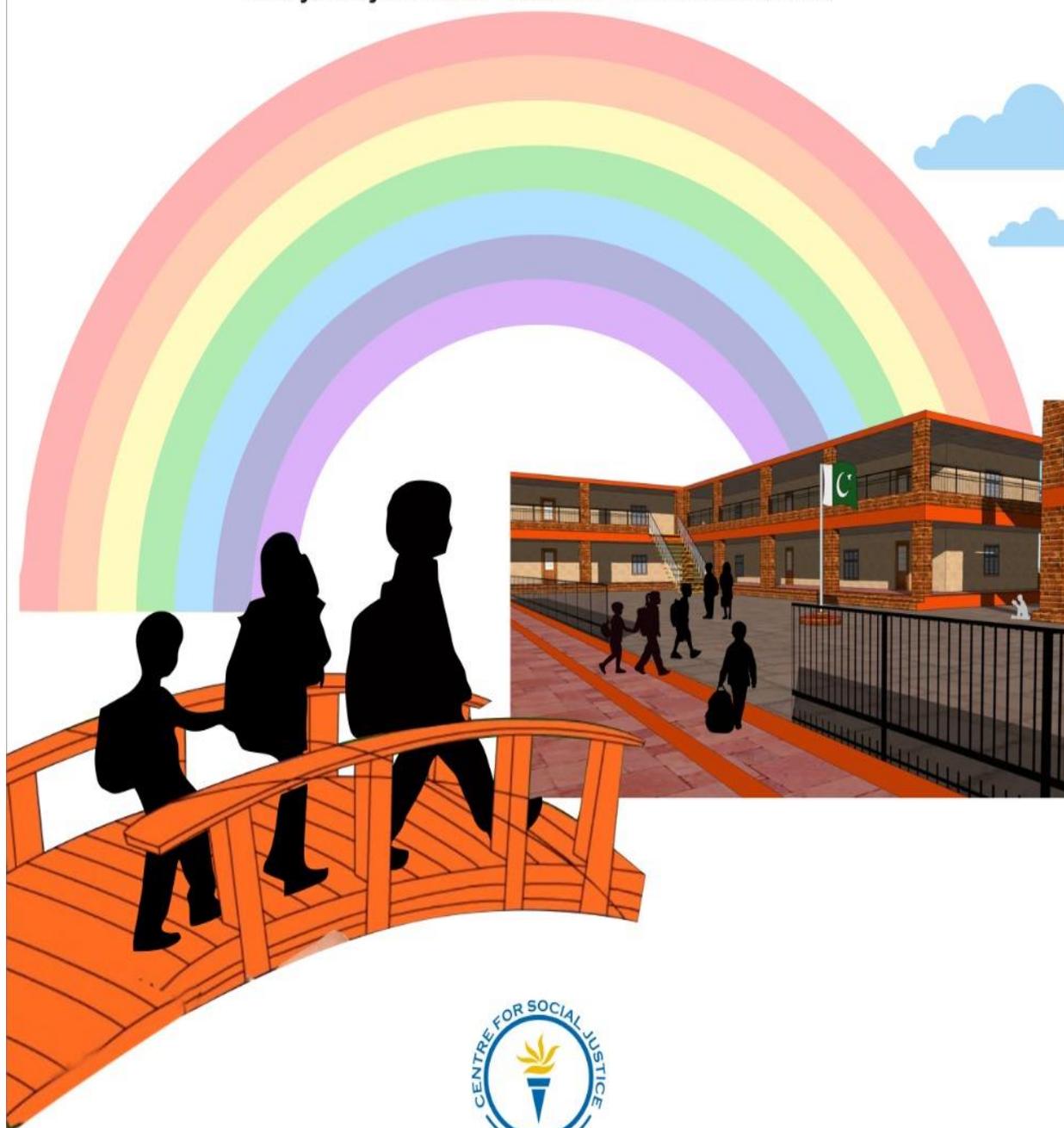


May we speak?

Policy Recommendations on Inclusive Education in Pakistan

Analysis by: LARAIB NIAZ AND TEHREEM FATIMA



Policy Recommendations on Inclusive Education in Pakistan

By Laraib Niaz and Tehreem Fatima

Executive Summary

This report provides policy recommendations to the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Pakistan to inform the upcoming National Education Policy 2022, with respect to making the policy ‘inclusive’. The report particularly focuses on issues around religious inclusion in the education system and actions that can make the system more inclusive for minority religious communities within the country. The report uses a rapid evidence review of existing literature on religious inclusion in Pakistani education policy as well as an evidence review of policy papers from around the world in making education policies more inclusive (for religious minorities, in terms of gender, and for children with disabilities). The rapid evidence review helps identify the issues with the current education system and identifies possible solutions that have worked in other contexts as viable options to be used for the Pakistani education sector.

Consolidated Recommendations

- **Teacher Training Programme:** Empower teachers to become agents of change through teacher training programme that better equips them to teach a diversified classroom and to value the diversity of all students. A five-year teacher training programme would prepare teachers for an inclusive learning environment by filling gaps in their knowledge about pedagogies and other aspects of inclusion and help them address issues such as instructional techniques, classroom management, learning assessment etc.
- **Teachers training to ensure diversity** in teaching and classrooms is required. The interreligious competence of teachers in Pakistan needs to be bolstered. They should also be trained for better inclusion and diversity in the classrooms. This should be enabled by both pre-service and in-service teacher training. Initial teacher education (ITE) programmes as well as continuous professional development (CPD) should be utilised to help teachers in developing their inter-community competence and teaching skills so that teachers have the required skills to interact with a diverse range of students (gender, religion, ethnicity).
- **Diversity should be encouraged** in the teaching workforce: currently there is a lack of diversity in the public education teaching staff and the education policy should encourage greater religious and gender diversity

in the workforce. Affirmative action can be utilised to sure entry and acceptance of teachers from minority backgrounds in the workforce.

- **Given the findings from the attainment gap study (CSJ)¹:** National and International Government and Non-Government Bodies, and Funding Agencies must recognise the the issue of educational differences between minority religion students and take measures to rectify them. The education of religious minority groups should be prioritised with the initiation of special programmes which focus on the rectification of this disadvantage. Provincial and federal governments must invest in minority religion run school infrastructure. Church-run schools across Punjab cater to multireligious populations and are safe havens for religious minority students getting an education. Government and international organisations should step in whenever there are Church-run schools on the verge of closing down.
- **Respect for others need to be taught.** From early childhood education, the focus should be on preventing misconceptions and providing opportunities for peaceful and tolerant interreligious experiences.
- **Include new and effective methods for creating inclusive classrooms** such as project-based learning, service learning, cooperative learning, and peer education. These methods have been proven useful across the world in promoting tolerance.
- **Introduce an alternative to Nazra** for students belonging to minority religious communities.
- **Data Collection and Dissemination:** Access to robust and disaggregated data will facilitate the development of policy and strategies that address the educational needs and experiences of religious minorities and children with disabilities to foster greater inclusion in the education sphere.
- **Shared Responsibility:** Collaboration between schools and all stakeholders furthers the agenda of inclusive education by adopting strategies, such as adoption of inclusive teaching methodologies and improving digital literacy, that fosters greater understanding, tolerance and inclusion in the classroom and outside. In the wake of the pandemic, it is even more important to adopt methodologies and strategies that take into account and address the learning disparities and outcomes among students.

¹ CSJ. Reinforced Disparity in Education: The Challenges before the Christian Schools in Punjab. Centre for social Justice.2021.

- **Increase gender parity** in education and introduce policies to increase enrolment and access to education of girls.
- **Enable citizenship education** to foster peace, harmony and tolerance and civic ideals in students.
- **Ensure increased access of children with disabilities** in public and private schools. Provide resources to schools (such as assistive devices) and teacher training.

Contents

Consolidated Recommendations.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Background and Statement of the Problem	1
Policy Recommendations.....	7
Teacher Training.....	7
The Creation of Inclusive Schools	9
Inclusion for Religious Minorities: A look at the Religious Education Curriculum.....	10
The Problem of Citizenship Education	11
Gender-Biased Illustrations	11
Children with Disabilities.....	12
Data Collection and Dissemination.....	12
Shared Responsibility	14
Conclusion	15

Introduction

Intolerance and discrimination have been defined by The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 1981², as *“Exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis”*.

In Pakistan, Article 22 of the Constitution asserts: *“No person attending any education institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own”*³. Yet, research on the educational process in Pakistan⁴ has uncovered a lack of separation between education and religion, particularly in education policies and curriculum. Chughtai (2015) in her in-depth analysis of Pakistani education policies reveals that *“while state sponsored curriculum material is used for the purpose of solidifying the relationship between religion and state, the content, the process, and the constantly shifting narrative of religious nationalism, selected from a multitude of narratives, are products of strategic choices that may well employ religion but are not religiously motivated (p.202)”*⁵.

This report provides policy recommendations to the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training to make the National Education Policy 2022 more inclusive (for religious minorities, gender and children with disabilities).

Background and Statement of the Problem

In both education policies and curriculum frameworks in Pakistan there is a focus on (i) the Islamic national identity, which deems imperative the inclusion of Islamic teachings in almost all subjects in the school curriculum and (ii) a constant need to reiterate the two-nation theory and justify the formation of Pakistan on religious grounds which serves to alienate minorities along religious lines. The consistent retelling of the narratives from the violent partition of India

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/religionorbelief.aspx>

³ https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf

⁴ Lall & Vickers, 2008; Nayyar & Salim, 2003; Nayyar, 2013; Rahman, 2011b; Rosser, 2004; Saigol, 2003.

⁵ Chughtai, Mariam. What Produces a History Textbook?. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education.2015.

and Pakistan helps to create biases against Hindus (who are currently a minority in the country).

A.H Nayyar in a report by CSJ⁶ published in 2020, while conducting a review of education policies for their inclusion of religious minorities concluded that *“it must, however, be acknowledged that some affirmative actions in favour of religious and ethnic minorities, like special seats in competitive environments, are indeed suggested in education policies. But the clear violation of constitutional rights, like those granted in Article 22, has gone unnoticed in nearly all the policies. It should, however, be emphasized that no government needs to wait for the next policy to correct the wrong. It is the duty of all the governments to stop any violation of constitutional rights whenever brought to their attention (p.32)”*.

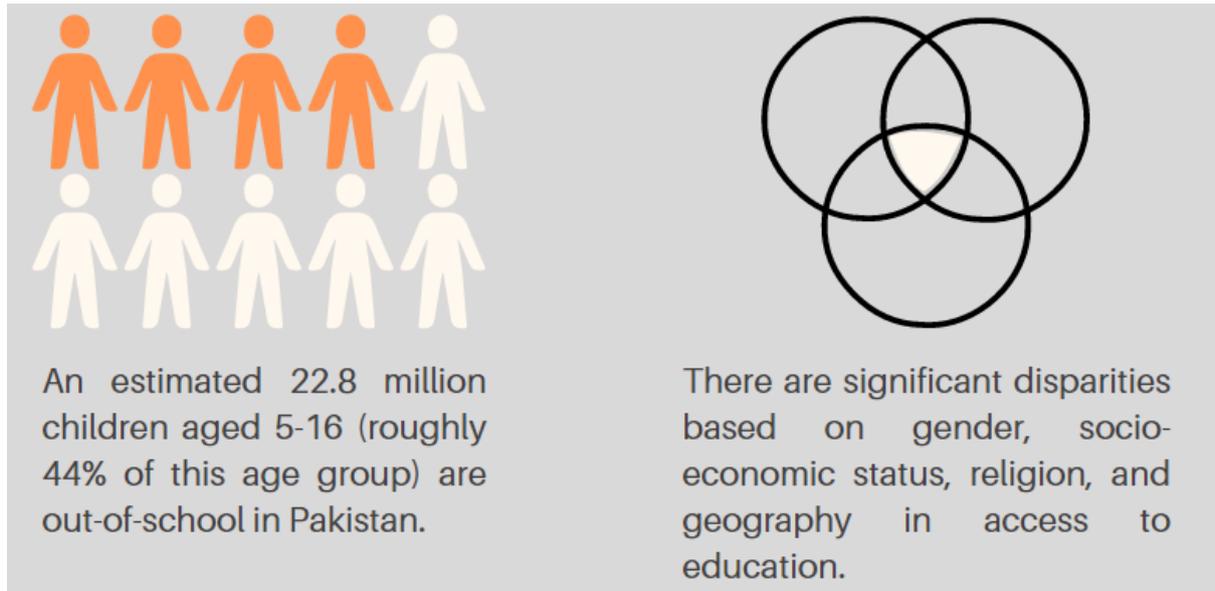
Nayyar in CSJ (2020) also laments how previous education policies have contained empty promises and elaborated on societal malaises without any defined guidelines on how to correct these issues with a lack of specific objectives. For instance, rote learning is highlighted as an important issue in the education system, yet no policy has highlighted how this issue may be resolved.

The federal government published the draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2018⁷ (mandated by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf Government), which states that Islamiyat should be taught as a compulsory core subject from Primary to Higher Secondary level extending up to graduation in all general and professional institutions. Ethics (Moral Education) in lieu of Islamiyat (Compulsory) is introduced for minorities as their constitutional right, but sadly with little preparation in teacher education, recruitment, pedagogy, and assessment system and market recognition. The draft policy also highlighted four issues of concern:

- (i) Access, especially out of school children (OOSC).
- (ii) Uniformity in education systems
- (iii) Quality of education, especially of teachers
- (iv) Skills training and higher education

⁶ CSJ. Quality Education vs Fanatic Literacy. An analysis of textbooks, curriculum and policies in Pakistan. Centre for Social Justice.

⁷ <http://www.mofept.gov.pk/SiteImage/Policy/National%20Eductaion%20Policy%20Framework%202018%20Final.pdf>

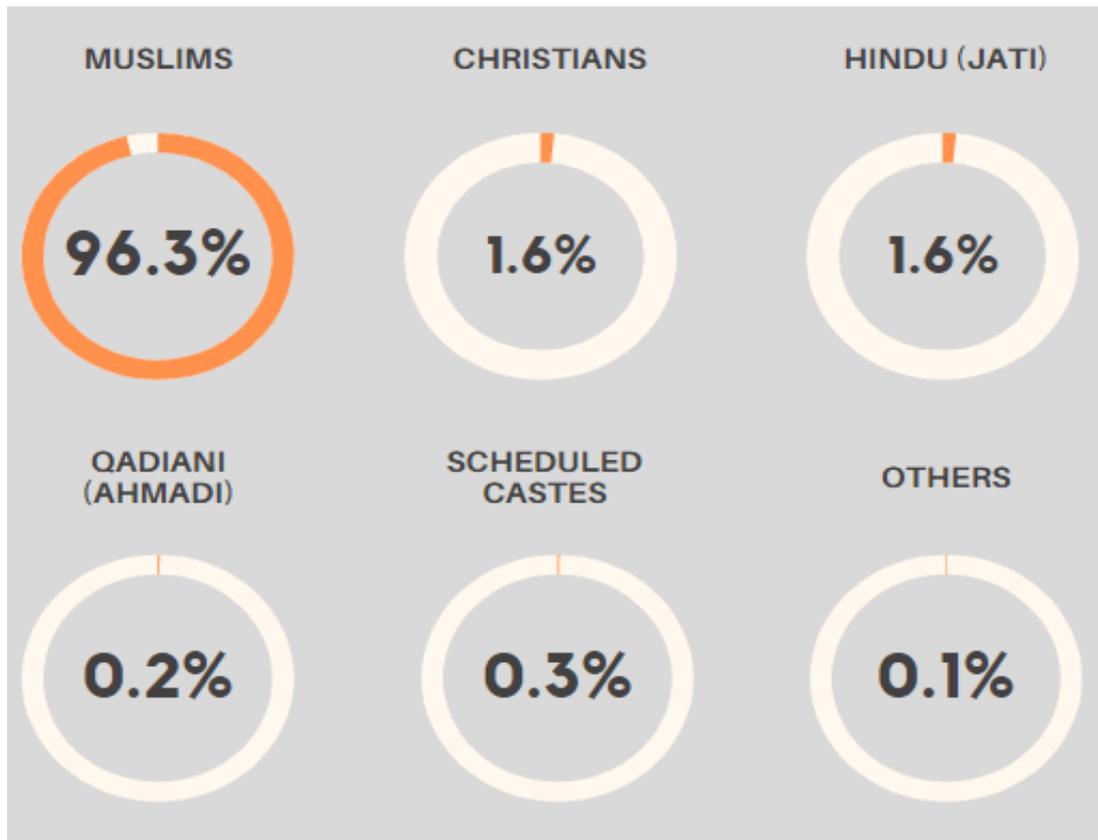


However, the problem of inclusion (particularly pertaining to religious minorities but also relevant for children with disabilities) failed to be addressed. The brief document albeit in a very concomitant and cursory way displayed concerns over the marginalised populations within the society, particularly girls and religious, ethnic minorities and expressed its resolve to take them under consideration while formulating policy action. Yet, no detailed steps have been outlined by the government in ensuring the rights of religious minorities and all other marginalised communities within Pakistan. Even though the single national curriculum focuses on the narrative of eliminating differences between the different systems of education (elite private education, low-cost private education, Islamic religious schools (madrassahs) and public schools), hardly any attention has been paid to ensuring lack of discrimination within these systems as perpetuated by the state and its policies.

At present, Islamiyat is a compulsory subject for Muslim students, from primary school to university levels in both public and private schools. The learning of Nazarah (Quranic text) was compulsory from class Five to Eight and since 2021 has become mandatory for classes 1 to 5 as well. The minority students are allowed to study Ethics instead of Islamiyat according to the National Education Policy 2009⁸ and with the advent of the single National Curriculum minority religion students are now provided the option of studying the subject of religious education.

⁸ http://www.mofept.gov.pk/SiteImage/Policy/NEP_2009.pdf

Figure 1: Population of Pakistan by Religion Demographic



Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2021

According to the Pakistan bureau of Statistics the percentage of Muslims in Pakistan is 96.3% with a minority religious community of Hindus, Christians, Qadianis, scheduled castes and others (which comprise of Buddhists, Baha'is, Sikhs, Jews and Jains). Yet the minority religious communities are hardly given any representation in the education system which predominantly cater to the majority populations.

The population of most minorities in Pakistan has been growing in numbers as is demonstrated from the table below. While the population of Pakistan has increased by 56.9% from 1998 to 2017, the population of Christians, Hindus, and Scheduled casts have increased by 20.4%, 41.4%, and 61.2% respectively for the same time period. The latest Census is expected to show an even higher rise in the population of minorities in the country. This establishes a clear need for prioritizing inclusive education to safeguard one of the basic tenants of the human rights of minorities in Pakistan.

Census (Population millions)	1981 in	1998	2017	Increase in Population since 1998

Total	84.25	132.35	207.68	Increased by 56.92%
Muslims	81.45	127.43	203.0	Increased by 37.22%
Christians	1.31	2.1	2.64	Increased by 20.45%
Hindus	1.28	2.11	3.6	Increased by 41.4%
Ahmadis	0.10	0.28	0.18	Decreased by 55.55%
Scheduled casts	No Data	0.33	0.85	Increased by 61.18%
Other religions	0.11	0.1	0.04	Decreased by 150%

Currently the education policy as well as the curricula and textbooks focus heavily on fostering Islamic education, yet there is hardly any attention paid to the rights of minorities. The Single National Curriculum (SNC) has included a curriculum for Religious Education, yet elaborate teacher training to actualise the curriculum is needed. Previously Ethics has been provided to non-Muslim students as an alternative to Islamiyat⁹ but research has shown how most minority students prefer taking Islamiyat for fear of discrimination and teaching of Ethics also suffers from lack of available teachers to teach and in many cases the lack of published textbooks¹⁰. There is also no alternative given for the subject of Nazarah. Religious minorities and policy experts have been recommending a review of this arrangement to avoid risks of exclusion and religious discrimination.¹¹ Additionally the research-based educational attainment gap study of CSJ 2021 reveals that there is a negative gap of -12% between minority Christian religion students and the majority Muslim religion students. There seems to be not just a difference in the infrastructure available to minority religion students but also significant disparities between the performance of minority religion students with those of Muslim students. The policy recommendations in this document are therefore provided to make the upcoming education policy more inclusive for students belonging to all religious denominations as well as

⁹ National Education Policy 2009, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, p. 33.

¹⁰ Dayan, Uzma & Khan, Mashal & Ali, Arshad. THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A MINORITY GROUP MEMBER: THE CASE OF FOUR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN. 53, 2017.

¹¹ <https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2018/-education-policy-fails-to-curb-religious-discrimination>.

making the policy more inclusive in terms of gender and children with disabilities.

Policy Recommendations

Teacher Training Programme

Inclusive education cannot be realised in the classrooms without the involvement and support of teachers: To buttress inclusive education, teachers need to be trained on the methodologies and strategies pertaining to teaching all students in the classroom. This will empower teachers to be agents of change that instil values of tolerance, acceptance, and critical thinking into their students so that they grow up to become part of a just and non-discriminatory society. Empowering teachers to become agents of change also removes barriers to learning as the teacher is able to foster a learning environment that focuses on learning opportunities and outcomes.

Empowering teachers to provide inclusive education requires educating teachers and designing professional learning opportunities for them that enhances their teaching abilities to implement innovative, integrated learning tools and techniques to the classroom. Teacher training programmes would qualify the teachers to adapt methods of inclusive education as per the needs of their classroom. To achieve this, the teacher training programme must incorporate a mixture of theory-based learning and practical experience to ultimately create a more child-centred and inclusive learning experience for the students. To further enhance teacher's learning and experience, peer-training and professional exchange of ideas and experiences should be encouraged through the establishment of learning communities, resource centres, mentoring and team teaching.

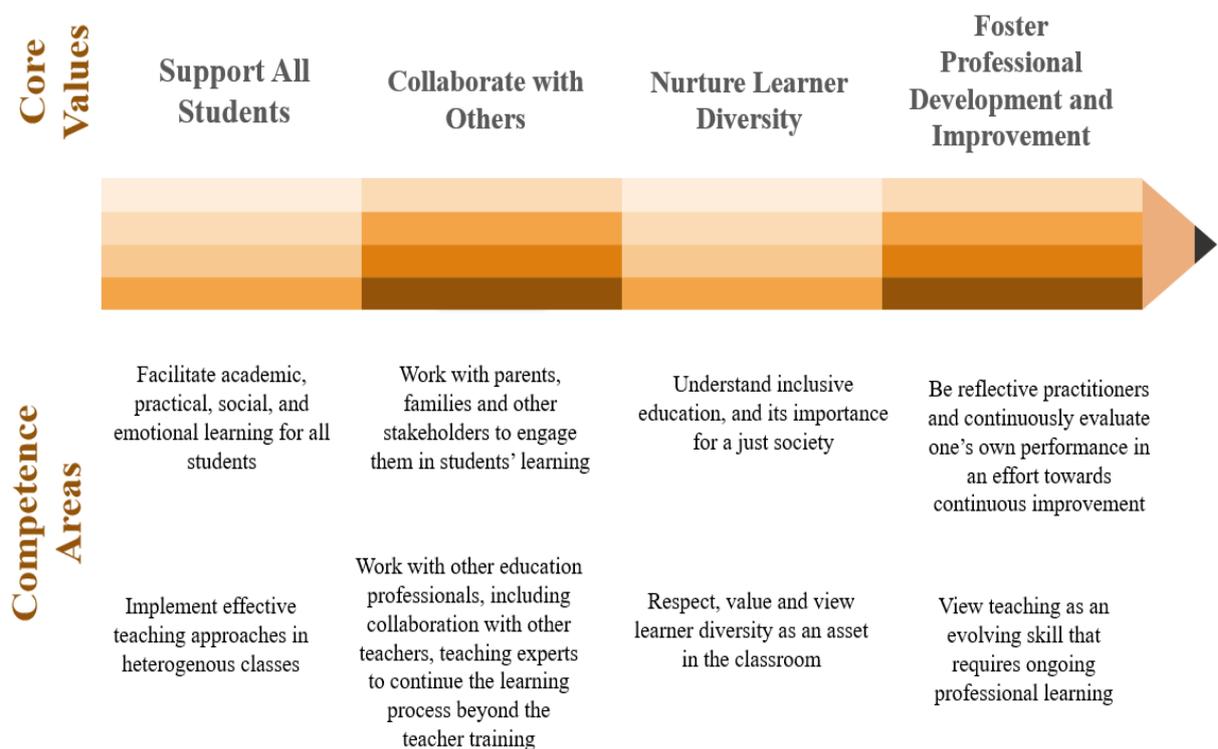
Policy makers recognise the importance of teacher training for inclusive education as is evident from the new Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020–2025. The plan emphasizes inclusive education and focuses on teacher training programmes on disability sensitization, disability-friendly infrastructure, and inclusive teaching methods. Despite the policy-level recognition given to teacher training, there is limited implementation of the plan. There are only 206 teacher training institutions (with enrolment of 722,728) most of which are located in Punjab (31%) and Sindh (31%), however there is no teacher training institution dedicated solely to inclusive education.¹² While the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) provides guidelines on teaching methodologies addressing the

¹² Government of Pakistan, Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. (2016). Pakistan education statistics 2014-15. Islamabad: AEPAM.

diverse learning needs of all students, including children with disabilities and Punjab University and the University of Education offer a bachelor’s programme on special education, there is a need to make inclusive education training a mandatory unit in all bachelor of education programmes. Furthermore, refresher courses and in-service training courses on inclusive education methodologies and pedagogies with a focus on practical implementation should also be made mandatory across the country.

Ideal teacher training programme would consist of high-quality training that prepares teachers for an inclusive learning environment by filling gaps in teachers’ knowledge about pedagogies and other aspects of inclusion. The core values imparted during teacher training would help in addressing issues ranging from instructional techniques, classroom management to learning assessment. It is recommended to develop a five-year pre-service and in-service teacher training programme which also focuses on subject-specific workshops such as teaching English, theoretical and practical study of computer science etc. as well as the practical aspects of inclusive education.¹³

Figure 2: Basic Framework of Inclusive Teaching



¹³ Abraham Akhter Murad. (2021). Reinforced Disparity in Education: The challenges before the Christian schools in Punjab, Pakistan. Centre for Social Justice.

Teacher training programmes, both pre-service and in-service, in Pakistan face a range of issues. Limited funding and resources are a major issue which compromise the quality of training being impacted at these training institutes as specialised training materials and supplies are needed for the training of inclusive education. Not only are the training institutions poorly equipped for inclusive education, schools also do not have proper learning material and resources required for inclusive education thus, teachers that do receive training in inclusive education methodologies cannot practice it in the classroom. The curriculum for inclusive education also needs to be broadened and the duration of training, especially in-service training, needs to be enhanced so that teachers are better equipped to deal with all students' learning abilities and capabilities. Other issues that need to be addressed to enhance teacher training for inclusive education are:

- i. Coordination and implementation issues between policies, education departments and training institutions,
- ii. Overemphasize on theory in both pre-service and in-service curriculum,
- iii. Lack of uniformity in implementation across the country, and
- iv. Lack of monitoring, research, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the inclusive education teacher training programmes/initiatives.¹⁴

The Creation of Inclusive Schools

Religion and morality are critical aspects of child's social and emotional development. It is important to therefore focus on morality in education but not in a way that alienates some students. Schools should enable an environment that promotes diversity. The education policy should stipulate how schools need to teach about beliefs and religion in a way that promotes tolerance, peace and coexistence. This will include recognising the importance of empathy as well as social-emotional learning, which can prove to be a powerful tool for fostering empathy and tolerance. The policy should stipulate the creation of sustainable education programmes with activities for students such as intervening to help others, applying conflict resolution skills. There needs to be an enabling environment for learning that is personalised but also collective in nature. Include new and effective methods for creating inclusive classrooms such as project-based learning, service learning, cooperative learning, and peer education. These methods have been proven useful across the world in promoting tolerance.

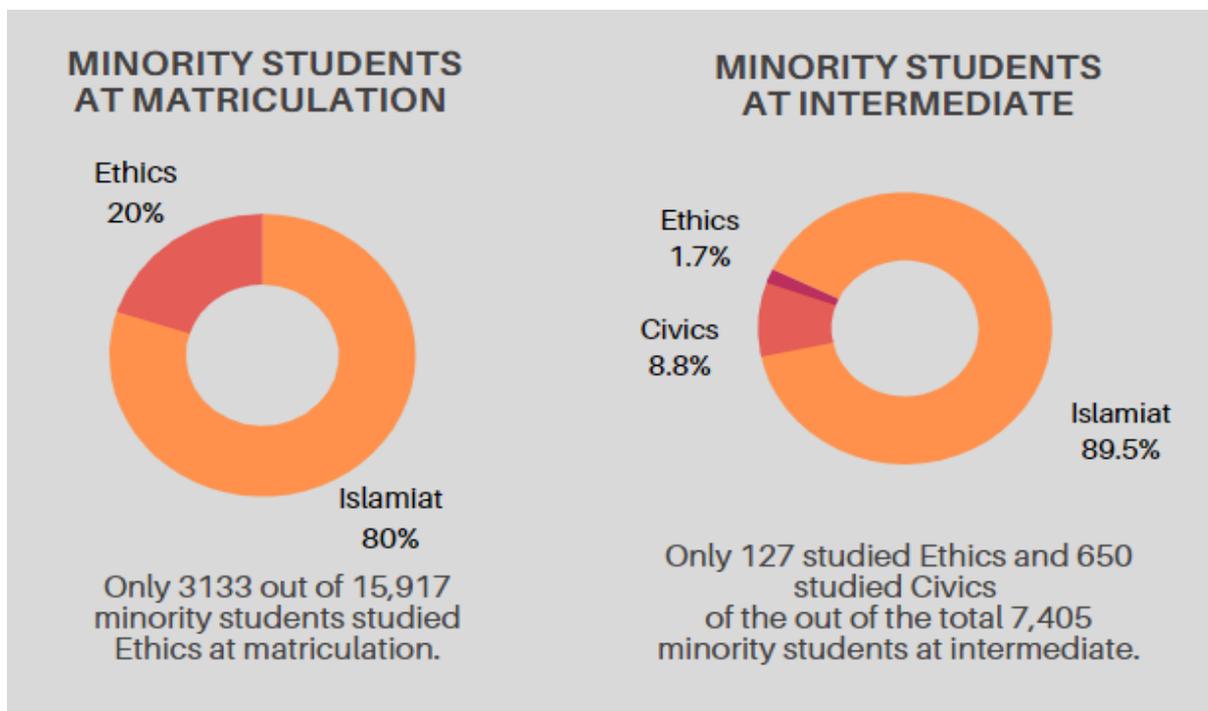
¹⁴ Muneeba Tahira, Ayesha Hassan, Amjad Malik, and M. Imran Yousuf. Teacher education in Pakistan: Issues and problems. (2020). ERIC - Education Resources Information Center.

Inclusion for Religious Minorities: A look at the Religious Education Curriculum

Under the Single National Curriculum, a new subject has been introduced for religious minorities in Pakistan: Religious Education. In comparison to Ethics, Religious Education focuses on several different religions (of whose followers live in the country) including Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Baha'i and Kalasha faith. This curriculum is comprehensive and is implemented for students in Grades 1 till 5.

A working paper by CSJ published in 2020 outlined the viability of Ethics as a subject for students belonging to religious minorities in the education system of Pakistan. The data provided by Education Boards and Examination Commission in Punjab, that was utilized for the study, showed that in 2018 Ethics was the least preferred option for the minority students. The detailed statistics are given below:

Figure 3: Minority Students Preferring to Study Islamiat at Matriculation and Intermediate Level



The case of ethics showed how even with the presence of a subject for minorities, the enrolment was low. A number of reasons can be possible for this, but the government should ensure policy postulations that encourage minority religion students to undertake the Religious Education subject. The viability of the subject was low, and it created more exclusion than inclusion in the education system.

The government should make sure there is more acceptance towards the subject religious education and devise policies to encourage minority students to opt for the course.

The Problem of Citizenship Education

A particular area within education where religious minorities face discrimination is in citizenship education. The public education system in Pakistan is not discriminatory in enrolment (where religious minorities are granted admission in all public educational institutions)- but rather is exclusionary when it comes to the content of its policies and texts, particularly in the construction of students' national identities and the cultivation of citizenship ideals. Citizenship education is generally fostered through subjects such as social studies, civics, history, geography, and languages and forms an essential component of school education in Pakistan. It shapes societal ideals and norms in the minds of the students and is an important component of their association with their country and in the development of their national and civic identities. The subjects of Languages (both Urdu and English), History and Social studies comprise 25-40 percent of the textbooks and heavily include religious materials which all the students regardless of their religious affiliation must study and pass. This is prevalent with the existence of a simultaneous articulation by the government on how there cannot be force or coercion for religious minorities.

The problem of citizenship education needs to be resolved. The education policy needs to lessen its focus on the creation of citizenship in a way that excludes religious minorities. The policy should outline how citizenship education is going to foster diversity, peace, co-existence and tolerance in the society and will be used to foster good civic ideals in the students.

Gender-Biased Illustrations

Depictions and illustrations in certain SNC-approved textbooks have generated significant criticism for the portrayal of women as wives of, mothers of and homemakers to their male counterparts. Previous research on textbooks and curriculum has also highlighted gender biased illustrations of minority religious women as being involved in sports in comparison to the stereotypical roles of Muslim wives and teachers. By creating demarcations between the population based on gender and religion, the education system can create disparities in the society. The education policy should therefore emphasise unity in diversity, peace, and co-existence.

Children with Disabilities

In Pakistan, one of the most profound barriers to inclusive education is the lack of access to education for children with disabilities despite increased policy focus by the government in recent times¹⁵. There are very few studies in Pakistan that have focused on access to education and enrolment of children with disabilities in schools. Malik, Raza, Rose and Singal¹⁶ have attempted to show to what extent children with disabilities are in school and learning (in rural Central Punjab). The results showed a preference for boys over girls for parents having children with disabilities and that children were being enrolled in mainstream schools (the proportion of children with disabilities that were out of school was larger) but their learning levels were low. Based on this research a number of recommendations can be given:

- Policy should ensure increased access of children with disabilities in public and private schools.
- Provide resources to existing schools (assistive devices etc) to enable children with disabilities to be integrated
- Provide teacher training to ensure integration in the classrooms.
- Ensure gender parity in education access and enrolment of children with disabilities.

Data Collection and Dissemination

Anecdotal evidence exists pertaining to the need for a more inclusive education policy in Pakistan, however there is limited availability of data to further strength this evidence. In the absence of robust disaggregated data, furthering the agenda of inclusive education would prove to be a challenge that may not be adequately addressed. Robust and timely data collection aids in constructing effective and responsive measures to further inclusive education as well as allow policy makers to measure the progress towards the goals set for achieving inclusive education.

Improving the quality of data is seminal for measuring access to education for religious minorities as well the provision of adequate learning resources for children with disabilities. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the

¹⁵ Singal, N. Education of children with Disabilities in India and Pakistan: Critical Analysis of developments in the Last 15 Years. Springer Science and Business Media. 2016.

¹⁶ Malik, R., Raza, F., Rose, P., & Singal, N. (2022). Are children with disabilities in school and learning? Evidence from a household survey in rural Punjab, Pakistan. *Compare*, 52(2), 211-231.

Rights of Person with Disabilities (UNCRPD)¹⁷, the government of Pakistan is bound by the convention to incorporate appropriate measures, at federal and provincial levels, that ensure inclusion of children with disabilities into the education system. Under the convention, the education policy should include specific points that not only facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities but also devises steps and provisions that ensure attendance, knowledge dissemination and graduation through the establishment of special and inclusive schools, training centres and partnerships with private schools and NGOs. Ensuring compliance with the UNCRPD necessitates data collection on metrics like the number of children with disabilities of school going age, their type of disability, enrolment figures, as well as data on the number of educational facilities that are currently available to children with disabilities including number of specialised teachers, learning material available etc.

Robustness of data is crucial for addressing the needs of religious minorities and children with disabilities as data sheds light on the needs and experiences of these subgroups. In the absence of disaggregated and robust data, reporting and discussion around improvements to the education policy would likely not adequately address the needs of religious minorities and children with disabilities.

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Figure 4: Framework for Leveraging Data for Inclusive Education



Shared Responsibility

The fundamentals of inclusive education extend beyond the boundaries of schools and classrooms as educating children serves as a conduit for societal development. Just like education is a shared responsibility between schools and all involved stakeholders, inclusive education is a shared responsibility as well. Partnerships and collaboration between schools, communities, and parents have a proven track record towards enhancing mutual trust, fostering greater community spirit, and achieving the goal of inclusive education at a community level.

Bringing inclusive education under the banner of shared responsibility relies on the notion that every learner has the right to access effective learning opportunities regardless of class, gender, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, migrant status, and ability. Inclusive education as a shared responsibility is the foundation of a just and equitable society as it can aid in addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparities and inequalities in access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes.¹⁸

One basic, yet crucial, tenant of inclusive education is teaching all children together in ways that respond to individual characteristics and needs. This

¹⁸ S. Alisauskiene, D. Kairiene (2016) Shared Responsibilities of Parents and Teachers in Inclusive Early Childhood Education, EDULEARN16 Proceedings, pp. 8601-8611.

encourages children to understand and accept difference in opinions, beliefs, and abilities from a young age and fosters critical thinking. In the long run, these practices and experiences change attitudes and create a more tolerant and non-discriminatory society.¹⁹ Another important conduit of inclusion education is access to digital learning materials. Improving digital access and helping all students develop digital literacy would aid in ending segregation within educational settings by ensuring inclusive teaching in the classroom and beyond. More broadly, through greater digital access and literacy, the education system must provide access to personalised educational and learning environment with appropriate support.²⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of shared responsibility for an inclusive education. With teachers adapting their teaching practices to the online sphere and parents supporting the mantle of education, the pandemic resulted in all stakeholders realising and adapting their responsibilities to facilitate education and learning. However, the impact on the learning outcomes of students was varied due to the pandemic. To ensure inclusive education, it is important to devise methodologies and strategies that consider and address the learning disparities and outcomes among students.

Conclusion

This report presents recommendations to the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training to ensure inclusivity in the National Education Policy 2022. The report recognises the need for greater religious inclusion in the policies, curriculum, and textbooks within the education system of Pakistan. It provides recommendations to the government to enhance teacher training (both pre- and in-service), and to encourage schools to increase diversity, peace, and tolerance in the classrooms. It also suggests for the policy to stipulate an alternative to Nazra for religious minority students in Pakistan. It further provides recommendations to make the education policy more inclusive in terms of gender and for children with disabilities.

¹⁹ UNESCO (2020). Towards inclusion in education: Status, trends and challenges. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374246>.

²⁰ Ydo, Y. Inclusive education: Global priority, collective responsibility. *Prospects* 49, 97–101 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09520-y>