Federal Education Policy 2026

Draft 25th May

Vision

Pakistan envisions an education system that fulfils every child's constitutional right to quality learning, equitable in reach, inclusive in spirit, and transformative in purpose. Grounded in the values of Islam and the principles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and in continuity with the national development aspirations that have guided the country's journey toward prosperity, this vision aspires to nurture a generation imbued with character, curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, civic responsibility, and the power to communicate, prepared to meet the challenges of a changing world with conscience and confidence. Through the shared resolve of the federal government, the federating units, and the whole of society, education shall become the enduring instrument by which Pakistan fulfils its promise to every child, and builds the human capital on which its future as a just and prosperous nation depends.

Mission

The Federal Education Policy 2026 commits the Government of Pakistan, through the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, and in principled cooperation with the federating units, to the sustained and accountable transformation of education in the Islamabad Capital Territory and to the stewardship of nationally coordinated standards across Pakistan. Building upon the human development commitments of Pakistan Vision 2025 and in fulfilment of Article 25-A of the Constitution, the Policy will ensure universal access for all children from ages five to sixteen, with deliberate priority given to girls, children with disabilities, out-of-school learners, and all groups historically excluded from educational opportunity. It will build robust foundations through early childhood care and education; reform curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogy to be child-centered, contextually grounded, and developmentally sound; invest in teacher quality and institutional governance; establish inclusive pathways for non-formal and madrassa education; integrate technology responsibly and equitably; and institutionalize research, data, and monitoring systems for evidence-based governance, together forming a generation that is educated, ethical, and fully prepared for the demands and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements

The Federal Education Policy (FEP) 2026 stands as a landmark expression of collective vision, national resolve, and shared responsibility to transform the educational landscape of Pakistan. Its journey from concept to completion reflects not the effort of a single institution, but the unified contribution of leaders, experts, practitioners, and partners who came together with a common purpose: to shape a future-ready, inclusive, and equitable education system for every child and learner.

At the forefront of this transformative initiative, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) is acknowledged for its unwavering leadership, strategic vision, and sustained commitment to reform. The guidance and patronage of the worthy Secretary, MoFE&PT, Dr. Nadeem Mahbub, provided continuous direction and institutional strength throughout the policy development process. Deep appreciation is extended to the Additional Secretary, Mr. Hassan Saqlain, Senior Joint Secretary, Syed Junaid Akhlaq, and Dr. Shoaiba Mansoor, Deputy Educational Advisor, for their steadfast support, coordination, and facilitation in ensuring seamless policy development and inter-institutional alignment.

Col. Jamal Saeed Malik, PD HRD&OE, Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), is acknowledged with deep appreciation for his strategic engagement, continuous feedback, and high-level coordination support. His valuable contribution in aligning education reforms with national priorities particularly in human capital development, digital transformation, technical and vocational education, and workforce readiness—has been instrumental in strengthening the forward-looking and transformative dimension of this policy.

The Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), through its Policy Research Wing (PRW), in the leadership of Dr. Zaigham Qadeer, and Ex DG Dr. Shahid Soroya and their team (Ms Sohail Ajmal, Ms. Samana Ali Bukhari, Mr. Haider Ali, Ms. Misbah Azhar & Mr. Adeel Ishaq) served as the intellectual and technical backbone of this national undertaking. It is here that research was translated into direction, evidence into strategy, and ideas into structured policy action. Special recognition is extended to Dr. Ehtisham Anwar and the DARE-RC team, whose dedicated writing, analytical depth, and policy insight significantly shaped the core architecture and substance of the framework. Their contribution reflects academic rigor combined with a deep commitment to educational transformation.

With equal respect, the leadership and strategic oversight provided by Major General (Retired) Dr. Ghulam Qamar, DGRE, are acknowledged for steering the process with discipline, clarity, and institutional strength. The invaluable contribution of Dr. Tahir from the National Curriculum Council (NCC Wing) is sincerely appreciated for his technical guidance, curriculum expertise, and constructive inputs, which strengthened the academic coherence of the framework.

Special appreciation is extended to Mr. Imtiaz Ali Qureshi (PEIRA), whose regulatory insight and thoughtful engagement contributed meaningfully to strengthening the governance and private education dimensions of the policy. Deep gratitude is also conveyed to Ms. Riffat

Jabeen Director Academics Federal Directorate of Education and her team, led by Ms. Gul-e-Zahra, for their tireless coordination, field engagement, logistical facilitation, and consistent support throughout consultations, workshops, and stakeholder engagements.

This policy is equally a tribute to the countless educators who form the backbone of the education system. Teachers, headteachers, and education managers across the country are acknowledged for sharing lived experiences, classroom realities, and ground-level insights that ensured the policy remains practical, relevant, and responsive. Their voices helped bridge the gap between policy formulation and classroom practice.

Sincere gratitude is also extended to development partners and international organizations whose technical expertise, global perspectives, and sustained collaboration significantly enriched the policy discourse and design. These include UNESCO, UNICEF (Mr. Ehsan), World Bank (Ms. Maliha), JICA (Mr. Abid Gill), the Malala Fund, ASPIRE, Tabadlab, ISAPS (Mr. Ahmad Ali), Aga Khan University (Mr. Sajid Ali), and Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (Ms. Baela Raza Jameel). Their collective contributions strengthened evidence-based decision-making, fostered innovation, promoted inclusivity, and ensured alignment with global education standards and best practices.

Appreciation is also extended to all federal and provincial departments, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, research organizations, civil society actors, and technical experts whose participation through consultations, FGDs, KIIs, workshops, and review sessions ensured that this policy is deeply rooted in collective intelligence and shared national experience.

Ultimately, the Federal Education Policy (FEP) 2026 is more than a document it is a national promise. A promise to every child who seeks opportunity, every teacher who shapes minds, and every institution striving for excellence. It represents a shared journey toward an education system that is modern, inclusive, innovative, and resilient.

This achievement belongs to all those who contributed directly or indirectly with vision, expertise, dedication, and belief in the transformative power of education to shape lives and destinies.

List of Abbreviations

Organization / Contributor	Full Form / Description
AJK	Azad Jammu & Kashmir
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AKU	Aga Khan University
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
ASPIRE	ASPIRE Pakistan
CDA	Capital Development Authority
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DRE	Directorate of Religious Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FBISE	Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education
FCE	Federal College of Education
FDE	Federal Directorate of Education
FEP	Federal Education Policy
FPSC	Federal Public Service Commission
GB	Gilgit-Baltistan
HEC	Higher Education Commission
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBCC	Inter Board Committee of Chairmen
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IPEMC	Inter-Provincial Education Ministers' Conference
ISAPs	Institutional Strategic Advisory Partners
ITA	Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LANA / LaNA	Literacy and Numeracy Assessment
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MoFE&PT	Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training
NBF	National Book Foundation
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCHD	National Commission for Human Development
NCP	National Curriculum of Pakistan
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NAT	National Achievement Test

Organization / Contributor	Full Form / Description
NAVTTC	National Vocational and Technical Training Commission
NEF	National Education Foundation
NEP	National Education Policy
NEPDF	National Education Policy Development Framework
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NFEMIS	Non-Formal Education Management Information System
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
PEIRA	Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority
PIE	Pakistan Institute of Education
SIFC	Special Investment Facilitation Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

1 INTRODUCTION 2

2 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES 4

2.1 PRINCIPLES 4
2.2 OBJECTIVE 4

3 ISLAMABAD CAPITAL TERRITORY: CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT 7

3.1 STATUS OF ICT 7
3.2 ICT: AREA AND HISTORY 7
3.3 THE CHALLENGE OF SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS 8
3.4 LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY 9
3.5 CONSEQUENCES FOR EDUCATION 9
3.6 OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION POLICY FOR ICT 10
3.7 THE 6 CS OBJECTIVE FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT 11

4 STATE OF EDUCATION IN ICT 12

4.1 LITERACY RATES 12
4.2 ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION 12
4.2.1 OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN 12
4.2.2 GROSS AND NET ENROLMENT RATES 13
4.2.3 OVERAGE CHILDREN 13
4.2.4 ENROLMENT PATTERN 13
4.3 QUALITY OF EDUCATION 16
4.4 CONCLUSION 18

5 ACCESS 1: PARTICIPATION OF ALL 19

5.1 OBJECTIVES 19
5.2 STRATEGIES 19
5.2.1 SCHOOL PROVISION 19
5.2.2 STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL PROVISION ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.2.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 20
5.3 STRUCTURING A ROBUST NFE SYSTEM 22
5.3.1 STRATEGIES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.3.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 23
5.4 THE INVISIBLE CHILDREN 24
5.4.1 THE BREAD WINNERS 24
5.4.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATION 24
5.4.3 THE TRANSGENDERS 24
5.4.4 RECOMMENDATION 25
5.4.5 THE INCARCERATED 25
5.4.6 RECOMMENDATION 25

5.5 TIMELY ENROLMENT AND ECCE ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.5.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
5.6 INCENTIVES FOR DEMAND SIDE ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
5.6.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**

6 ACCESS 2: INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION 26

6.1 UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION 26
6.2 SITUATION IN ICT 26
6.3 THE CHALLENGES 27
6.4 OBJECTIVES 28
6.5 STRATEGIES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.6 DATA AND INFORMATION 29
6.6.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 29
6.7 RESOURCE NEEDS AND PROVISION ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.8 OBJECTIVES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.9 STRATEGIES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.9.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATION 30
6.10 STANDARDS AND PLAN FOR INCLUSION AND MAINSTREAMING 30
6.11 OBJECTIVE ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.12 STRATEGIES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
6.12.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 30

7 QUALITY OF LEARNING: CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS 33

7.1 STRATEGIES ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
7.2 CURRICULUM 33
7.3 OBJECTIVE 34
7.4 STRATEGIES 35
7.5 REVIEW THE CURRENT CURRICULUM 35
7.5.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 36
7.6 INSTITUTIONALISE AND STRENGTHEN THE REVIEW PROCESS 37
7.6.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 37
7.6.2 EMERGING CONCEPTS IN THE CURRICULA 39
7.6.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 39
7.7 CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
7.7.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS **ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.**
7.8 TEXTBOOKS 40
7.9 OBJECTIVES 40
7.10 STRATEGIES 41
7.11 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 41
7.12 INCLUSION AS A THEME 42
7.12.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 42

8 QUALITY OF EDUCATION: TEACHERS AND TEACHING QUALITY 44

8.1 TEACHERS IN FDE 44
8.2 OBJECTIVE 45
8.3 STRATEGIES 45
8.4 SUPPORT TO PDF 45
8.4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 45
8.5 TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS 46
8.5.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 47
8.6 TEACHER QUALITY IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS 47
8.7 OBJECTIVE 47
8.8 STRATEGIES 48
8.9 IMPROVING CPD IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS 48
8.9.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 48
8.10 TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING 49
8.10.1 STRATEGY ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
8.10.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 50

9 ASSESSMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS 53

9.1 OBJECTIVE(S) 53
9.2 STRATEGIES 54
9.2.1 STRUCTURED AND CAPACITATED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM 54
9.2.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 54
9.3 ENHANCE QUALITY OF THE FBISE EXAMINATIONS 56
9.3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 56
9.4 USE OF ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS INFORMATION 58
9.5 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 58

10 CHILD WELFARE, HEALTH AND NUTRITION 60

10.1 OBJECTIVES 60
10.2 STRATEGIES: 60
10.3 PRE- SCHOOL HEALTH CARE AND STUNTING PREVENTION 61
10.3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 61
10.4 SCHOOL READINESS 62
10.5 STUDENT NUTRITION 62
10.5.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 63
10.6 PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND SPORTS 63
10.6.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 63
10.7 CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES 64
10.7.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 65
10.8 PROVISION OF MISSING FACILITIES 65
10.8.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 66
10.9 CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT 67
10.9.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 67

11 POST PRIMARY CHALLENGES 68

11.1 OBJECTIVE 68
11.2 STRATEGIES 68
11.3 REMEDIAL LEARNING OPTIONS 68
11.3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 68
11.4 PROVISION OF COUNSELLING SERVICES 69
11.4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 70

12 ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND PROVISIONS FOR RELIGIOUS MINORITIES 71

12.1 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL SYSTEM 71
12.2 IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE 72
12.3 CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS 73
12.4 OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 73
12.5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 74
12.6 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 75
12.7 GRADE-WISE PROGRESSION 75
12.7.1 COMPULSORY STATUS AND TIME ALLOCATION 75
12.8 TEACHER PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 75
12.8.1 QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS 76
12.9 PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES 76
12.10 TEXTBOOKS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 76
12.10.1 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES 76
12.11 FAITH-SPECIFIC AUTHENTICITY 76
12.11.1 TEACHER GUIDES AND SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS 77

13 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT 78

13.1 OBJECTIVES 79
13.2 STRATEGIES 79
13.3 COOPERATION AND SYNERGIES WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR 79
13.3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 79
13.4 HEAD TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 80
13.4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 81
13.5 INFORMED DECISION MAKING 81
13.5.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 82
13.6 FINANCE AND BUDGET 82
13.6.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 82

14 NATIONAL AND INTER-PROVINCIAL COORDINATION 85

14.1 COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION 85
14.2 OBJECTIVE 85
14.3 STRATEGY 86

14.4 INSTITUTIONALISATION OF IPEMC 86
14.4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 86

15 INTER BOARDS COORDINATION COMMISSION 88

15.1.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 88

16 MINIMUM NATIONAL STANDARDS AND PROCESSES FOR CURRICULUM AND LEARNING MATERIAL 90

16.1 OBJECTIVE 90
16.2 STRATEGIES 90
16.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 90

17 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTING OF DATA 92

17.1 OBJECTIVE 93
17.2 STRATEGIES 93
17.3 STRENGTHEN NATIONAL DATA STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS 94
17.3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
17.4 STRENGTHEN REPORTING OF DATA ON SDG 4 ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
17.4.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

18 MADRASSA EDUCATION 94

18.1 OBJECTIVE 96
18.2 STRATEGIES 96
18.2.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 1

19 NATIONAL LANGUAGES RESEARCH 2

19.1 WHY THE NEED FOR RESEARCH? 2
19.2 OBJECTIVE 3
19.3 STRATEGY 3
19.4 SET UP A NATIONAL LANGUAGES AUTHORITY 3
19.5 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 4

20 NATIONAL RESPONSE TO AI AND EDUCATION 5

20.1 HISTORY AND CONTEXT 5
20.2 THE DIGITAL AND AI DIVIDE 6
20.3 WHAT CAN AI ACHIEVE? 6
20.4 THE CURRENT USE 7
20.5 MOVING FORWARD 8

20.6 OBJECTIVES 8
20.7 STRATEGIES 8
20.8 THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION 9
20.8.1 OBJECTIVE 9
20.8.2 STRATEGIES 10

22 HIGHER EDUCATION 11

22.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 12

23 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY 13

23.1 SECRETARIATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY 13
23.2 OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE 13
23.3 IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE 13

List of Abbreviations

To be added

Messages and Acknowledgements

To be added

1 Introduction

The Federal Education Policy (FEP) 2026 has been prepared as a follow-up to the National Education Policy Framework 2024. The Framework was the first step toward restructuring education policy responses in the country, given that nearly 15 years had elapsed since the last National Education Policy (NEP) was approved in 2009. During this period, the education system in Pakistan has undergone a learning curve in all three main areas: quality of learning, access and participation, and governance. New areas have also emerged, such as the need to respond to climate stress and integrate technology.

FEP 2026 has been prepared within the revised mandate of the federal government in education, following the 18th Constitutional Amendment and subsequent efforts for national coordination on education. The Policy is therefore divided into two parts.

The first part provides recommendations for improving education service delivery in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The second part presents recommendations for a "national response," covering areas where federal-provincial cooperation is required and areas where the federal government, on its own initiative, needs to contribute to education development. The latter includes strengthening research on languages and the higher education stream, which remains a domain of the federal government. Managed by the autonomous Higher Education Commission (HEC), standards for higher and technical education remain part of the Federal Legislative List, Part 2.

The federal-provincial cooperation component has been included within the limits prescribed by the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, made in 2010, and the consequent evolution of federal-provincial relations over the last 16 years. During this period, all federating units recognized that nationally agreed standards, targets, and procedures are required in some domains. Through agreement between the provinces and the federal government, documents such as the Minimum National Standards on Quality Education (MNSQE) 2017, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2017, the National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP) 2022–23, and the National Education Policy Development Framework (NEPDF) 2024 were developed. FEP 2026 builds on this evolution under the principle that federal-interprovincial cooperation is necessary for national stewardship of key decisions in education. International reporting of data has continued to remain a domain of the federal government throughout this period, which by default also provides it with the mandate for collating national data.

The Policy, therefore, is not only relevant to ICT but also covers national cooperation on education. Some of the recommendations in the areas of standards, curriculum, and textbooks can be used to develop a national dialogue on these subjects.

In the specific section on education service delivery in ICT, the Policy covers the areas of quality of learning, access to education, governance and management, inclusion and equity, and Islamic education and religious education for minorities.

National issues covered include federal-interprovincial cooperation, international and national reporting of data, national education standards and curriculum framework, madrassa education, technology integration (as a national area of concern), and research on national languages to facilitate improved results in literacy and quality of learning.

An implementation framework has also been included. The framework not only provides an oversight and monitoring structure but also requires the development of time-bound plans with costing to ensure that the recommendations are prioritized and operationalized in a structured manner.

2 Scope and Objectives

The Policy, in line with the settled role of the Federal government in education, covers areas where its jurisdiction is legally exclusive and others where the mandate remains with it as a default and thirdly the role of inter-provincial coordination in key areas that has gained space among provinces as a recognition of the need.
This policy is therefore divided into:

i. Education service delivery in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) covering quality, access, governance, inclusion, Islamic education and technology integration.
ii. International coordination in matters of education, including reporting of data against international markers like Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
iii. National equivalence standards and processes.
iv. Federal-interprovincial coordination.
v. Madrassa education.
vi. The challenges of technology integration.
vii. National initiatives on research, especially, on a school language policy.

2.1 Principles

The Policy's analysis and recommendations have been based on principles recommended by education research and learning from experiences of the past. These include:

i. A learner centered approach..
ii. A recognition that the early years of the child are the most critical for stronger schooling outcomes and long term national development.
iii. A balance between treatment of education from pre-primary to higher secondary as a continuum and the need for exclusive focus, as per need, of each section.
iv. Decentralisation and human resource capacity development as the key to effective governance.
v. Inclusion of technology and emerging areas are recognized as necessary for future needs but should be included with due caution in view of emerging research on the right approaches to add learning of digital technology and learning through digital mediums.
vi. Recognition of diversity in contexts as the key to effective education, policy development, planning and implementations.
vii. Importance of federal-interprovincial cooperation as necessary to standardization of education across the country.

2.2 Objective

The objectives of the Federal Education Policy are as follows:

1. Improve all education outcomes in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) with the objective of achievement of quality education for all children.
2. Provide value based education to all children as enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, ensuring provision of Islamic education to Muslim children and relevant religious education to children from other faiths.
3. Provide an avenue for review of the higher education policy in Pakistan.

4. Rationalise and strengthen national coordination on school education.
5. Develop support structures for mother tongue-based multilingual education through strengthening of research.

Section I: Education in Islamabad Capital Territory

Education service delivery in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) is the responsibility of the Federal Government. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) perform this function with the help of its wings and attached departments. This section covers all components of education service delivery – access, quality, equity, and governance. The policy recommendations recognise the realities of demographics of ICT and the growing role of the private sector. Wherever relevant, these are included in policy recommendations.

3 Islamabad Capital Territory: Context and Environment

The educational structure envisioned in the original design of the new capital has become misaligned with the current realities of the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). This reflects a broader issue in the city's growth and development. Designed to expand in a geometrically perfect pattern, Islamabad has lost its intended shape under unforeseen population pressures driven by external factors. This imbalance affects all services within the ICT- most notably, education.

3.1 Status of ICT

The ICT (Islamabad Capital Territory) consists of four rural areas and one urban area. All services and administration within the Territory are managed by the federal government, which holds the same mandate, in ICT, as provincial governments in their respective regions. The delivery of education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Development and Training (MoFEPT) and its attached departments.

3.2 ICT: Area and History

Location of Islamabad as the new capital of Pakistan was finalised in 1958. Capital Development Authority (CDA) was formed in 1960 to oversee its development. The master plan for the new city envisioned a grid based design with clear demarcation of residential sectors, areas designated for educational institutions, commercial zones and rural areas. In addition, separate areas were marked for residence of diplomatic missions and community and government offices. The rural zone was also marked out in the master plan.[1] The capital was shifted from Karachi to Islamabad in 1963.

The master plan divides the urban areas of the city into sectors. Each sector has four sub-sectors with standardised street grids and numbers which make it easy to navigate. In the initial years of the city's development the original design was the exclusive guide for expansion. While sectors developed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) never disturbed the fidelity of the plan, other informal construction began to appear on ICT's landscape in, both, the urban and rural areas. The pristine symmetry of city's development that blended into the natural greenery of its environemnt was, and continues to be, marred by these constructions. The primary cause of this growth in construction, beyond the planned development by CDA, has been the massive unanticipated population growth witnessed by Islamabad in the last 30 years. This has disrupted the design for service delivery – including education.

The location of Islamabad as the new capital of Pakistan was finalized in 1958. The Capital Development Authority (CDA) was formed in 1960 to oversee its development. The master plan for the new city envisioned a grid-based design with a clear demarcation of residential sectors, areas designated for educational institutions, commercial zones, and rural areas. In addition, separate areas were marked for diplomatic missions, community facilities, and government offices. The rural zone was also clearly outlined in the master plan. The capital was shifted from Karachi to Islamabad in 1963.

The master plan divides the urban areas of the city into sectors. Each sector contains four sub-sectors with standardized street grids and numbers, making navigation easy. In the early years

[1] https://www.cda.gov.pk/public/aboutIslamabad visited on 10th August 2025.

of the city's development, the original design served as the exclusive guide for expansion. While sectors developed by the CDA never compromised the fidelity of the plan, other informal constructions began to appear on the landscape of the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), in both urban and rural areas. The pristine symmetry of the city's development, which once blended seamlessly into the natural greenery of its environment, was - and continues to be - marred by these constructions. The primary cause of this unplanned growth, beyond the CDA's controlled development, has been the massive and unanticipated population growth Islamabad has experienced over the last 30 years. This has disrupted the design for service delivery, including education.

3.3 The Challenge of Shifting Demographics

Population of Islamabad grew at 4.71% between 1998-2017 and 2.81% between 2017-2022. In the latter period growth in rural population has been 3.59%. The main cause of population expansion in the period after 1998 has been unrest in other parts of the country, especially, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The proximity of the province to Islamabad makes it a natural destination for economic and security induced migration. Many of the other internal migrants are from Balochistan and Karachi. In addition, there is a trickle from districts that abut Islamabad due to the relatively better education, health and employment opportunities in the city.

Large sections of these later migrant populations have settled in the rural areas that have morphed into large towns with construction and development patterns not dissimilar to the unplanned growth of most cities and towns in Pakistan. Slums and low income housing settlements have also sprouted across the planned urban portions controlled directly by the Capital Development Authority (CDA). Most of these have been built in less conspicuous places near traditional water ways (now functioning as drainage channels for waste) surrounded by trees. They continue to grow behind these natural shields. The third form of unplanned construction has been on land already acquired by the Capital Development Authority (CDA). These low income informal (illegal) housings along with the shops that serve their needs have also grown in the last two decades in certain parts of Islamabad. The most prominent is "Mehrabadi" that encroaches land designated for development of sectors F-12 and G-12. The government has recently started vacation and clearing process against these constructions but the massive populations in rural Islamabad continue to grow.

The population of Islamabad grew at a rate of 4.71% between 1998 and 2017, and at 2.81% between 2017 and 2022. In the latter period, the rural population grew by 3.59%. The primary driver of population growth after 1998 has been unrest in other parts of the country, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The province's proximity to Islamabad makes it a natural destination for both economic and security-induced migration. Many other internal migrants come from Balochistan and Karachi. Additionally, a steady trickle of migrants arrives from districts surrounding Islamabad, drawn by the city's relatively better education, health, and employment opportunities. Another source has been natural growth has the families of first settlers, mostly government officials, have stayed on and increased in numbers.

Large portions of these more recent migrants have settled in rural areas, which have transformed into large towns. Their construction and development patterns closely resemble the unplanned growth seen in most cities and towns across Pakistan. Slums and low-income housing settlements have also emerged in the planned urban areas directly controlled by the Capital Development Authority (CDA). Most of these settlements have been built in inconspicuous locations near traditional waterways—now functioning as drainage channels for waste—and are often shielded by surrounding trees. They continue to grow behind these

natural barriers. A third form of unplanned construction has taken place on land already acquired by the CDA. These low-income, informal (illegal) housing units, along with the shops that serve their residents, have also proliferated in certain parts of Islamabad over the last two decades. The most prominent example is "Mehrabadi," which encroaches on land designated for the development of sectors F-12 and G-12. While the government has recently begun the process of vacating and clearing these constructions, the massive populations in rural Islamabad continue to grow.

3.4 Linguistic Diversity

Islamabad is arguably the most multilingual city in Pakistan. Punjabi is the most widely spoken mother tongue, reported by 52.27% of the total population. It is followed by Pashto (18.50%) and Urdu (12.23%). The shares of other languages spoken in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) are: Hindko 6.40%, Saraiki 2.12%, Kashmiri 2.09%, Sindhi 0.77%, Balochi 0.15%, Brahvi 0.13%, and others 5.34%. While these communities use Urdu as the lingua franca, mother tongues remain the primary mode of communication within most families.

3.5 Consequences for Education

This unanticipated growth poses not only a challenge for the Capital Development Authority (CDA) in administering rules and regulations, but also has serious consequences for the delivery of social services, including education. Two of these challenges stand out:

1. An exponential increase in the number of school-age children, necessitating the expansion of schools and the recruitment of more teachers.
2. A growing diversity of linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, creating the need for a delivery system suited to this diversity.

The schools originally envisaged in the design can no longer cater to the requirements of this much larger and more diverse population.

Islamabad's schooling system was planned according to its zoning structure, with schools provided in each sector. Government-run schools were established based on population needs at the time—needs that were not expected to grow to the scale witnessed over the last 30 years.

The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), an attached department of the then Federal Ministry of Education, was formed to oversee education delivery in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and manage public-sector institutions. In the field, supervisory roles are carried out by Area Education Officers (AEOs) and head teachers.

The schooling system itself was originally divided into two tiers: model colleges and federal schools. Model colleges were considered elite institutions. The Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) recruits teachers for these colleges (which include classes from grades 1 to 12, and in some cases beyond) at the senior Grade 17 level, unlike teachers in other FDE schools. The quality of education in some of Islamabad's model institutions was comparable to that of the best private elite schools in the country. Even today, they retain a relatively higher level of educational quality.

In 2014, all FDE schools were designated as model institutions. However, this did not diminish the reputation of the older model colleges. Pressure for admission to these colleges remains high, and they have been forced to run evening sessions to accommodate as many students as possible. The de facto divide persists, but other changes have impacted educational service delivery in all schools run by the FDE, including the older model colleges.

As noted above, the sustained pressure of population growth over the last two and a half decades has meant that the government has been unable to meet the needs of the increased number of children and the sprawl of localities. A major consequence has been an exponential increase in the number of private schools. These range from elite private schools to low-cost, small institutions catering to low-income households. Madrassas have also grown in number since the 1980s. In most cases, these provide residential options and attract students not only from within Islamabad but also from outside. Most students in these institutions come from the poorest segments of society.

As a result, Islamabad now has three parallel systems, each regulated by a different organisation. Public-sector schools are managed by the FDE; private schools are regulated by the Private Education Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA); and the madrassa system is regulated by the Directorate of Religious Education (DRE) of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT).

The policy acknowledges this divide, and recommendations have been developed to ensure that requirements common to all systems, as well as those unique to each, are addressed. The objective of providing quality education to all children remains the mandate of the state, irrespective of ownership patterns.

3.6 The Challenge of Education Policy for ICT

The Parliament passed the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 to implement the requirements of Article 25A of the Constitution, which guarantees free education as a fundamental right. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) is mandated to ensure its implementation through various systems - not only to fulfill its obligations to the child but also to foster stronger social cohesion, which is at risk when parallel systems operate without a policy that binds them to shared values and equal opportunities for growth.

The objectives of the Education Policy for ICT, therefore, align with the requirements of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 and the broader goals enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In targeting education in ICT, the policy pursues the following objectives:

1. Provide quality education to all children studying in the Islamabad Capital Territory.
2. Ensure the provision of non-formal education to all out-of-school children in ICT, helping them reintegrate into regular education or enter the workforce through skill development.
3. Ensure that children with disabilities are included in regular schools where possible, and that quality special schools are available in adequate numbers for children who cannot be accommodated in mainstream schools.

4. Prepare the education system for future challenges, including the impacts of climate change, the advent of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, and the need to become lifelong learners in a job market where employable skills continue to evolve.
5. Instill in all children the ideological values enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
6. Mainstream children studying in madrassas, making their skills relevant to a broader and modern job market.
7. Strengthen the inclusion of the private sector through governance changes to support the achievement of education objectives.

To achieve the above objectives, the policy recommendations have been structured with the following considerations:

1. The child is at the center of all policies.
2. The current capacity of the system must be considered to set realistic expectations for improvement over time.
3. The dynamic nature of demographic shifts in Islamabad must be recognized.
4. The future needs of children and society must be integrated into the learning process.

The policy includes recommendations on areas already part of the ongoing reform process. It will not only provide long-term support for these reforms through its recommendations but also contextualize these interventions within its overall objectives.

3.7 The 6 Cs Objective for Child Development

With a child centred approach, the Federal Education Policy targets quality education for all children and to inculcate in the child the following qualities:

1. Character
2. Curiosity
3. Creativity
4. Critical thinking
5. Civic responsibility
6. Communications skills.

The 6Cs objectives will be pursued through the curriculum shifts, pedagogic approaches and extra-curricular and co-curricular activities recommended in the Policy.

4 State of Education in ICT

Challenges exist across all areas of access, quality, governance, and equity. Significant improvements are needed to reduce the number of out-of-school children, enhance the quality of education, and promote inclusion - if Pakistan is to meet the requirements of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Sustainable Development Goal 4. These shortcomings are, among other reasons, driven by demographic shifts that have diminished the relevance of the original education delivery system, both in terms of capacity and learning pathways. The rapid expansion of private schools is one consequence of population growth, urban sprawl, and the changing profile of learners. As a result, even with higher literacy rates and fewer out-of-school children than the average urban area of comparable size, the learning challenges remain similar to those found elsewhere in the country.

4.1 Literacy Rates

Islamabad has a higher literacy rate than the national average of 61%. The overall literacy rate in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) is 83.97%. Literacy is higher among males (88.23%) than females (79.13%), while the literacy rate for transgender individuals stands at 47.04%.

This higher urban literacy rate can be attributed, in part, to the original settlement of the new capital. The first residents were government servants, who were required to meet minimum educational qualifications for recruitment. Over time, the families of many of these original government employees have made the city their permanent home.

4.2 Access and Participation

Islamabad has relatively better access to and participation in education, supported by the availability of both public and private schools, as well as a highly literate population with a strong demand for education. However, there are still gaps in key indicators that need to be addressed to meet the requirements of quality education for all.

4.2.1 Out of School Children

There are 89,127 out of school children in ICT out of which 54% are girls. The majority (78%) of the total OOSC are in the age group 10-16. The composition of these numbers is unclear in terms of the reasons for them being out of school. Some of them may have dropped out of schools, while others are possibly children of newly migrant families that find it difficult to adjust to requirements of schools in Islamabad. Irrespective of the cause, incidence of out of school children is always the highest among the poorest households and post primary age children. Three categories of out of school children are often invisible in policy spaces. These are transgenders, incarcerated children and those involved in daily labour. While data is not available on the level of exclusion these groups there is enough professional feedback and anecdotal data to conclude that these children are not fully on the radar of policy interventions. Another area where non-inclusion is not fully captured is children with disabilities. Global trends show that a high percentage of children with disabilities are not part of formal schooling either in regular or special institutions.

In Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), there are 89,127 out-of-school children (OOSC), of whom 54% are girls. The majority (78%) of these children are in the 10–16 age group. However, the reasons behind their exclusion from school remain unclear. Some may have dropped out, while others are likely children from newly migrated families who struggle to meet the enrollment requirements of schools in Islamabad.

Regardless of the cause, out-of-school children are consistently most prevalent among the poorest households and those of post-primary age. Three categories of OOSC are often overlooked in policy spaces: transgender children, incarcerated children, and those engaged in daily labor. Although data on the extent of exclusion faced by these groups is unavailable, sufficient professional feedback and anecdotal evidence suggest that they are not fully within the scope of policy interventions.

Another area where exclusion is not adequately captured is that of children with disabilities. Global trends indicate that a high percentage of children with disabilities remain outside the formal education system—whether in regular or special institutions. While Islamabad has facilities for children with disabilities in the form of special schools, the numbers outside schools are unknown.

4.2.2 Gross and Net Enrolment Rates

Gross enrolment rates in schools are 92% for both boys and girls. Net enrolments rates are 85% for each category. This shows a high level of participation rate compared to the national average but still leaves a large number of children outside schools.

Table 1: Gross and Net Enrolment Rates in Islamabad

	Boys	Girls	Overall
Gross Enrolment Rate Primary to Higher Secondary Education	92%	92%	92%
Net Enrolment Rate Primary to Higher Secondary	85%	85%	85%

4.2.3 Overage Children

The larger problem is the prevalence of overaged children at each educational level. This not only reflects low system efficiency but also increases the risk of dropout before school completion. Table 2 shows that a substantial percentage of children are overage at both the primary and middle levels.

Table 2: Overage Children at Primary and Middle Levels

	Boys	Girls	Overall
Primary	38%	46%	42%
Middle	45%	46%	43%

At the primary level, 42% of children overall are overage. The percentage is higher for girls (46%) than for boys (38%). At the middle level, the percentage of overage boys rises to 45%, while girls remain at 46%, resulting in an overall rate of 43%. These findings have implications for policy interventions at all levels—starting from early childhood education.

4.2.4 Schooling and Enrolment Patterns

There are nearly four times more private schools in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) than those run by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and other public-sector entities. Moreover, enrollment in these private schools now matches the combined enrollment of both

categories of public-sector schools. This trend has emerged due to the government's limited resources to establish schools for a growing population amid rapid urban expansion.

The primary obstacle is the cost of land. Land prices in Islamabad—like in most urban areas of Pakistan—have increased exponentially. Additional costs, including building construction, teacher and head teacher recruitment, and the provision of free textbooks, add up to amounts the government will not be able to afford in the coming years. As a result, the growth of private schools is expected to continue.

However, private schools are not a monolith. While not all types can be neatly categorized, three distinct groups emerge. The first group consists of elite private schools, which are distinguished by their requirement and use of a very high level of English proficiency in the learning process. Students at these schools typically take international high-stakes examinations such as British O-Levels and the International Baccalaureate (IB). These programs require a high-resource learning environment both at home and in school.

The second group includes schools run through franchises of elite school systems. These cater to households that cannot afford the fees of the original franchising systems. English is also the medium of instruction in these schools, but the quality of resources—both at school and at home—is not on par with that available to learners in elite schools.

The remaining schools fall into the category of "low-cost private schools." They claim to be "English medium" but lack the resources to meet the demands of such an approach. Learning outcomes in these schools do not differ significantly from those in government schools; in many cases, they are actually lower.

> The policy does not subscribe to the view that proficiency in English is a marker of quality. Unfortunately, it has allowed individuals to be categorized as part of a social elite. The designation of 'elite' for certain types of schools has been based on this social construct. Quality of learning is not defined by proficiency in any language; rather, it consists of cognitive development - particularly critical and analytical ability - and the value systems acquired through education. The most effective medium for achieving this quality is the child's familiar language, especially in the early years. This is elaborated in detail later in the policy.

Among government schools, certain categories can be considered on par with elite schools in terms of English language proficiency and outcomes. These include institutions run by the Ministry of Defense and a few others. In the sections below, these are grouped under the category of 'other public.

Enrolment by School Types

The growth and enrollment of private institutions have outpaced those of the public sector. There are now 1,532 registered private institutions in the district, compared to 432 run by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). Table 3 presents the distribution of enrollment, categorizing schools into three types: public sector, private, and other public. Public schools are those operated by the FDE, while "other public" includes schools managed by government organizations other than the FDE. Private institutions account for 59% of total enrollment. At the pre-primary and primary levels, their shares are 83% and 60%, respectively. Although these shares decline beyond the primary level, they remain high.

Table 3: Enrolment Shares by School Types in ICT

ICT Enrolment - Percentage Shares			
	Public	Private	Other Public

Pre Primary	13%	83%	5%
Primary	35%	60%	6%
Middle	45%	48%	7%
High	45%	46%	9%
Higher Secondary	46%	46%	7%
Overall	**35%**	**59%**	**6%**

Note: Public means schools run by FDE and other public denotes schools run by other government entities[2].

Gender Wise Enrolment

Overall, more girls are enrolled in schools; however, their share among out-of-school children (OOSC) remains higher than that of boys. At all education levels except pre-primary and primary, females constitute a larger proportion of enrolled students. In FDE schools, female enrolment exceeds 50% at every level. Table 2 shows that the share of female students increases beyond the primary level.

Table 4: Share of Enrolment of Girls in ICT Schools

	Public	Private	Other Public	Overall
Pre Primary	56%	47%	46%	48%
Primary	55%	47%	47%	50%
Middle	58%	47%	48%	52%
High	59%	47%	48%	52%
Higher Secondary	65%	47%	53%	55%

When combined with "other public schools," the share of government-owned schools at the higher secondary level reaches 55%. In public sector schools, girls make up 65% of the student population at the higher secondary level. At the middle, secondary, and higher secondary levels, the share of female enrolment in public schools stands at 50%, 51%, and 54%, respectively, while in private schools, it is 44%, 41%, and 39%. The remaining students are enrolled in other public schools. In lower grades, private schools enroll a higher proportion of girls.

These figures suggest that, for reasons of safety and economics - or both - more parents choose public schools for their daughters' enrolment in higher grades. This view was also expressed by senior teachers working in FDE schools across ICT.

Table 5: Percentage of girls in private and public sector schools in ICT

Level Wise Share of Girls in Enrolment			
	Public Share	Private Share	Other Public
Pre Primary	15%	81%	4%
Primary	38%	57%	5%
Middle	50%	44%	6%
High	51%	41%	8%
Higher Secondary	54%	39%	7%

[2] Data on enrolment in Madrassas is not available.

4.3 Quality of Education

The quality of education is low, contradicting the general-and historical-perception that education in Islamabad is relatively better. This assessment is based on data from three sources: the National Achievement Tests (NAT), the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA), and feedback from practicing teachers. All three confirm weak reading skills, below-par achievement in mathematics, and consequently, overall poor learning outcomes.

National Achievement Tests

Low achievement in English and mathematics is the most concerning. While performance improves in Urdu, it remains far from satisfactory.

Table 6:Overall Student Performance in each Assessment in ICT

Subject	N students	N items	Mean score	Mean % items answered correctly	Median raw score	SD of scores	% achieving no more than 25%
Grade 4 English	489	48	20.5	42.7	18	9.9	21.7
Grade 4 FL	418	15	14.4	95.8	15	1.4	0.0
Grade 4 Maths	487	48	18.5	38.5	16	8.3	23.6
Grade 4 Urdu and Sindhi	496	52	30.6	58.8	33	10.9	6.9
Grade 8 Maths	427	52	19.3	37.1	19	5.6	13.6
Grade 8 Science	464	52	21.4	41.2	21	6.3	8.2

Source: National Achievement Test (NAT) 2023-24

By grade 8, results decline from an already low base, with mean scores dropping to 19.3 in mathematics and 21.4 in science. Female students show only a slight advantage in grade 8, whereas boys have a relative edge in the early grades - though overall scores remain low for both genders.

Table 7: Performance in each Assessment in ICT by Gender

Subject	N items	N students		Mean raw score (SE)		SD		Difference
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Grade 4 English	48	260	229	22.03 (2.39)	18.69 (1.79)	10.83	8.34	-3.34
Grade 4 Maths	48	259	228	19.75 (2.30)	17.04 (1.23)	9.54	6.26	-2.72
Grade 4 Urdu and Sindhi	52	265	231	31.23 (2.43)	29.84 (2.08)	11.42	10.20	-1.39
Grade 8 Maths	52	223	204	18.02 (0.48)	20.71 (1.07)	4.83	5.96	2.69
Grade 8 Science	52	217	247	20.14 (0.62)	22.57 (1.16)	5.52	6.72	2.42

Source: National Achievement Test (NAT) 2023-24

Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA)

The scores from the 2023 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LANA) further confirm low learning levels in Islamabad. The overall average score ranges between 318 and 343, including both public and private schools. For girls, the average score ranges from 356 to 401, while for boys it ranges from 329 to 391. In rural areas, these scores drop further to between 275 and 322. In public schools, the range is 280–324, compared to 368–420 in private schools.

Table 8: LANA Scores in Reading for Islamabad

Category	Score	Benchmark
Overall	318-343	Basic

Girls	356-401	Basic to Low
Boys	329-391	Basic
Rural	275-322	Below basic to basic
Public Schools	280-324	Below basic to basic
Private Schools	368-420	Basic to low

LaNA categorizes performance in both reading and mathematics as: basic, low, intermediate, high, and advanced. In reading, no score reaches even the intermediate level. The lower end for public schools and rural schools - which include low-cost private institutions - falls below the basic level.

Table 4 presents the mathematics scores for Islamabad. These are relatively better, yet they still fall within the lower benchmarks of basic and low. Only in the case of private schools does the upper end of the range exceed the required score for the intermediate level - by just 7 points.

Table 9: LANA Scores in Mathematics for Islamabad

Category	Score	Benchmark
Overall	410-459	Low
Girls	412-459	Low
Boys	403-463	Low
Rural	341-406	Basic to low
Public Schools	345-399	Basic
Private Schools	425-482	Low to intermediate

Scores for girls range from 412 to 459, while boys' scores fall between 403 and 463. Once again, rural areas and public schools are at the lowest levels of learning, with neither group surpassing the "basic" benchmark.

Feedback from Teachers

Interviews with teachers from various public sector schools in Islamabad have confirmed a situation of generally low learning outcomes. Teachers explained that students struggle even with basic reading comprehension, persisting as late as secondary education. Only a small percentage of students are able to read at the appropriate level, even at the post-primary stage. At the primary level, at least 50% of children face such difficulties, according to feedback from teachers and key decision-makers at the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). Some of the teachers estimated it at an even lower number.

Box 1: Changing Profile of Students and Quality of Education in Public Model Schools

> An important dynamic behind the decline in quality has been the change in the profile of children enrolled in model schools. In the past, these schools catered to the children of the city's more educated elite, largely due to the absence of equivalent private schools. This contributed to a strong overall learning environment. However, many children from these families have since shifted to a growing number of elite private schools. As a result, even model colleges now must adapt to new realities: they are increasingly serving students who may require different teaching-learning processes and even alternative curricular paths.

In most cases, the children who perform relatively better come from families where parents can support their learning process due to stronger household endowments, such as parental

literacy and the ability to afford private tuition. However, performing better does not necessarily mean that these children are adequately prepared for higher education, as per feedback received from officials of the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The difference in learning outcomes is only relative. Only in the case of elite private schools - a completely separate stream- is the success rate very high. This is the result of high resource availability per capita, both at home and in schools, including parental education, learning resources in the household and school, and the quality of teaching and management systems.

4.4 Conclusion

ICT faces many of the same educational challenges as most cities in Pakistan, even though its indicators are often better than those of the provinces. However, comparisons with provincial data must be interpreted with caution, as Islamabad's smaller size and higher per capita resources skew the picture. As the federal capital, it benefits from access to better-qualified teachers and other professionals. Despite these advantages, its education performance is only marginally better than the provincial averages. While access and participation are relatively better than the national average, significant gaps remain. The quality of education is also disappointingly low, as teachers in ICT face the challenge of instructing not only a large but also a diverse student population. Main problems in education stem largely from unsustainable population growth. Among other consequences, this means public schools cannot accommodate the steadily increasing number of school-age children. Private schools of variable quality have surpassed public sector enrollment-especially in the early grades. This has pressed the education authorities to change the approach to education management. The Policy calls for further re-orientation to the new reality for better education outcomes.

5 Access 1: Participation of All

FEP 2026 aims to include the last child in school. Population growth poses the most formidable challenge to achieving this goal and to meeting the requirements of the ICT's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012. The trend over the last 28 years indicates that more schools, classrooms, and teachers will be required in the future. However, the mere provision of institutions will not be sufficient to ensure universal participation and school completion.

Systemic efficiency also requires a reduction in overage admissions, as these increase the risk of low school completion rates. Even with policy options aimed at reducing the risk of dropouts and children not enrolling in school, there will likely remain, in the foreseeable future, school-age children who are not engaged in any educational activity.

The risk of dropouts must be mitigated throughout the education cycle. Given the high levels of poverty and the consequent socio-economic pressures and attitudes toward education demand-side interventions for both girls and boys are needed. These meausres will guarantee they reach school and that poverty does not remain a barrier to school education.

The Policy recognizes that out-of-school children will remain a reality for the system to address. It provides specific recommendations for a strengthened non-formal education structure, offering a second-chance option for children who cannot be admitted to an age-appropriate class in a regular school. Among out-of-school children is a category referred to as "the invisible children." The Policy uses this term for children who have been deprived of educational opportunities due to social attitudes and the inability of past policies to recognize their special status and struggles. This group includes transgender individuals, children involved in work, and those incarcerated in jails. Another category that is recognized but has not been effectively included in education is children with disabilities. The Policy's perspective and recommendations for their inclusion are discussed in the next chapter.

5.1 Objectives

1. Include all children school age in education opportunities of quality as per the requirements of ICT's Rights to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2010.

5.2 Strategies for Access

To improve access the policy addresses the following areas:

1. School provision for current and future populations of children.
2. Access for out of school children in education through a robust NFE structure.
3. Access for marginalised children, especially, those not routinely included in policies (the invisible children).
4. Timely enrolment of children to reduce overage population among students and reduce the risk of early dropouts.
5. Addressing demand side issues of access for both boys and girls.

5.2.1 School Provision

As the data shows, continuing to rely solely on public sector schools to meet educational demand in Islamabad will not be feasible. The education plans developed during the city's early years are no longer relevant. Effective planning and achievement of educational goals now require the inclusion of private schools, since the government sector alone cannot meet the schooling needs of Islamabad. As indicated by the data in Chapter 4, the private sector

already bears a significant share of this responsibility. It is realistic to expect that future requirements will also be met by private institutions, although the state will retain overall responsibility. This will involve planning, assessing options for accommodating the growing school-age population, and regulating quality and standards.

Planning for school expansion in a growing population is challenging but essential. It will require population projections and mapping of school availability in different localities. This mapping should identify needs such as school upgrades, inclusion of early childhood education, and expansion of existing schools. Once this information is available, decisions can be made regarding public-private partnership models and appropriate regulatory frameworks. This will form the foundation of the overall plan.

Incorporating the private sector into these plans means the government must review its current regulatory role to ensure that expansion through private schools aligns with the state's educational aims and objectives. At present, the Private Education Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) primarily handles registration, which binds schools to basic requirements such as teacher turnover and school facilities. These regulations will need to be revised to enhance requirements as needed, while also providing support for the development of private schools.

5.2.2 Policy Recommendations

1. **Long-Term Projection Study:** The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) will conduct a projection study to assess school infrastructure needs over the next ten years. This study will be based on historical growth rates over the past several years, alongside other relevant variables. The projections shall be reviewed and updated every five years.
2. **Needs Mapping Based on Projections:** Based on these projections, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT), in collaboration with the FDE, will map the requirements for school expansion. The mapping will include detailed, locality-specific requirements for each level of education—Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), primary, middle, secondary, and higher secondary—separately for boys' and girls' schools.
3. **Comprehensive Expansion Plan:** Utilizing the projections and mapping data, the MoFE&PT, in partnership with the FDE and the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA), will develop a comprehensive plan for expanding schooling. This plan will include: (a) an estimate of the number of children to be accommodated in private schools, (b) options for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and (c) the number of additional schools to be established by the FDE. For FDE-established schools, the plan will require strict adherence to legal provisions mandating space for educational institutions in all new housing development projects.

4. **Regulatory Review and Reform:** The FDE, PEIRA, and the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) will coordinate to commission a study through an accredited academic institution. The study will assess the current state of education delivery, the reach and quality of private schools in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and the effectiveness of the existing regulatory framework. Based on the study's findings, the regulatory mechanism will be reviewed in consultation with PEIRA, representatives of private schools, the MoFE&PT, and the FDE. The revised mechanism will include options for Public-Private Partnerships, with specific modalities to be determined through the consultation process. The study shall also include a review of relevant experiences and best practices from other parts of the country.

5.3 The Overage Challenge

More than 40% children in primary and post-primary classes in public schools are above the official age. Delayed enrolment in schools leads to early dropouts and consequently impacts the number of years that a child attends schools. It also carries risks of bullying for younger children in the same classroom. A solution to this problem partly lies in availability of early childhood education and primary schools in the local vicinity. The larger issue, however, is of attitudes in households, which lead to delay in school admissions. Low birth registrations also contribute – especially – among families of recent migrants to the city. The Policy also recommends increase in the official primary age to bring it closer to the ground realities and expects that this will reduce the difference between official age for schooling and the actual age of students in schools.

5.3.1 Policy Recommendations

All children will be enrolled when they reach school going age. As per law every child who reaches the age of 5 years should be in school. This requires the following pre-requisites:

1. **Revision of Official School Age:** MoFE&PT will formally designate ages 6 to 10 as the official age range for primary education (Classes 1 to 5).
2. **Awareness Plan for Timely Enrolments:** FDE will develop a comprehensive awareness and advocacy plan to promote timely enrolments, supported by annual enrolment drives in communities. The plan will be implemented with the involvement of Area Education Officers, head teachers, and teachers, utilizing a variety of media channels, including internet-based platforms.
3. **Birth Registration Drives:** MoFE&PT and FDE, in coordination with the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), will conduct bi-annual birth registration drives, particularly targeting families of recent migrants into ICT. These drives will be preceded and reinforced by a large-scale awareness campaign using legacy media, WhatsApp, and social media.

5.4 Incentives for Demand Side

Management of demand-side factors that negatively impact access is more challenging, as introducing effective flexibility in the attitudes that drive behavior takes a longer period of time. However, there are some policy options - targeted at poverty alleviation - that can help improve attendance. The impact of poverty is most evident at the post-primary stage, when children face pressure to support their families, either through household chores (in the case of girls) or income-generating activities (mostly expected of boys). Early female marriage is also a concern, though its extent in Islamabad is unclear. One of the most important of these interventions, therefore, has been the provision of stipends to girls beyond the primary level. Other issues, such as security concerns, can also be addressed by the government, especially, through provision of transport options. Wherever transport facilities have been officially provided, attendance and continued enrolment, especially, of girls have shown a positive impact. However, transport and other demand-side issues are not limited to the inclusion of girls alone—they also affect the enrolment of boys. Demand-side policy interventions need to focus on all children.

5.4.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Need-Based Stipends for Children from Poor Communities (Middle Level):** Targeted inclusion is challenging, but in urban areas like Islamabad, poverty is spatially concentrated - slums and low-income housing areas are identifiable. In rural settings, this may be less straightforward. To address this, the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and the Punjab Education and Research Institute Agency (PEIRA) will commission a third-party survey to identify high-poverty areas and include children from these communities in the stipend program. This will also cover children admitted to private schools under the legally mandated quota. Head teachers will be empowered to nominate any child who does not meet the above location-based criteria for the stipend. Stipends will be linked to attendance and academic performance.

2. **Merit-Based Scholarships for High-Performing Middle School Graduates**: All children who complete middle school with high academic performance - as defined by criteria set by FDE for public schools and PEIRA for private schools—will be awarded scholarships that include a living allowance until the completion of higher secondary education.

3. **Transport Facilities for Post-Primary Students**: Transport facilities will be provided to post-primary students, particularly those in rural areas. This could take the form of dedicated school buses or travel subsidies to support commuting. Safe transport for girls will be ensured by the FDE. These subsidies and transport services will also be extended to children enrolled in non-formal education institutions.

5.5 Structuring a Robust NFE System

According to the 7th Population and Housing Census 2023, Islamabad is home to nearly 89,127 out-of-school children. Many of these children are now past the appropriate age for their grade level and can only be reintegrated into the education system through an effective, accelerated, and alternative non-formal education (NFE) framework. As out-of-school children will remain a reality in the foreseeable future, it is essential to establish a robust NFE governance system that ensures equitable access and prepares these children for continued learning and the world of work. Availability of reliable data will be a key to inclusion of out of school children and a core component of the governance structure.

Some progress has already been made. A coordination cell has been established within the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) to oversee NFE in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). Members of this NFE Coordination Cell include BECS, the National Education Foundation (NEF), and the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). However, this cell needs to be strengthened, and a more sustainable governance structure is required for the effective implementation and oversight of NFE. A starting point has already been established with the Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFEMIS). A draft strategy for NFE has also been developed and now needs to be implemented on the ground.
The purpose of NFE is to allow children a second chance at schooling through mainstreaming or enhance the capacities of graduate to move to the world of work with conflation of skill development with learning of other subjects. Systems of certification become enablers of transition.

The governance structure in NFE as for all education streams will target improvements in quality of learning and access and equity. The specialised challenges of multi-age and multi-grade classrooms that become more complex in NFE require specialised efforts – including

development of condensed packages, higher stress on skills development and differentiated assessment practices. Packages have already been developed for various programmes, including youth literacy. The challenge of implementation on scale while maintaining quality remains.

5.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize a Robust Governance Structure:** The Federal Cabinet will approve a formal governance structure for Non-Formal Education (NFE). This includes establishing the NFE Coordination Cell within the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) as a permanent body, supported by dedicated personnel and a regular budget. The Cell will be officially notified to lead the planning, implementation, and oversight of NFE in collaboration with relevant organizations, including the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and other attached departments of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT).

2. **Need-Based Expansion of NFE Centres:** The NFE Coordination Cell shall develop and implement a plan for the need-based expansion of NFE centres in Islamabad, in collaboration with private sector NFE providers. This plan will be subject to annual review and revision.

3. **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process for the oversight of NFE centres will be administered by the NFE Coordination Cell in partnership with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE).

4. **Institutionalization of the Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFEMIS):** The NFEMIS will be institutionalized to enable a data-driven management system for NFE. While NFEMIS will continue to be housed within the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), the NFE Coordination Cell will be responsible for data collection. PIE will integrate this data into its consolidated database. To ensure the effective functioning of NFEMIS, the NFE Coordination Cell and PIE will jointly develop and implement a biannual data collection and reporting plan for the identification, enrolment, and retention of out-of-school children in Islamabad.

5. **Strengthening Assessment, Certification, and Learning Continuity:** The capacity of the FDE to assess and certify graduates of various NFE modules will be strengthened. This will enable learners to clear requisite education levels and ensure learning continuity through mainstreaming and transition. Additionally, collaboration between the NFE Coordination Cell and the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) shall be institutionalized to provide assessment and certification services for vocational training courses integrated with NFE programmes.

6. **Promoting Quality in NFE:** The NFE Coordination Cell will lead the following initiatives to enhance the quality of NFE:
    a. Introduce minimum quality standards for NFE and establish a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for NFE and Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) teachers in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

b. Formalize collaboration with the National Curriculum Council (NCC) to develop and improve NFE/ALP curricula that are age-appropriate and equivalent to formal education programmes.
c. Notify the National Book Foundation (NBF) as the designated body for developing learning materials for a range of NFE and ALP programmes.

5.6 THE INVISIBLE CHILDREN

There are some segments of OOSC children, which though significant, remain out of sight – and consequently, the discussions – of the policy makers. Each has its own peculiar reasons for not coming to schools and therefore needs a corresponding solution – more so if our slogan is 'leave no child behind'.

5.6.1 The Bread Winners

The largest of such segments is that of working children – the children who earn a living for their families. Unless it is ensured that their livelihood remains intact, they cannot be brought back to schools. Noting the fact that most of the business establishments open late in the morning, a pilot project was initiated by the then School Education Department, South Punjab, in 2021 whereby special classes were introduced for working children in public schools close to such places where there was concentration of businesses that employed children, i.e. workshops, restaurants, markets etc. The classes were held early in the morning, i.e. from 7:30 to 10:30 am, and thereafter the children were free to go to work. Though first started in one school in Multan as a pilot project, the initiative became such a success that soon it was expanded to all eleven districts of South Punjab. These schools were named as *Subeh Nau* Schools (Early Morning Schools). The curriculum taught in these schools followed ALP model and was provided by JICA. Later, technical and vocational education too was added in some of such schools to enable working children to grow in their respective trade/profession and earn a decent living. The initiative, though met considerable success, could not continue due to funding and placement issues.

5.6.2 Policy Recommendation

Flexible Learning Times: Learning from this model – and even improving upon it – initiation of classes may be considered in carefully selected schools in ICT where working children may be imparted formal education and skills' training in early hours of the morning and freed afterwards to follow their respective economic pursuits. It may be noted here that afternoon schools (or even evening classes) cannot serve the purpose of these children as usually they remain employed from late mornings to late evenings and even nights.

5.6.3 The Transgenders

Another important segment of the OOSC is that of the transgender students. It goes without saying here that transgender community happens to be one of the most marginalised segments of the society. In almost all cases, when the fact of them being transgenders becomes apparent at around the age of puberty, they are shunned by their own families too. The doors of formal education shut on them as well, as they are harassed out of the schools they were earlier studying in. Begging on roadsides, dancing in weddings functions, and forced entry into immoral activities remain their only chances of survival. This vicious cycle may not be broken for such children, unless they are provided education as well as technical and vocational skills.
A pioneering initiative on inclusion of transgender was completed by the then South Punjab Education Department. Evening classes were initiated for transgenders in one of the public schools for girls in Multan in July 2021, close to a locality where a larger number of

transgenders lived in rented houses, employing ALP model developed with the help of JICA. Later, technical and vocational laboratories were also established in this school with the help of UNESCO and KOIKA to teach entrepreneurial skills to transgender students such as cooking, tailoring, hair cutting, make-up, photography/video making and IT. Once the initiative had succeeded in Multan, another school was opened in Bahawalpur on similar lines. Though started with a handful of transgender children, the initiative, which came to be known as TRANSEDUCATION, was at its peak catering for more than 500 students. The Government of Punjab later announced to open a school for transgender children in each of the nine divisional headquarters of the province. However, since no dedicated budget line was earmarked for the purpose, the initiative ran into difficulty towards the end of 2025. Lately, it has been decided that the required funds would be provided under the ASPIRE project funded by the World Bank.

It may be noted that besides providing uniform, shoes, books and stationery free of charge, an honorarium was also provided to these students to cover their transport and other expenses. This honorarium had been linked to regular attendance and satisfactory academic performance. Most importantly, it was ensured that educated transgenders were employed in these schools for teaching, as far as practical. It was believed that such transgender teachers would not only act as role models for transgender children but would also understand their issues better.

5.6.4 Recommendation

Classes for Transgender Children: Classes may be initiated for transgenders in a public school building in late afternoon/evening in ICT. Initially one school in urban centre and another in rural areas may be earmarked for the purpose. Besides teaching ALP based curriculum, these children may also be taught technical and vocational skills in order to enable them earn a decent living for themselves. Provision of free books, stationery and uniform as well as honorarium may also be considered to create an incentive for such children.

5.6.5 The Incarcerated

Juvenile prisoners are another segment that remains totally invisible in our larger scheme of things. Once incarcerated, such prisoners lose all opportunities of learning with the result that once they come out after completion of their respective sentences, their only chance of survival is to continue following the path of crime – albeit in a more organised manner.

While incarcerated, instead of keeping such prisoners locked up all the time or employed in menial duties, reformative process could be initiated by employing education and imparting technical/vocational skills. Punjab example may be quoted in this regard. The province has 2 dedicated borstal institutes (juvenile prisons) – one at Bahawalpur and another at Faisalabad – as well as juvenile sections in other jails. In borstal institute at Bahawalpur, an initiative of imparting education and skills was undertaken in 2023 under makeshift arrangements, on pilot basis. However, after having seen its utility and fruits, now a formal school is being constructed within the premises of the borstal institute. Similarly, establishment of another school is also in pipeline for the other borstal institute at Faisalabad.

5.6.6 Recommendation

Education Options for Incarcerated Children: A model jail is being constructed for the Islamabad Capital Territory these days and reportedly is near completion. This presents a critical window to ensure that an academic block—if not a dedicated school—is integrated into the larger scheme. After all, being touted as a model prison, it should set a national precedent for rehabilitation, for others to follow, with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training playing a lead role.

6 Access 2: Inclusive and Special Education

Inclusion of children with disabilities in education requires a multifaceted approach. Key considerations include the range of disabilities, the capacities needed to identify them, the ability to integrate children through diverse pathways and pedagogic methods, and the provision of support for mainstreaming. Currently, the systems and structures within ICT for including children with disabilities are weak and limited. FEP 2026 outlines two distinct paths: inclusion or mainstreaming in regular schools, and placement in special education institutions. The goal is to mainstream the maximum number of children with disabilities into regular schools. Only when a disability is severe or of such a nature that it requires specialized efforts - such as specially trained teachers, other specialists, and learning aids - should children be admitted and cared for in special schools. Children enrolled in these special schools may, where possible, be mainstreamed into regular schools. A well-functioning school system will rely more on inclusion in mainstream schools and less on special schools. This has been the most significant challenge in ICT, compounded by the limited number of special schools and their resource constraints.

6.1 Understanding Inclusive and Special Education

Disabilities exist across a wide spectrum. However, the system's capacity to diagnose them - especially those affecting cognition - is limited. Diagnosis depends on teachers' ability to recognize disabilities, yet there is no systemic approach to accessing the few professionals available in the market who can identify more complex, non-visible disabilities. Even when disabilities are diagnosed, the system struggles to absorb the children who need support. As a result, a large number of children with disabilities are excluded from educational opportunities tailored to their needs, which could help them become independent members of society as adults.

Children with disabilities are included in education either through special schools or by being admitted to regular schools that make special provisions for their inclusion. Special schools employ staff specifically trained to support and educate these children. For example, a school for children with hearing impairments requires teachers and staff who can communicate in sign language, among other accommodations. The Policy acknowledges that special schools will always be necessary, but it emphasizes that the majority of children with disabilities should be educated in regular schools, as early mainstreaming into society is beneficial. This is only possible if regular schools are adequately prepared. Such preparation includes accessible physical infrastructure—including Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities—as well as trained teachers, community support, and access to counselors.

6.2 Situation in ICT

The Directorate of Special Education, under the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), operates special schools for children in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). There are five institutes, each catering to one of the following groups:

i. Children with hearing impairment
ii. Children with visual impairment
iii. Children with other physical handicaps
iv. Children with developmental disorders
v. Skill training for children with disabilities

Boarding facilities are available at these institutes, and their enrolment includes children from outside ICT as well. The inclusion of children into regular schools through mainstreaming has been an unsuccessful process, as is the case in most of Pakistan. Recently, the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), with support from the provinces, collected data on children with disabilities in schools across the country. Indicators based on the Washington Group's short survey were used, which primarily identify mild intellectual disabilities. While this is a step forward, it does not address the larger issue of credible national data on children with disabilities and their inclusion in education.

6.3 The Challenges

The first problem is that, similar to the rest of the country, ICT does not have data on children with disabilities. The 2023 National Population Census provides data on persons with disabilities, and according to the report, out of 73,022 persons with disabilities in ICT a total of 6304 are children.

> In the Population and Housing Census 2023, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics provides disability data in the population. The data states that persons with functional limitation make up only 8.12% of the total population in Islamabad. The population of male with functional limitation (functional limitations in male as a percentage of total male population) is 8.70% and for the female (functional limitations in female as a percentage of total female population) is 7.46%. Furthermore, out of the total population with functional limitations, 56.64% reside in rural areas, while 43.36% reside in urban areas. The total number of persons with disabilities is 185,380.

It is not currently possible to determine the number of children excluded from schools due to disabilities, as collecting data on disabilities requires specialized questionnaires and training. Recently, as mentioned, the short version of the Washington Group questionnaire was used in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) — but only in public (FDE) schools, not in madrassas, private schools, or at the household level. Consequently, access-related data for children with disabilities is unavailable, and it is impossible to assess whether the existing number of special schools is adequate for ICT's needs. The trend from global experiences and other provinces shows that a large majority of children with disabilities are not in schools. Girls with disabilities are, normally, the most excluded. Data limitations prevent from reaching conclusive answers for ICT. Unless a more robust and regular source of data collection is in place sustainable policy options will be difficult to prepare.

A second challenge is mainstreaming children into regular schools. With the exception of schools receiving external support from organizations, most schools are unprepared to include children with disabilities who do not require admission to special institutes. For example, WASH facilities for children with disabilities — such as those who use wheelchairs — are unavailable. Physical infrastructure like ramps either does not exist or has been constructed without meeting required standards (e.g., the correct gradient). Teachers are not trained to accommodate these children in the teaching-learning process, especially those with learning difficulties due to cognitive disabilities. Among other requirements, teachers need training to adapt curricula and teaching approaches for these children and to maintain separate portfolios tracking their progress. Part of the problem lies in the overambitious and overcrowded curriculum mentioned earlier. In many cases, classrooms themselves are also overcrowded. Head teachers are not trained in the requirements of inclusive practices, and counseling and

other support systems necessary for all students — but especially for those with special needs — are absent. These children are often victims of bullying that goes unreported.

Special schools face their own set of problems. Recruiting sufficient faculty, providing adequate facilities, and engaging with parents are key challenges. Specialist support, such as sign language experts, is not easy to find, and multilingualism further complicates the standardization of sign language. Students in vocational institutions struggle to find useful employment; part of the problem, at least, lies in employers' reluctance to hire these graduates. Overall, societal attitudes remain insufficiently inclusive toward children with disabilities.

Early detection of conditions like dyslexia, dyscalculia, and visual impairments — which are not necessarily cognitive impairments — can help children progress more quickly in their learning and improve their chances of success both in school and beyond. However, teachers are not trained to detect these problems in the classroom, and there are no health services to assess children for less visible disabilities. As noted, this problem begins with the absence of counseling. Another policy omission is the lack of clear guidelines for mainstreaming children from special schools into regular schools.

Even if a systemic process of data collection, counseling, and other support were to be institutionalized within the school system, there has been no assessment of the resources required, the availability of necessary competencies in the job market, or the financial implications.

Finally, society’s attitudes toward children with disabilities must change. Education, mainstreaming into society, and employment opportunities are their rights. Any resources provided for these children should not be viewed as “handouts,” as is currently often the case. Many parents struggle to cope with children with disabilities, leading to emotional and physical neglect that further complicates their conditions. These parents are either unaware of available educational facilities or cannot afford to send their children to such schools. Affordability issues are not necessarily due to school fees; mobility challenges may require special transport arrangements and, sometimes, a carer to accompany the child to and from school. If parents had a better understanding of how to support their child in becoming a more functional member of society, they would be more engaged and could partner with schools to work toward a brighter future for their children.

Employment opportunities for these children also need to expand. A single technical and vocational education institution cannot meet the demand. Many children cannot even travel to the existing institute due to distance and lack of transport facilities.

6.4 Objectives

1. Strengthen access to quality and relevant education for children with disabilities in ICT.
2. Prepare regular schools for disability inclusion.
3. Develop and implement disability inclusive curriculum, textbooks and pedagogical approaches.

6.5 Data and Information

Data on children with disabilities remains the weakest link in the policy space concerning the education of this group. Although the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) recently initiated a process to collect disability data, including in the 2023 census, the information is still limited. According to PBS, there are 6,304 children with disabilities in Islamabad. This data was collected using the short version of the Washington Group questionnaire. As noted above, data on children in schools remains scarce. Data systems within the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) must become more robust and self-sustaining to enable regular updates on children with disabilities and their school attendance - whether in private, public, or madrassa institutions.

6.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Regular and Institutionalised Data Collection:** Regular and periodic data collection on children with disabilities in the Islamabad Capital Territory will be institutionalized. An annual survey utilizing the short set of questions from the Washington Group on Disability Statistics will be integrated into the standard Education Management Information System (EMIS) data collection instruments. Additionally, a comprehensive, detailed questionnaire will be administered once every three years. Data collection will be led by the Directorate of Special and Inclusive Edcuation. Other partners will be FDE and PEIRA.

2. **Inclusion of Disability Data in EMIS:** The annual EMIS questionnaire will include the short set of Washington Group questions for administration across all schools in the Islamabad Capital Territory, including public-sector schools, private-sector schools, and madrassas. To facilitate effective data collection, the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) will coordinate with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA), and the Directorate of Religious Education (DGRE), respectively.

3. **Data Informed Policy for CWDs:** The data collected will be utilized to inform the development of a comprehensive policy on Special and Inclusive Education. Furthermore, the data will guide the planning and allocation of resources necessary to establish a sustainable education system responsive to the needs of children with disabilities.

6.6 Strenghtening Special Schools

While the broader objective of the Policy is to expand inclusive education, the need for special schools will always remain. These schools require dedicated attention and planning, particularly in terms of equipment, specialists, and instruments, which must be provided and replenished on an ongoing basis. Currently, there is no systemic process to assess the needs of special education schools. Equipment and other infrastructure require regular replenishment, and there is a persistent demand for trained personnel. These resources are not always available, and staff turnover makes it difficult to replace expertise. A systemic approach to identifying and replenishing infrastructure, equipment, and human resources is urgently needed.

6.6.1 Policy Recommendation

1. **Regular Survey of Resource Needs for Special Schools:** The Directorate of Special Education will conduct a comprehensive survey of the resource needs of all institutes of special education. Resources include specialized human resources within and outside the institutes, as well as technological support systems. This survey will be repeated every two years.
2. **Plan for Resource Replenishment of Special Schools:** Based on the survey findings, the Directorate of Special Education will develop a plan for the provision of identified resources to the institutes. In cases where human resources cannot be employed full-time, the Directorate will arrange for the requisite expertise through external partnerships, consultancies, or shared-service arrangements.
3. **Professional Development for Staff of Special Schools:** The resource assessment will include a review of teacher training needs and the provision of resources for their continued professional development. Based on this information, the Directorate will establish a regular professional development programme for teachers and other specialists within schools for special education.

6.7 Standards and Plan for Inclusion and Mainstreaming

Despite initial efforts dating back nearly a decade and a half, inclusive education initiatives have not been successfully sustained. This remains a deeply challenging area as neither schools nor communities are prepared for inclusive education. School readiness for inclusion requires interventions at multiple levels: infrastructure and facilities, teacher training, support personnel, and a school community that embraces an inclusive mindset. The school community includes teachers, headteachers, parents, and—most importantly—students in regular schools who do not have disabilities. Without a school community prepared for inclusion, children with disabilities become highly vulnerable to bullying and neglect. Counseling services and raising awareness among other students and parents are also essential for successful inclusion. The process begins with establishing institutionalized standards for inclusive education.

Time management presents another significant challenge. Teachers, already overwhelmed by the demands of completing the standard curriculum, find it difficult to dedicate focused attention to children with special needs. In many cases, individualized learning plans must be developed, and additional time is required to support these students effectively.

School readiness alone, however, is insufficient. Social attitudes -including those of parents of children with disabilities - often hinder continued educational support for these children. Social stigma, financial constraints, and a lack of awareness all contribute to parents' low confidence in the education system’s ability to support their children with disabilities. This is further reinforced by limited employment opportunities for their children. Most employers lack disability-inclusive approaches and environments, which severely restricts the life options of persons with disabilities. Unless parents can see viable career pathways, the incentives to support the education of children with disabilities will remain low. All of these issues must be addressed in policy to achieve better inclusion of children with disabilities.

6.7.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish Comprehensive Standards for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools**: These standards shall address the following key areas:
   a. **Infrastructure and Personnel:** Minimum requirements for accessible physical infrastructure and specialized support staff.
   b. **Teacher and Head Teacher Training:** Mandatory professional development requirements for educators and school leaders.
   c. **Counseling Services:** Provision of accessible psychological and guidance counseling for students and families.
   d. **Community and Parental Engagement:** Protocols for fostering partnerships with families and local communities.
2. **Develop and Implement a Phased Expansion Plan for Inclusive Education Readiness**: Start with a b**aseline assessment** to conduct a comprehensive survey of all Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) schools to assess current capacity against the newly developed standards. Gradually incorporate these inclusion standards into the regulatory framework governing private schools. Where necessary, allocate resources to provide training for teachers and head teachers in low-cost private institutions. Extend the application of these standards over time to include non-formal education institutions and madrassas.

3. **Design and Execute Annual Awareness Campaigns on Special and Inclusive Education**: These campaigns shall target three key audiences: the general public, parents of children with disabilities, and senior policymakers and decision-makers. The objective is to foster broader societal recognition of the right to education for children

with disabilities and the corresponding obligation to allocate appropriate resources.

4. **Develop a Disability-Inclusive Curriculum to Promote Attitudinal Change**: The National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW) will lead the development of a curriculum that integrates disability inclusion themes across all subjects for all students. To ensure effective implementation, the NCCW, in collaboration with the National Book Foundation (NBF), shall train textbook authors in converting inclusion themes into engaging, high-quality educational content.

5. **Facilitate Employer Engagement for Vocational Graduates with Disabilities**: MoFE&PT will organize targeted workshops and consultative meetings with potential employers for both girls and boys with disabilities. The objective is to understand workforce needs and to sensitize employers to the value and capability of hiring individuals with disabilities who have completed vocational training programs.

6. **Establish Specialized Parental Guidance Camps in Islamabad:** MoFE&PT in partnership with active NGOs and local political representatives, set up specialized guidance camps across various localities of Islamabad. These camps will support parents of children with special needs by helping them recognize their children's rights, with a particular emphasis on ensuring equal support and opportunities for both girls and boys with disabilities.

7 Quality of Learning: Curriculum and Textbooks

Section 4.3 highlights the weak learning outcomes of children in ICT, but these outcomes cannot be attributed to a single cause. While there is a common perception that poor teaching is to blame - often making the teacher the focus of criticism - this perspective can be misleading. Improving learning outcomes will remain ineffective unless teaching quality is understood as the product of multiple inputs.
Teachers are only one element of the teaching-learning process. Other factors that influence both learning and teaching methods include the curriculum, textbooks, assessments, teacher-student ratios, and the methods and expectations of supervision, support, and mentoring. In Pakistan, including in ICT, the failure to achieve curriculum objectives cannot be isolated to any one input. To truly improve learning outcomes, the entire value chain that produces quality learning must be reassessed.

The Federal Education Policy 2026 (FEP 2026) reviews and offers policy recommendations for this entire value chain: from curriculum development to child well-being. This chapter focuses specifically on curriculum and textbooks. It mostly addresses issues of technical import that will improve the processes and products for both curriculum and textbooks. The need for a more robust approach to address curricula in sciences and the emerging areas of environment and technology have also been suggested. The final section addresses approaches to making curriculum and textbook content more inclusive for all learners - an area that has been particularly weak in the past. Although inclusive themes have been incorporated, their comprehensiveness and effectiveness remain insufficient.

7.1 Curriculum

The school curriculum spans from pre-primary early childhood education through the end of higher secondary education, making a total of 14 years. At each stage, expectations and assumptions about the child are critical for designing an effective, learner-centered curriculum. The early years are especially important, as they form the foundation upon which the entire learning path is built. During this period, the child is expected to develop foundational skills.

The post-primary curriculum - designed for when the child is expected to have become a self-learner - prepares the learner for "life and livelihood." It is at these levels that the fast-changing realities of the world need to be integrated into the learning process on an almost ongoing basis. These realities include evolving concepts in the sciences, developments in the digital world, and environmental challenges such as climate change and its implications. The key challenge lies in determining the scope, topics, and level of detail appropriate for each grade, while ensuring a clear progression of learning from one level to the next. This means the curriculum cannot be a static document. However, any changes must be grounded in research and introduced carefully through an institutionalized process, so that learning is not disrupted by abrupt or unconsidered additions - regardless of how important a new topic may be.

At each stage, the curriculum must be designed according to the specific requirements of that level. In the early years, curricula should be simple, contextually relevant to the child, and focused on developing foundational skills. Contextually relevant curriculum development in these early years must address three key challenges:

1. The languages used for literacy and as the medium of instruction—ideally, these should be the same.
2. Assumptions about the child's school readiness. In the absence of a strong early childhood education program, it is safer to assume that the child is not prepared for school.
3. The level of household support available to the child.

By the end of primary school, every curriculum expects that the child has transitioned from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." According to child psychology, by age 11, a child has the capacity to learn everything an adult can. However, this comes with two important conditions. First, it assumes that the primary school curriculum and teaching have adequately prepared the child for "reading to learn." By the time they begin post-primary education, the child should have developed sufficiently high reading and numeracy skills, as well as strong analytical abilities. Second, while a child may potentially be able to learn "everything," factors such as age appropriateness, time available for learning, foundational requirements of various topics, and realistic language expectations must all be considered. This means that prioritization and sequencing must precede the detailed development of content.

It is at this post-primary stage that the context can transition from the local to the global. New knowledge, learning processes, and requirements driven by shifts such as climate change and opportunities opened by technological innovation can be introduced into the curriculum. These should be staggered in a sequence that supports effective learning and concept assimilation. At this stage, more complex and abstract concepts in subjects like science and mathematics can also be introduced.

Finally, it is important to remember that a curriculum is a document implemented as public policy. If it is developed without a proper assessment of the resources available in schools - and without an implementation plan that realistically accounts for resource development - classrooms will be unable to support its execution.

Recent feedback and analysis, including a diagnostic review conducted by the National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW), show that curriculum design itself can negatively influence learning outcomes. The extant curriculum has been described as ambitious, overloaded, and irrelevant to the context of a large majority of students. The main reason cited is the inability to use methods that accommodate ground realities - especially those of the learner - in the design. Without clarity on the learner's context in the early years, teacher capacity, classroom realities such as available time, and parental education levels, the curriculum has proven difficult to implement. Teachers have reported difficulties related to the curriculum's ambition, overload, and lack of horizontal and vertical alignment, and have identified the exclusion of these realities as key factors in poor implementation.

7.2 Objective

1. Review and enhance quality and relevance of curriculum to the context and age of child with a sequencing and pacing path built on the initial endowments of children, especially, the home language and environment.
2. Standardize and institutionalize the curriculum review process to ensure it follows the principles of child centered learning design in early years, adopts appropriate pacing

and sequencing approaches as the child progresses in the education system and considers the resource realities and context of delivery and avoids whimsical changes.

7.3 Strategies

1. Review of the current curriculum after completion of a diagnostic process that identifies key issues at all levels.
2. Institutionalize a research based curriculum development process that ensures that the learning design is child centered and cognizant of the resource needs and limitations.
3. Design and implement effective transition strategies from ECE to primary and primary to post primary.
4. Develop and institutionalize a process that links curriculum development in the post primary level with research institutions, employers and Higher Education Commission (HEC) for regular review for inclusion of modern concepts relevant to the changing world and requirements of higher education.

7.4 Review the Current Curriculum

The current curriculum (inclusive of scheme of studies) has a high degree of ambition from very early stages of schooling and is not embedded in the context of the majority of learners. This leads to problem initiated in the early years that become irreversible at some point. The current curriculum, especially, fails to include the child's context in early years – critical to all learning at this stage. Like all skill development processes the key is low expectations and repetition of the basics. Selection of language for teaching and development of literacy is very important. This choice, along with the learning of other content, has to be matched with the household endowments of the child when building expectations or in more technical terms the student learning outcomes. Parental literacy and language usage at home should be the two most important considerations. This is not the case of the current curriculum which has been designed without considering the issues of low-income and low-literacy households as well as the home language advantage.

The overwhelming majority of children in government and low fees private schools are from families that do not fall within the assumptions of the curriculum. This means that these households have lower literacy and limited to no access to learning material beyond the textbooks. Presence of digitized material is low and often not used for learning.
Language choice for classrooms in Islamabad is among the most challenging. The city houses a population that represents the linguistic and ethnic mix of the entire country. This poses a language challenge in the classrooms for teachers. Multiple mother tongues in households with low proficiency in English (and often Urdu) and poor education means that the child in an average classroom of the public sector and low fee private school struggles with the current design of the curriculum. A common language in the classroom for medium of instruction and for literacy development needs to be identified.
Teachers in FDE agreed that Urdu as the language for literacy and learning in early years is the optimal choice. It has a much wider footprint than English. Children from different linguistic communities use it to communicate with each other – so some level of oral proficiency in Urdu is expected among a large percentage of children. The learning expectations of the language, however, will have to be constructed based on the realities in the poor households in ICT. This may mean a higher emphasis on oral learning and delaying the transition to literacy.

Overall, there is a need to simplify the entire curriculum, even after the language issue is resolved. Children in grade 1, for example, do not need to be familiarized with probability and data, as at present, when they continue to struggle with foundational numeracy. This, especially, has to be considered for a few years to come, given that quality early childhood education programmes are available to a very small minority of children only. In the case of all others the first foray into education is in grade 1.

Review and rationalization of curricula beyond primary is also required to align with the changes in lower grades. There are, however, other problems that also need to be rectified. A number of difficult concepts in the current curriculum have been pushed into lower grades for earlier introduction than needed – especially complex concepts in science and mathematics that were (for example) previously included in secondary school are introduced in classes 5th, 6th and 7th. This also needs rationalization. Content has to adjust to the time available. At present there is no congruence as the scheme of studies – a key basic document – was developed after the revision of the curriculum was completed. Teachers interviewed explained that at no stage can they cover more than 60 to 70 percent of the curriculum in the given time.

7.4.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Conduct a Comprehensive Curriculum Diagnostic and Restructuring:** Undertake a detailed diagnostic assessment of the current curriculum to identify critical areas requiring reform. Based on this diagnosis, restructure the scheme of studies, ensuring alignment with available time, resources, and the specific developmental needs of each educational stage.

2. **Rationalize Curriculum to Reduce Ambition and Overload:** Implement a systematic rationalization process to reduce curriculum overload and scope. Prioritize content that is contextually relevant to the child, especially in the early years, and build foundational knowledge at a measured pace that supports effective teaching and learning.

3. **Adopt a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Approach:** Recognizing Urdu as the home language of the majority of children, establish a comprehensive MTB-MLE strategy. Specific implementation measures include:

a. In the early years, given widespread multilingualism and low English proficiency in households, mandate Urdu as the primary medium of instruction in public schools and low-cost private schools.
b. Prioritize oral language development in Urdu to a requisite proficiency level before transitioning to literacy instruction.
c. Apply the same oral-first pedagogical approach to the introduction of English.

4. **Establish a Phased Transition for Language of Instruction:** Maintain Urdu as the primary language of instruction for all subjects from early years through Grade 5 to ensure conceptual clarity and foundational learning before moving to English as the medium of instruction**.**

5. **Introduce English Strategically and Sequentially:** Introduce English as an oral language beginning in Grade 3. Formal literacy in English should commence in Grade 4, allowing for a gradual and developmentally appropriate shift. From Grade 7 onward, transition English to serve as the primary medium of instruction for academic subjects.

7.5 Institutionalise and Strengthen the Review Process

Absence of a standardized, child centered process for curriculum review and limited organizational capacity contribute to development of curricula that add to the teaching-learning difficulties in the classroom.
Although some details were provided in the National Curriculum Framework 2017. These were never officially notified and, therefore, not followed. The review procedure did not consider the diversity in the country (replicated in many ways in ICT) and according to most professionals consulted has an elite bias – i.e it caters more to the realities of the child from households with strong educational and financial endowments. This makes it irrelevant to the learning context of a vast majority of children. To enable ongoing effective review of curricula there is a need to standardize the processes to ensure they cater to diversity. A concomitant requirement is to strengthen the capacity of the National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW). The key to institutionalisation is to prepare rules for operationalisation of the Federal Supervision of Curricula, Text-books and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act 1976.

7.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **1. Establish a Standardized, Research-Based Curriculum Review Process:** The National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW) will mandate and notify a standardized

curriculum review process, which must be grounded in research and include the following requirements:

a. **Scheme of Studies Prerequisite:** Mandate a comprehensive review of the existing Scheme of Studies as a mandatory prerequisite before any revision of the curriculum content is undertaken.

b. **Child-Centered Early Years:** Ensure that curriculum design for early childhood education (ECE) and early primary years is explicitly aligned with child-centered, play-based, and developmentally appropriate pedagogical approaches.

c. **Contextual Transitions:** Design curricula to facilitate a structured transition from foundational learning to more advanced, context-relevant learning needs, ensuring continuity and responsiveness to the child's environment.

d. **Developer Qualifications:** Clearly define and enforce minimum qualifications, expertise, and experience required for all curriculum developers, reviewers, and subject matter experts involved in the process.

e. **Vertical and Horizontal Alignment:** Ensure robust vertical alignment (across grade levels) and horizontal alignment (across subjects within the same grade) to ensure coherence and progression of learning outcomes.

f. **Inclusive Teacher Representation:** Mandate the inclusion of practicing teachers from all levels of public schools and low-cost private schools in the curriculum review bodies to ensure practical feasibility and ground-level relevance.

g. **Resource Feasibility:** Prohibit the inclusion of learning objectives, content, or assessment expectations that cannot be realistically met with the existing available resources (infrastructure, materials, and teacher capacity).

h. **Implementation and Resource Plan:** Mandate the development of a detailed resource needs assessment and an implementation plan alongside every revised curriculum. This plan must include:
    i. A clear timeline for phased roll-out that includes textbook development, teacher training and preparation of assessment frameworks aligned to the curriculum.
    ii. Identifiable indicators for monitoring progress and success.
    iii. A budget and resource allocation strategy for effective delivery.

i. **Reflected in Rules:** The process developed will be incorporated as rules for implementation of Federal Supervision of Curricula, Text-books and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act 1976.

2. **Create a Policy Framework for Curriculum Review Cycles:** The NCCW will prepare a comprehensive policy that governs the curriculum review process, specifically defining:
    a. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clear delineation of duties for all stakeholders (NCCW, provincial bodies, subject experts, teacher representatives).

b. **Drivers for Review:** The criteria and triggers for initiating a curriculum review (e.g., fixed time periods, emergence of new knowledge domains, technological shifts, or changes in national priorities).
c. **Feedback and Monitoring:** Develop a systematic feedback mechanism between the NCCW, FDE, PEIRA and schools in both the public and private sectors. This framework should allow for collection on implementation challenges and successes to inform future revisions.

3. **3. Strengthen the Structure and Capacity of the NCCW:** To meet the enhanced requirements of systematic review and ongoing monitoring of curriculum implementation, it is recommended that the **structure, human resources, and technical capacity** of the National Curriculum Council Wing be strengthened. This will include:
    a. Recruitment of specialized personnel in curriculum research, assessment, and implementation science.
    b. Dedicated units for monitoring and evaluation of curriculum roll-out.
    c. Provision of tools, technology, and protocols for continuous curriculum tracking and support.

7.5.2 Emerging Concepts in the Curricula

Curricula respond to new discoveries in various subjects and the emerging realities of a changing world. Sciences normally witness the maximum changes. Two most significant areas in the modern world are environmental issues resulting from climate change and the rapid changes in the digital technologies, now evolving into the arena of generative artificial intelligence. The usual methods of curriculum development (which need to be changed anyway) will not be applicable to inclusion of these two areas and other changes in more science oriented topics. It requires multisectoral teams, including specialists, teachers and learning scientists, for inclusion of these concepts in curricula across grades and subjects.

7.5.3 Policy Recommendations

Dedicated Groups for Inclusion of New Areas: To ensure the national curriculum remains current, age-appropriate, and globally competitive, it is recommended that the National Council for Curriculum Wing (NCCW) establish three dedicated Review Groups for the following domains: (1) Sciences, (2) Environmental Issues, and (3) Digitization (including Artificial Intelligence). These Review Groups would provide the NCCW with evidence-based, annually updated recommendations, ensuring that the curriculum evolves dynamically in response to scientific progress, environmental urgency, and rapid technological change. Their work will support a balanced, forward-looking education system that prepares learners for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Mandate and Functions:

Each Review Group will be tasked with the following core responsibilities:

1. **Annual Curriculum Review on Climate Change, Sciences and Technology Integration:** Conduct an annual assessment of curriculum content on climate change, science

and technology integration as per their respective mandates to identify and recommend the inclusion of emerging concepts, technologies, and methodologies where necessary.

2. **Age-Appropriate Technology Integration:** Critically evaluate and determine the optimal age for introducing technology - both as a subject of learning (e.g., coding, AI literacy) and as a tool for learning (e.g., digital pedagogy, adaptive learning platforms). This assessment will prioritize developmental readiness, cognitive safety, ethical risks and equity of access.

3. **International Benchmarking:** Undertake systematic, ongoing study of curricula and best practices from leading educational jurisdictions worldwide on the emerging themes and sciences. This comparative analysis should inform recommendations for adapting proven approaches to the national context.

7.6 Textbooks

Quality of textbooks as learning material have also been highlighted as poor by teachers. To an extent their difficulty level is determined by the unrealistic expectations of the curriculum. Low quality of textbooks accentuate the difficulties of teaching and learning of an ambitious and overloaded curriculum. Textbooks that are not user friendly. Among other weaknesses, textbooks have a high degree of difficulty in vocabulary with a horizontal disconnect across subjects. This means that the language benchmarked in one subject (for example English) is exceeded when used in another (like science). There are also issues of vertical alignment where concepts in a given level do not gradually shift to the next grade. There is often a major jump. Illustrations also, especially, in early years are not in the context of the child. Number of topics is excessive and individual chapters are heavy.
There is no assessment of the textbooks' volume to align it with the time available in the academic year and sometimes even the requirement of the curriculum. This problem is not limited to individual subjects but the whole set of textbooks for a given grade make learning very time consuming – beyond the time realistically available during the academic year. Similar to the curriculum the problem lies in absence of a structured process of textbook development. Textbooks are not tested for relevance and quality in the field before approval and often the National Book Foundation (NBF) is placed under time pressure to produce textbooks (again an outcome of a well-defined, child centered, textbooks development process not being notified). In addition, authors, illustrators and reviewers are not trained for the purpose of development of age appropriate textbooks and effective conversion of curriculum needs into learning material. Most authors are not familiar with the requirements of development of textbooks for children of different ages and the alignment of learning with the expectations of the curriculum. Without standardization, training of authors and following internationally accepted processes for textbook development and review these important inputs will remain of low learning value to teachers and students. To enable the above, the current capacity of the National Book Foundation (NBF) will also need to be reviewed.

7.7 Objectives

Develop child centred textbooks that function as effective, user friendly, learning material.

7.8 Strategies

1. A standardized textbook development and review process built on international practices.
2. Strengthened capacity of the National Book Foundation (NBF) to develop quality textbooks.

7.9 Policy Recommendations

1. **Standardize the Textbook Development and Review Process:** The Government shall mandate a standardized, evidence-based process for the development and review of textbooks, aligned with international best practices. This revised process must be formally notified and shall include the following mandatory features:
   a. Professional Development: Mandate formal, certified training for all textbook authors and reviewers to ensure they possess the pedagogical expertise required to prepare age-appropriate learning material.
   b. **Pre-Certification Field Testing:** Require compulsory field testing of all draft textbooks in select classrooms before the issuance of the final No Objection Certificate (NOC). Publishers must be obligated to address feedback from the field tests and provide documented evidence of corrective measures taken.

2. **Establish a Certified Training Program for Authors and Reviewers:** The relevant ministry will collaborate with one or more accredited universities to develop and deliver standardized training courses for textbook authors and reviewers at all levels (primary, secondary, and higher secondary). These courses will be university-certified. Consequently, selection as a textbook author will be contingent upon holding this university certification, in addition to fulfilling all other established professional criteria.
3. **Implement a Structured, Annualized Feedback Mechanism**: A formal and transparent feedback mechanism will be established and officially notified. This mechanism must include the periodic collection of qualitative and quantitative data from a representative sample of teachers and head teachers from both public and private sector schools. Feedback on textbook content, usability, and effectiveness will be solicited at least once per academic year, and the findings must be systematically analyzed and used to inform future revisions.

2. **Strengthen the National Book Foundation (NBF):** A comprehensive capacity review of the National Book Foundation (NBF) will be conducted to assess its ability to oversee the development of high-quality textbooks. Based on the findings of this review, the government will formulate and fund a detailed implementation plan to enhance the human resources, technical expertise, and institutional capabilities of the NBF, enabling it to effectively perform its oversight and quality assurance mandate.

7.10 Inclusion as a Theme

Inclusion is a theme that cuts across the entire curriculum and through all textbooks. Curricula and textbooks aim to address attitudes and biases that exclude groups on different markers of identity, including, faith. Similar to technology and environmental issues, inclusive content cannot be prepared without the support of specialists. These teams have to be involved in all curriculum and textbooks content. The policy recognises the following key areas for inclusion in the curriculum and textbooks. The list is not exhaustive and options for additions should remain open.

1. Inclusion of the socially and economically marginalised.
2. Gender inclusion.
3. Inter-faith and intra faith inclusion
4. Disability inclusion.
5. Multicultural and linguistic inclusion for national cohesion will also be adde as themes. The cultures, languages and stories of different regions will be included at the age-appropriate level to be celebrated as diversity of colours that unify the Pakistani identity.

7.10.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a Mandatory Inclusion Framework for Curriculum Development**: To ensure systematic and consistent integration of inclusivity, the following procedural reforms are recommended:
    a. **Develop a Binding Inclusion Framework:** Prior to any future curriculum revision, the NCCW will develop a comprehensive **Inclusion Framework**. This framework will serve as a binding, non-negotiable guide for all content developers, textbook authors, and curriculum designers.
    b. **Specialist Pre-Approval Review:** All draft curricula and textbooks will undergo a mandatory pre-approval review by a panel of inclusion specialists. No curriculum or textbook will be approved for use unless it demonstrably aligns with the Inclusion Framework.
    c. **Integrate Inclusion into Teacher Training:** All pre-service and in-service teacher training programs for curriculum and textbook implementation must include dedicated modules on inclusive pedagogy. These modules should equip teachers to address sensitive themes, manage diverse classrooms, and effectively use the inclusive content provided.

2. **Mandatory Content Coverage for Inclusive Themes**: All curriculum and textbook content must explicitly and systematically address the following five dimensions of inclusion, reflecting the values of faith, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
    a. **Socio-Economic Inclusion (Addressing Hierarchy and Marginalization):** Content must directly challenge the entrenched social and economic hierarchies that marginalize individuals and households. It shall explicitly

teach the principle of fundamental human equality, as enshrined in Islamic teachings, the Constitution of Pakistan, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Examples, case studies, and narratives should celebrate social mobility, economic justice, and the dignity of all labour.

b. **Gender Inclusion (Beyond Binary Frameworks):** Content must critically address and dismantle gender stereotypes in all spheres (home, workplace, public life). It will promote the importance of equal opportunities and full inclusion in society and economic activities, without prejudice. This inclusion will explicitly cover not only women and men but also transgender, ensuring their representation and dignity are respected.
c. **Inter-Faith and Intra-Faith Inclusion (Promoting Religious Harmony):** Curricula and textbooks will include themes, stories, and depictions that actively celebrate the contributions of religious minorities to Pakistan's history and development. Content must foster respect and understanding across the diverse schools of thought within Islam promoting intra-faith harmony. The goal is to increase social cohesion, both across different faiths and within the Muslim community.
d. **Disability Inclusion):** Disability inclusion will be treated as a cross-cutting principle, not merely a separate unit. (Note: Specific operational details, including educational accommodations and accessibility, are addressed in detail in Chapter 6 of the relevant policy document.). Textbooks will feature diverse representations of persons with disabilities in active, capable, and non-stereotypical roles. Language and imagery will avoid pity-based or inspirational narratives, instead normalizing the presence and contributions of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.
e. **Multicultural and Linguistic Inclusion (Strengthening National Cohesion):** Content shall celebrate Pakistan's rich cultural and linguistic diversity as a source of national strength and unity. Age-appropriate themes, stories, folklore, and historical accounts from all regions of Pakistan will be included. The message will be that different cultures, languages, and traditions shall be presented as "diverse colours" that together form a unified and vibrant Pakistani identity, thereby, fostering national cohesion.

8 Quality of Education: Teachers and Teaching Quality

Teacher competence is most often assessed by student outcomes. However, when a curriculum is misaligned with students' contexts and is overloaded beyond the time and resources available, poor learning outcomes cannot be attributed solely to teacher competence. Other contributing factors include textbooks that are difficult to teach, overcrowded classrooms, an emphasis on syllabus completion rather than student learning from supervisors, and generally weak mentoring. A teacher is an employee of an organization - whether the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) or a private school - and their performance, on a scale, reflects the quality of the entire system's output.

The recruitment system used by the FDE, along with its access to a larger educated population for teacher selection, means that, on average, the quality of teachers in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) is better than that in the provinces.

Regardless of the quality of teachers recruited, sustained performance (beyond the quality of the products and processes already mentioned) requires ongoing professional development, provision of resources, and morale building through the inclusion of teachers in decisions that affect their professional performance. In recent years, the FDE has implemented sustainable training mechanisms through technology-based training products for both newly inducted and existing teachers. The Professional Development Framework prepared by the FDE comprehensively covers training requirements and, to incentivize effectiveness, links these to teacher promotions. The Framework also provides training modules for school heads. As the process is still in its early stages of implementation, this policy does not add further recommendations for its improvement, except support through provision of resources, ongoing review of the model and capacity enhancement for effective delivery. Other areas that impact teacher performance and morale, such as inclusion and professional recognition, require greater attention. It also calls for a review of the career structure and related incentives.

The situation in private schools is less clear. Support systems to enhance the competence and performance of private school teachers vary by school type and are weakest in low-cost private schools, which enrol the largest number of students. Given that the quality of teaching and learning is the responsibility of the state, and that private schools remain a very important component of education delivery in ICT, policy responses are needed to improve teacher competence in this sector. Regulatory support and opportunities for professional development for these teachers should be taken up by the government. Policy recommendations to this effect have been discussed in more detail.

8.1 Teachers in FDE

Teachers in FDE have a number of advantages when compared to their counterparts in the provinces. Firstly, all schools have head teachers, which are missing in the provinces in the case of primary schools. The student teacher ratio is relatively better and teacher training opportunities are available. Recent recruitment drives have reduced the shortages of teachers drastically. The criterion used by FDE is 1.5 teachers per section in primary and 1.7 per section of secondary. While this is the aspired ratio, it cannot be followed in all schools as

some are overcrowded while others have low enrolments. Recent recruitment drives have reduced shortages though the number of teachers remain below the required in Urdu and English.
There are variations in working conditions, depending on whether they are operating in rural or urban areas. In the former transport to schools, the general conditions of school buildings and students from relatively poorer households add to the challenge of teaching.

8.2 Objective

Enhance the competence and capacity of teachers schools in ICT, both FDE and private schools.

8.3 Strategies

1. Provision of resources and supportive policies to implement the Professional Development Framework.
2. Provide increased weightage to pre-service teacher education in recruitment.
3. Ongoing improvement of PDF through periodic reviews.
4. Enhance teacher effectiveness through their inclusion in policies that impact their professional environment and work.
5. Improve quality of teacher professional development in private schools.
6. Standardize teacher professionalism through introduction of a licensing regime.

8.4 Support to PDF

For the Professional Development Framework (PDF) developed by the FDE to be successfully implemented, an early rollout based on its Action Plan is essential. To ensure long-term sustainability, ongoing provision of resources - particularly on the recurrent side - will be necessary. The Framework links promotions to the successful completion of training modules, which will require changes to teachers' service rules. Once implemented, the PDF will need continuous review to assess its effectiveness, identify gaps, and drive improvement. The Framework already includes a built-in evaluation mechanism which will help enhance its performance. However, a more comprehensive, periodic assessment (including a review of the Framework's design) should be added to support context-based, sustainable changes. Although the Training Wing has been established to oversee implementation, a thorough capacity assessment of the Wing is needed, and corresponding resources must be allocated to sustain its work. Additionally, the training modules will require revision once the curriculum is updated, and funds for this purpose should be planned in advance—likely required by fiscal year 2028–29.

8.4.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Structured Budgetary Requirements:** Develop and submit a comprehensive document outlining the recurrent and developmental budgetary requirements for the Framework's rollout over the next five years. Once approved, these requirements should be integrated into the

annual budgetary exercise in accordance with established rules.

2. **Link CPD with Incentives:** Submit formal proposals to the Establishment Division for the revision of teachers' service rules, specifically to incorporate Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements and to establish clear linkages between CPD participation and promotional incentives.

3. **Develop a Robust Review Model:** Design and implement a more robust review model to assess the policy-level effectiveness of the Professional Development Framework (PDF). This model should build upon the evaluation processes already embedded within the existing Framework.

4. **Capacity Strenthening of Training Wing:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the Training Wing's capacity needs to enhance its effectiveness in implementing, overseeing, and reviewing the CPD model. Based on this assessment, prepare and execute a targeted capacity development plan.

8.5 Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness depends on morale, resources, and capacity. While capacity-building processes have been developed and some are already underway, teacher morale remains a weak area. Morale has been a major issue, and resource constraints are another significant factor influencing teacher effectiveness.

Teachers are not treated as professionals whose valuable experience can contribute to education policy, design, and implementation. As a result, they are often required to implement policies, curricula, textbooks, and assessment systems that have not incorporated their feedback. Consequently, these products frequently do not align with the needs of students and classrooms. Without regular and structured inclusion of teachers in professional feedback mechanisms, the effectiveness of these processes and products will remain below par, and the absence of voice will continue to suppress teacher morale further.

In addition, ongoing reviews of resource requirements in schools and facilitation for teachers should be conducted. These should especially include the provision of daycare centers and, where needed, transport facilities for teachers—particularly female teachers posted in rural areas. Finally, the difficult area of teacher promotion requires more in-depth analysis to find solutions that enhance incentives for teachers while remaining within the government's financial capabilities.

8.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Teachers' Committees for Feedback on Quality Inputs:** FDE will constitute and notify teacher bodies in all areas for primary, middle and secondary and higher secondary to provide regular feedback on curriculum, textbooks, assessments and examinations and continuous professional development.
    a. The bodies will hold one meeting each quarter and provide written feedback on the set of questions provided plus also have the provision to give out additional information.
    b. These bodies will constitute of senior teachers from schools in each area and be separate for each level.
    c. PEIRA will suggest names from private schools for inclusion in the body.
2. **Head Teachers' Committee for Feedback on Quality Inputs:** Head teachers committee will also be notified by FDE in each area to provide feedback on quality inputs used in the classroom including curriculum and textbooks. Representation from private sector will be recommended by PEIRA.
3. **Feedback on High Stakes Examinations:** Annual meeting of principals of secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges will be held to provide feedback on the high stakes examinations of FBISE after every regular annual examination cycle. Documentation of the feedback will be provided to FDE for onward submission of FBISE. The latter may request interactive sessions with the principals on the basis of the findings of the report.
4. **Provision of Teacher Facilities:** An audit of each school will be completed by FDE to assess requirements of teachers' facilities including staff room, WASH, day care centres and transport. Based on the audit, an implementation plan be developed to enhance the provision of these facilities on a prioritized needs basis.
5. **Review of Promotion Rules:** A committee of senior teachers, head teachers and principals will be constituted to prepare recommendations for amendment to promotion rules of teachers.

8.6 Teacher Quality in Private Schools

Teacher quality varies across private school types, depending on the recruitment and professional development processes available. These schools can be broadly categorized into three types: elite school systems, franchised institutions, and low-cost schools. The policy's primary concern lies with low-cost schools at present.
Franchise schools operate at a medium fee level under franchises granted by some elite school systems. They primarily serve middle- to low-income households. To protect the brand's reputation, the franchising school systems enforce standardized and regulated operations. Unlike their franchising organizations, these schools follow the national curriculum, and their students sit for examinations conducted by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE).

Given the policy's overarching goal of engaging the private sector to improve educational quality for all children, supporting teacher professional development will be a critical area of focus. This is especially relevant for teachers in low-cost schools.

8.7 Objective

Strengthen teacher quality in private schools in Islamabad.

8.8 Strategies

Study the current situation of teacher training in private institutions.
Develop a need based professional development support programme for private institutions.

8.9 Improving CPD in Private Schools

Elite school systems have well established professional development systems suited to the needs of examination systems followed by each chain: O and A Levels etc. These systems have of professional development have also been introduced in the franchised schools, however, their compatibility with the needs of the national curriculum is unclear. The problem is in the case of low cost private schools that cater to low income households. These schools do not have any teacher training processes in place and require maximum handholding.

8.9.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Mandate a Comprehensive Review:** The Training Wing of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), in coordination with the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA), will conduct a systematic review of existing teacher competency standards and professional development (PD) structures within private schools in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

2. **Design a Targeted Intervention Programme:** Based on the findings of the aforementioned review, the FDE will design a structured professional development programme specifically tailored for private schools identified as requiring support to meet minimum quality standards.

3. **Establish a PPP-Based Funding Model:** The FDE, in consultation with PEIRA, will develop a sustainable costing model - rooted in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework - for the implementation of the designed programme. This model will be regulated by PEIRA and delivered in collaboration with an accredited private partner.

4. **Facilitate Access to Digital Training Resources:** The existing digitized training modules developed by the FDE will be

made readily accessible to all private schools that formally enroll in the professional development programme.

5. **Institutionalize the Support Process:** PEIRA will formulate and promulgate a dedicated policy to institutionalize the process of providing systematic support to private sector schools in Islamabad, in accordance with the recommendations outlined above.

8.10Technology Integration in Teaching and Learning

Use of technology in teaching and learning has expanded in public schools. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) has prepared a roadmap for technology integration in the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). Integration had already started, especially, during the COVID 19 pandemic. The following digital interventions are under current implementation in schools in FDE.

1. Smart classrooms and interactive screens in 140 smart classrooms with 235 interactive screens installed. These are clicker enabled classrooms to enhance teaching and learning.
2. Connected classrooms: 40 to 50 classrooms are currently connected via the programme.
3. IT Labs: There are 78 IT labs in rural/urban schools. Now under a PSDP project 30 latest computer labs have been set up. 22,000 chrome books have been distributed ajd 2 centres of excellence have been set up.
4. Robotics/Steam Labs: 8 labs established with World Bank's support and corporate social responsibility contributions.
5. Digital platforms: These have been provided in the form digital content, teleschool applications with 6 digital TV channels, VOD libraries with 80,000 plus registered users. In addition an e-Taleem LMS is operation for in school and out of school children. Synchronous teaching for remote schools with limited teacher availability is also operational.
6. Teacher training under the NIETE programme (already discussed above) is implemented through online training courses.

Tech/coding fellows provided by the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) provide support in teaching coding, AI, blockchain and other emerging technologies. Currently 150 tech fellows and 87 coding fellows work in select piloted schools.
The state of technology availability in public schools of FDE is shown in Table 10. A large percentage of schools still lack availability of digital facilities. Internet is available for pedagogical purposes in only 54% , facilities for students in 35% and for teachers in 44% schools. This shows the limitations of these schools in implementation of technology enabled learning.

Table 10: State of Digital Facilities in FDE

	Boys	Girls	Total
Schools with ICT Facilities for Online Teaching	35%	53%	44%
Schools with ICT Facilities for Students for Pedagogical Purposes	26%	45%	35%
Schools with Internet for Pedagogical Purposes	51.5%	55.5%	53.9%

Recently a curriculum on Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been introduced which is taught from early childhood education onwards.

The integration of technology in schools is a necessity of our time; however, it is essential to evaluate current interventions from multiple perspectives:

1. Learner benefit: Research on learning through technology (including AI) indicates that direct individual screen use should be avoided in primary classes. For post-primary levels, there is no conclusive evidence on the benefits or drawbacks. These findings carry significant policy implications. While the policy advocates for the use of technology, it urges caution: this use must be moderated by a careful understanding of potential unintended consequences on students' cognitive, social, and other skills.

2. School preparedness: Effective technology integration requires thorough school preparedness. This begins with adequate infrastructure—such as electricity, internet connectivity, and equipment—and extends to teacher preparedness, as well as the capacity of head teachers to support learning both about and through technology.

3. **Equity considerations**: It is crucial to ensure that technological facilities expand equitably to all schools and learners. This principle is already embedded in the roadmap for technology integration.

4. Cybersecurity and data protection: The use of digital media inevitably raises concerns around cybersecurity and data protection. These issues become even more pressing when the data involved belongs to children.

5. Sustainability and institutional coordination: A major gap remains in sustainability and the lack of effective institutional coordination. Currently, there is no central organization with the capacity to coordinate all related efforts, ensure follow-up services, and guarantee the security and long-term sustainability of the processes already introduced and implemented.

8.10.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Evidence-Based Integration of Technology in Pedagogy:** The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), in coordination with the National Council for Curriculum Wing (NCCW), will ensure that the integration of technology (including AI) in teaching and learning occurs within a research-supported, safe, and developmentally appropriate environment. To this end, the FDE and NCCW will:
    a. Review international best practices regarding technology integration in schools.
    b. Engage learning scientists and child psychologists to evaluate all ongoing technology programmes for unintended consequences on cognition, psycho-social development, and other critical aspects of child development.

c. Ethical risks and mitigation in use of AI.
d. Revise approaches based on research findings and expert advice.

2. **Developmentally Appropriate Principles for Technology Learning:** Based on established research and expert recommendations, the FDE will adopt the following principles for technology learning. The Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) will enforce these standards in private schools regarding Information and Communication Technology (ICT):
    a. Discontinue the use of screen time in primary classrooms, including Early Childhood Education (ECE).
    b. Introduce digital literacy in classrooms only after students have achieved strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills in the traditional paper and pencil based approach. As per the curriculum, this shall commence no earlier than a stage beyond Grade 5, when the child has developed the ability to "read to learn."

3. **School Preparedness and Phased Implementation Plan:** The FDE will identify specific needs for school preparedness and develop a fully costed plan to ensure that all schools are ready for technology integration (within the safeguards and recommendations of FDE through the process outlined above) by **2028**. At this point, the integration process will have been revised based on the structured review recommended in Point 1.

4. **Teacher Competency Framework:** Following the revision of the technology integration design (as per recommendation 3), the FDE will develop a comprehensive **Teacher Competency Framework for Technology Integration (including AI)** to ensure educators are adequately trained and supported.
Teachers expected to use technology for teaching will be trained as per the framework prepared.

5. **Establishment of an "FDE EdTech" Cell:** An "FDE EdTech" Cell will be established to oversee strategy, partnerships, and the implementation of all digital initiatives, guided by the overarching technology integration framework developed through the above process. The EdTech Cell will be responsible for developing and enforcing:
    a. Data protection protocols.
    b. Secure network infrastructure.
    c. Digital literacy campaigns focused on cyber safety.
    d. Any other related intervention.

9 Assessments and Examination

Assessments and examinations are core of the education process. They come in several forms: formative assessments used by teachers to improve classroom instruction; summative assessments in schools that measure student learning; high-stakes summative assessments, such as those conducted by boards of examination; and finally, systemic diagnostic assessments, which evaluate the learning situation in schools and identify the causes behind performance outcomes.

All education professionals, including consulted higher education officials, agree that even successful candidates often rely primarily on rote learning to pass exams. The main blame for this is typically placed on high-stakes examinations. However, this represents a limited view of the problem. The suppression of critical and analytical ability begins much earlier in the educational journey. Flaws exist in all school-level assessments—both formative and summative. In particular, teachers are not trained in the use of formative assessment, which is crucial for improving the teaching-learning process. This shortcoming may be partly due to an overloaded curriculum that leaves little room for teaching concepts and analytical thinking. Nevertheless, feedback consistently indicates that teachers lack training in developing quality assessments, whether formative or summative.

In addition to routine school examinations, the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) conducts centralized examinations at the end of Class 8. These were halted for two years but have since been restarted. Prepared by FDE teachers, these exams primarily test knowledge and, to some extent, comprehension, but do not assess analytical ability. This highlights the need for a systemic review of assessments and examinations within the school system. The quality of assessment in low-cost private schools is no better than in FDE schools, and given their teachers often have weaker qualifications and training, the entire system tends to test for and encourage rote learning. An Assessment Framework has been prepared by FDE. It needs more effective and targeted roll out.

Unfortunately, the problem of limited capacity extends to high-stakes examinations as well. On a positive note, examination boards across the country have recently agreed on a framework to move toward assessment items that discourage rote learning. Among them, the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) has progressed most rapidly, now testing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) instead of simply repeating textbook-based questions. However, these reforms are not synchronized with classroom teaching and learning processes. As a result, a whole-of-system reform is needed. The FBISE alone cannot transform classroom instruction, and the present pace of reform has raised the difficulty level too quickly.

Finally, diagnostic assessments deserve attention. The Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) conducts these annually across the country, including in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and publishes the results as the National Achievement Tests (NAT). These exams have produced useful analytics on correlations between teaching practices, results, and other variables. The main problem, however, is that this diagnostic data is not effectively used for systemic improvement. In fact, none of the datasets produced by any examinations or assessments - regardless of their quality - are used for analysis or policy review. This includes the large datasets generated each year by the FBISE. Irrespective of the quality of the exams themselves, the data held by the Board holds great potential for system analysis and for drawing lessons that could improve the education system as a whole.

9.1 Objective(s)

1. Enhance quality of all assessments at all levels: schools, FDE and FBISE

2. Utilise information procured from examinations, especially, the diagnostic assessments to improve the teaching-learning process and education policies in general

9.2 Strategies

1. Development of structured and capacitated systems to strengthen quality of assessments in schools.
2. Reform of the examinations conducted by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education conducting quality examinations.

9.2.1 Structured and Capacitated Assessment System

Low teacher capacity in assessments can be reduced by combination of training and handholding. A specialized unit within FDE should be set up to target assessment improvements. This should firstly prepare an assessment framework for schools. This should be followed by development of assessment items (an item bank) for each relevant level and finally specialized training should be provided to teachers and head teachers on development and use of formative and summative assessments. The current digital training module developed for teachers does have the capacity to develop test items but without effective training they may not have a sustained impact without infusion of the practice of prioritization of quality assessments in schools. It is important to train head teachers as they have the maximum influence on classroom practices and are in the best position to mentor quality assessments in their schools. As written tests are not conducted in earlier grades the training should be supplemented with videos that guide teachers in real time or authentic assessments in earlier grades. For the centralized assessments in grades 5th and 8th separate item banks will need to be developed. These should be tested for validity and reliability before being added to the bank. The same can be used for these examinations. These item banks, the assessments products produced by the teacher support modules and the trainings should align along an assessment framework prepared in line with the requirements of the curriculum and the need to shift towards analytical testing – to eventually eradicate rote learning processes.

9.2.2 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a Dedicated Assessment Unit:** The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) will establish a specialized unit to oversee the continuous improvement of assessments and examinations across all schools, including the centralized examinations conducted at the Grade 8 level.

2. **Shift Towards Critical-Analytical Testing:** In alignment with the ICT assessment framework, the FDE shall guide the development of assessment structures, processes, and

products for use in schools and teacher trainings. This framework will prioritize a gradual transition from rote memorization toward the testing and development of critical and analytical abilities. The FDE will also conduct targeted trainings on formative and summative assessments tailored to the specific learning requirements of each level within the training modules developed on the basis of the "Assessment Framework".

3. **Strengthen In-School Assessment Quality:** To enhance the quality of ongoing in-school assessments, the FDE shall implement the following measures:
    a. **Empower School Leadership:** Include head teachers in all relevant training programs and hold them accountable for the quality and integrity of assessments conducted in their respective schools. Every head teacher will undergo training to support the process of quality assessments in schools.
    b. **Support Early-Grade Assessment:** Develop instructional videos to guide teachers in early grades on the effective use of observational and authentic assessment methods.
    c. **Standardize Assessment Knowledge:** Produce videos that clearly explain core concepts and methods of assessment for all grades after the early years.
    d. **Build a Validated Item Bank:** Develop a centralized item bank by training a select group of teachers in high-quality item writing. All items will undergo rigorous testing for validity and reliability before being included in the bank for each learning level. The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) will establish a specialized unit to oversee the continuous improvement of assessments and examinations across all schools, including the centralized examinations conducted at the Grade 8 level.

9.3 Enhance Quality of the FBISE Examinations

Reforms have been introduced in the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Examinations (FBISE) in the last few years. These include development of questions that test cognitive development and not just rote learning. While it is important to shift from rote based to conceptual learning, transforming the examinations from textbooks based to SLO base at a fast pace is counterproductive. Many students find it difficult to cope with the new format of the examination. Part of the problem also lies in the increased difficulty level of the revised curriculum. There is as much a need to change teaching-learning processes as the examinations. Without a concomitant change children without support from tuition academies will find it difficult to cope with FBISE examinations. The direction of reform should continue at a slower pace. The assessment framework developed for implementation in FDE and the reform in FBISE should be aligned and paced in a coordinated manner where improved examinations are matched by requisite changes in the teaching learning process. Even as these improvements are targeted the quality of examinations in FBISE need further improvements through adoption of processes that produce quality examination papers. This will require training of examiners, development of item banks tested for validity and reliability and continuous improvement of the overall capacity to conduct quality examinations by Board. All this within the proviso that the pace of reforms should align with the changes in the teaching practices.

9.3.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a Permanent Coordination Mechanism between FBISE and FDE**: To ensure cohesion between examination reform and pedagogical capacity, a permanent, ongoing coordination mechanism shall be established between the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) and the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). The primary function of this mechanism shall be to align FBISE's reform initiatives with the assessment framework and training modules developed by the FDE's Training Wing. This will ensure that curriculum goals, teacher training, and student assessment are mutually reinforcing rather than operating in isolation.

2. **Develop a Joint, Phased 5-Year Reform Agenda with School-Level Feedback Loops**: To reconcile the pace of reform with the operational capacity of schools, a five-year

joint reform agenda will be developed collaboratively by FBISE and FDE,. This agenda will define clear roles, responsibilities, and milestone targets. A continuous review process - inclusive of school heads - will be institutionalized to adjust the speed of reform implementation according to school-level limitations. Concurrently, schools will be supported to enhance their capacity to evolve classroom teaching and learning in line with reform requirements. The objective is to ensure that the goal of high-quality, standardized examinations is successfully achieved without overwhelming the school system and potential pushback for the agena itself.

3. **Strengthen FBISE Examination Quality through Rigorous Input and Process**: **Standards**: FBISE will improve the quality and validity of its examinations by strengthening the inputs and processes used for the development and evaluation of assessment items. Specifically, FBISE shall undertake the following actions:

    a. **Mandatory Examiner Training:** Train all examiners selected for paper development in the creation and evaluation of test items that are strictly aligned with the curriculum and paced in accordance with the assessment framework agreed with FDE.

    b. **Certification System for Examiners:** Introduce a formal certification system whereby only examiners who have undergone approved training and achieved certification are eligible for selection and deployment in examination-related duties.

    c. **Curriculum-Aligned Item Bank:** Develop a comprehensive item bank that is fully aligned with the

curriculum and synchronized with the pacing of reforms outlined in the assessment framework agreed with FDE.

d. **Validity and Reliability Testing:** Subject all test items to rigorous validity and reliability testing prior to inclusion in the item bank, thereby ensuring that only technically sound items are used in the construction of examination papers

9.4 Use of Assessment and Examinations Information

Assessments, irrespective of quality, provide valuable information on the learning of children system performance. These are not only numbers demonstrating performance of students in various subjects but also, in good examination systems, examiners provide qualitative reports on the performance. The practice has been discontinued in FBISE. The Board, however, even without these reports has a rich volume of longitudinal data that has remained underutilized for research and analysis – and reforms consequent to the findings. The same holds true for the centralized examinations conducted by FDE. Similarly, the diagnostic assessments conducted by PIE are also sub-optimally utilized for systemic learning and reforms. PIE is conducting, sample based, diagnostic assessments for grades 4 and 8, Literacy and Numeracy Assessments (LANA). The assessments cover foundational learning through the Foundational Literacy Study (FLS) conducted once every two years. The use of this data for in depth policy review is limited.

9.5 Policy Recommendations

1. **Data-Sharing Protocols for Research Purposes:** The Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) and the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) will develop standardized protocols for sharing non-personal, anonymized data with universities and authorized research institutions. These protocols will uphold stringent personal privacy protections and comply with applicable data protection laws to facilitate evidence-based educational research.

2. **Analysis of Annual High-Stakes Examination Data:** The Policy Research Wing (PRW) of the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) will conduct an annual analysis of at least one high-stakes examination per year. Each analysis will produce a comprehensive report that includes actionable recommendations for improvement in curriculum design, assessment practices, and related educational areas.

3. **Qualitative Reporting by Examiners:** All examiners of FBISE will receive mandatory training in the development of qualitative assessment reports. These reports will be compiled annually and made publicly available to promote transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the examination system.
4. **Use of Diagnostic Data:** Diagnostic data produced by various assessments conducted by PIE will be used by FDE, NCCW and other relevant organisations for review of their policies. The analysis on which policy changes are made will mandatorily connect the findings, where relevant, with the results of the diagnostic assessments.

.

10 Child Welfare, Health and Nutrition

The policy prioritizes child well-being as the most essential component of a child-centered approach. Well-being is a fundamental right and lies at the heart of any system aiming to provide quality education to all learners. Unfortunately, poor health, lack of nutrition, and exposure to abuse remain harsh realities. Incidents of abuse occur not only within schools but also outside their premises—in social spaces, communities, and at home. Despite protective laws, child rights are poorly implemented. Although corporal punishment is banned in schools, it has still not been eliminated in practice. Similarly, school facilities remain inadequate to meet students' needs, even in Islamabad where the situation is relatively better. Many children enter school suffering from short-term hunger and even nutritional deficiencies, which impair cognitive development and learning. Physical education, sports, and other co-curricular activities have also declined. All these issues infringe upon children's rights—as guaranteed by the Constitution and other laws—and they negatively impact learning ability and school continuity.

These challenges begin even before a child enters school. State-supported child health interventions start at the prenatal stage. Government policy includes immunization after childbirth, recording data on stunting, and developing interventions to eliminate it. Yet, stunting remains the most serious child health issue in Pakistan. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2018, the prevalence of stunting in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) was 32.6%. While this figure is lower than the national average of 40.2%, it remains alarmingly high and a critical priority for policy action. Every issue affecting a child—both before and during school years—falls within the concern of education authorities. Therefore, this policy adopts a holistic approach to the management of child well-being.

10.1 Objectives

1. Ensure child well-being within and outside school.
2. Strengthen health care and nutrition for children in ICT to help them develop physically and cognitively as per their age.
3. Make school environments completely child friendly
4. Support child nutrition healthcare and physical activities through the school years to improve schooling outcomes.

10.2 Strategies:

1. Regular data collection on child health in pre-school and school levels for identification of key problems with the purpose to provide support for health and nutrition and eliminate stunting.
2. Coordination with other relevant organisations to develop a multisectoral approach to child well being that address, in particular, abuse, health and nutrition.
3. Continue, expand and strengthen the school meals programme.

4. Develop pscyhomotor skills of the child through inclusion in curriculum and provision of facilities in schools.
5. Encourage physical exercise, especially, through sports in all schools.

10.3 Pre- School Health Care and Stunting Prevention

YiuyuStunting is one of the most serious conditions affecting children's health, school performance, and life opportunities. Research shows that the first 8,000 days of a child's life - from conception to adulthood - are critical for shaping lifelong health outcomes. This evidence highlights the need for targeted interventions starting from the prenatal stage. However, the most critical window for prevention is the first 1,000 days. If stunting persists beyond age two, it becomes largely irreversible, with lasting impacts on physical and cognitive development. While this early stage falls outside the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry remains an important stakeholder in child welfare. Even at this stage, it can play a role—by using the curriculum and textbooks as tools to raise awareness about practices that reduce stunting.
Children with stunting become directly relevant to the Ministry's work when they enter school. Unfortunately, many of these children arrive without their condition being recognized, and without any understanding of its impact on their ability to learn. Furthermore, the education system is currently unprepared to support them, as no data is collected on students with stunting.

10.3.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Data on Children with Stunting: Ministry of** Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) in coordination with the **Ministry of Health**, shall develop standardized data collection tools for annual household surveys. These surveys shall be used to identify the prevalence of health issues affecting school-aged children, including stunting, and to inform evidence-based policy interventions. The data will include children with the condition enrolled in schools. This data will be collected after every two years.

2. **Awareness on Stunting through Content: National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW)** shall integrate stunting prevention awareness into national curriculum frameworks and textbooks. The **Federal Directorate of Education (FDE)** shall provide targeted training for teachers on the causes of stunting and preventive measures, enabling effective delivery of the updated content in classrooms.

3. **Learning Structures for Children with Stunting:** Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) will develop and implement a research-informed pedagogical framework to support the learning outcomes of children affected by stunting. This revised approach shall include adapted teaching methodologies and flexible pacing strategies tailored to the cognitive and developmental needs of children with stunting.

10.4School Readiness

School begins with pre-primary early childhood education classes. Islamabad currently runs two options. The older, sustained, programme in primary schools is called "Prep". This is available in all primary schools. A two year early childhood care and education (ECCE) has been initiated in 100 schools. This is funded through development funds of the Public Sector Development Programme (PSPD) and, therefore, has a finite lifetime. Sustainability beyond the period of the project is uncertain. The situation adds to the confusion, although, it is not the primary cause of overage admissions. It will be easier to first settle on a sustainable approach to ECCE in terms of time. Once this is settled then the strategies and policies for timely enrolment will become easier to implement. The policy recommends a one year ECCE programme. This is contrary to the ECCE models for two years have traditionally been recommended. These have been difficult to implement on a scale across Pakistan, including Islamabad. As a beginning universalisation of one year ECE (a requirement of Sustainable Development Goal 4) will be more practical – in the long term the system can transition to a two year ECE. This will also settle the issue of age of admission more realistically.

10.4.1Policy Recommendations

1. Expand the one year, mandatory, pre-primary class in all schools that have primary sections, including private schools. Every child at age 5 should be admitted in a pre-primary ECCE programme and be promoted to grade 1 by age 6.

Many children directly join class 1 of primary schools. Often these children are above the official age of 5 years prescribed by FDE. In the absence of universal and accurate birth registration it is not possible to ascertain the exact age of these children and most register at a later age than 5. Given the requirement of the Constitution that children between ages 5 to 16 to be enrolled in schools and the need for a strong ECE exposure (for at least one year) it will be more practical to shift the official age of class 1 to 6 years.

10.5Student Nutrition

In FDE schools, many children come from poor households. They often arrive without breakfast or with nutritionally insufficient food, leading to short-term hunger and unrecorded nutritional deficiencies that directly impair classroom focus and cognitive growth. Meanwhile, nutritional awareness among both parents and students remains critically low. While the curriculum includes lessons on nutrition, these are often compromised by an overloaded syllabus. Furthermore, there is no evidence that adolescents naturally develop the ability to determine their own dietary needs.

Despite the needs, anecdotal evidence suggests that both nutritional deficiencies and low awareness continue to prevail. Without systematic intervention in curriculum, parental education, and school feeding, the quality of learning will remain compromised.

To address these challenges, a two-pronged approach is needed. First, the structure and delivery of nutrition education require review. Lessons should be introduced as a dedicated

oral topic at the primary level and become an independent subject in later classes. Second, because children cannot make independent dietary choices, parental awareness programs are equally vital. To tackle immediate hunger, the existing school meals programme - currently limited to a few schools - should be expanded.

10.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Nutritional Education:** Enhance the impact of lessons on nutrition through review of the curriculum and textbooks to enhance the nutrition awareness component at all levels. Introduce oral nutritional awareness classes at the primary level and as an independent subject from class 6th to 8th.
2. **Enhance Parental Awareness on Nutrition:** Head teachers will create parental awareness on nutrition through PTSMCs and FDE will will develop specialised messaging to be delivered through messages digital media.
3. **Expand the School Meals Programme with Modifications:** Review the ongoing school meals programme for expansion to all FDE schools and at all levels and low cost private schools in poor communities. This can be done through conduct an overall evaluation of the programme to improve the quality of delivery and impact even further.
4. **Build Nutritional Data of School Children for Targeted Intervetions:** MoFE&PT will hire nutritional professionals either as regular employees or on retainership contracts to assess the health situation of children with reference to nutrition on a regular basis. The database built will be used for development of more problem specific interventions by FDE.

10.6 Physical Exercise and Sports

With the disappearance of the psychomotor domain from the curriculum, routines of physical exercise and sports in schools have also declined. This area is no longer a requirement of the system's accountability mechanisms. In schools where such activities continue, their presence is largely due to the initiative of the school head. This has both immediate and long-term consequences for the physical and mental well-being of students. The deficit is particularly pronounced among girls, who, due to cultural constraints, have fewer opportunities for exercise through sports in the home environment. Schools offer the best available spaces for them to engage in physical activity and develop the necessary muscular strength. Moreover, sports foster important qualities such as discipline, the ability to work in a team, and critical-analytical thinking. These help in development of a more rounded personality.

10.6.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Conduct a Comprehensive Audit of Current Implementation of PE and Sports:** Mandate a system-wide audit to assess the current state of physical education (PE) delivery and organized sports programs in schools. The

audit should document existing practices, available infrastructure, and specific resource constraints. Findings must be compiled into a formal report to serve as the baseline for future interventions.

2. **Develop a Strategic Development Plan Based on Audit Findings**: Using the data and insights from the audit, FDE and PEIRA will formulate a structured, time-bound plan for the regular development of PE and sports in all schools. This plan should outline clear goals, resource requirements, and measurable benchmarks for improvement.

3. **Implement the Programme through Capacity Building and Oversight**: FDE and PEIRA will operationalize the development plan by:
    a. Providing targeted training and awareness programs for school heads to ensure leadership buy-in and effective management.
    b. Allocating and deploying necessary resources (equipment, facilities, and funding) where gaps are identified.
    c. Establishing a monitoring and accountability framework through Area Education Officers to track progress and ensure compliance.

4. **Institutionalize Regular Inter-School Sporting Events**: MoFE&PT will establish a mandatory schedule for annual inter-school sporting competitions. Each year, the calendar will include a minimum of three to four distinct sports, with at least two of these being team sports to promote collaboration and collective participation.

10.7 Co-Curricular Activities

Similar to sports, co-curricular activities have gradually receded from schools as directed and monitored pursuits. While debating contests and similar events are still organized through the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE), these activities have been removed from the active curriculum at the pre-secondary level. There have been some co-curricular activities orgnised under specific interventions for STEAM but nothing insitutionalised or on a scale is implemented. This trend needs to be reversed. Revived activities should include school trips, declamation and essay writing competitions,

mathematics contests, reading clubs, and others. These could be incorporated either as elective subjects or as structured activities. Space will need to be provided for these activities in the scheme of studies.

10.7.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Formalize Co-Curricular Time in the Academic Structure:** The scheme of studies should be revised to mandate dedicated, protected time for co-curricular activities within the formal school timetable. This time will be considered an integral component of the academic schedule, not an optional or supplementary addition.

2. Establish Defined Competition Pathways and a Standardized Calendar: The FDE will systematically identify and designate priority areas for co-curricular activities, with a focus on competitions that extend beyond traditional academic subjects (e.g., competitive mathematics, essay writing, spelling bees, and robotics). All schools under the FDE's jurisdiction will be required to incorporate these designated activities into their annual school calendar as mandatory events.

3. Implement Mandatory Reporting and Oversight: Schools will be required to submit standardized quarterly reports to the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) detailing all co-curricular activities conducted during the reporting period. These reports will include information on participation levels, outcomes achieved, and the specific competitions or events held, thereby enabling systematic monitoring, evaluation, and resource allocation.

10.8 Provision of Missing Facilities

The absence of facilities - particularly toilets, but also classroom spaces, electricity, and water - negatively impacts student attendance and continued enrolment. For adolescent girls, the lack of facilities for menstrual health management (MHM), combined with a general lack of awareness in society, leads to missed school days and, ultimately, dropout. Boundary walls are important for the security of children, and at the secondary level, laboratories are an essential part of the curriculum.

The current definition of facilities needs to be reviewed. Facilities should be provided according to need and standardized accordingly. The same design cannot work for both overcrowded schools and smaller ones. At present, the definition of facilities is tied to standards set by the Public Works Department (PWD)—and even within these standards, there are variations in the quality of construction between urban and some rural schools. Educational and student needs, which vary by school, are not considered in the design of these structures.

Functionality is an additional, critical factor. Mere presence of facilities is not enough. If schools cannot maintain the functionality of their facilities, the problems caused by their absence begin to accumulate, leading to absenteeism and even student dropouts. Another factor of functionality is the ratio of students to facilities. These need to be revised too.

10.8.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Review and Revise School Facility Standards:** Conduct a comprehensive review of school facility requirements according to educational level (e.g., primary, secondary). Develop revised standards based on the needs of academic learning and child welfare. This review must include a re-evaluation of current standards for classroom spaces, construction, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities as prescribed and implemented in schools within the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

2. **Develop a Costed Upgrade Plan:** Formulate a detailed, costed plan for upgrading and replenishing all school facilities to meet the revised standards and definitions established in recommendation one.

3. **Allocate Maintenance Budgets to Schools:** Provide dedicated budgets for the ongoing maintenance of school facilities to be managed by Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) at the institutional level.

4. **Strengthen Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM):** Ensure the provision of appropriate MHM awareness and facilities for post-primary age girls. A senior female teacher should be trained for this purpose in every secondary or higher secondary school. This teacher will be responsible for conducting regular awareness sessions, training teachers in girls' schools, and performing inspections. To support better implementation, one teacher in each girls' school will be designated as an MHM counsellor after receiving appropriate training.

5. **Extend Standards to Private Schools:** The Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) will conduct a similar survey in private schools, prescribe revised WASH standards, and require that every private school with enrolled girls have at least one female teacher trained in MHM awareness and counselling and availability of requisite facilities.

10.9 Child Friendly School Environment

Children cannot learn in an environment of fear. Learning must be a joyful activity. Anecdotal evidence and feedback from consultations confirm that corporal punishment (along with bullying) remains widespread in schools. Although teachers are legally prohibited from administering corporal punishment, there is no systemic approach to monitor or prevent it. Children who face abuse at school or at home have no access to counselling services. This lack of support affects their well-being and performance in school, with consequences that extend into later life. The problem stems from an endemic acceptance of corporal punishment as a means of disciplining children, paired with a weak recognition of bullying as a serious issue. Simply changing laws is not enough if the mindset of teachers - and society at large - remains the same.

10.9.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Mandatory Teacher Training on Non-Violent Classroom Management**: Training courses will be instituted for all teachers on managing classrooms without resorting to corporal punishment, emotional abuse, or psychological harm.

2. **Specialized Training for Head Teachers**: Head teachers will receive specialized training in child management, with a focus on preventing corporal punishment and bullying within their institutions.

3. **Establishment of Zonal Counselling Services**: Counselling services will be made available in each educational zone, with a minimum of five counsellors initially assigned to support both teachers and students who have experienced abusive situations.

4. **Designation of School-Based Student Counsellors**: At least one teacher in every school will be trained in basic counselling and designated as the student counsellor. This teacher may refer complex cases to the zonal counsellors as needed.

5. **Ongoing Parental Education on Abuse Prevention**: Parental education will be delivered through annual sessions, as well as via videos shared through WhatsApp and other internet platforms. These efforts will aim to enhance understanding of the harmful effects of physical, psychological, and other forms of abuse, and will be implemented as an ongoing process.

6. **Student Awareness of Counselling Services**: Students will be informed of the availability, functions, and operational details of counselling services, including confidentiality policies, to ensure they are aware of and can access support when needed.

11 Post Primary Learning Challenges

When it comes to learning at the post-primary level, two key challenges stand out:

(1) the lack of effective remedial learning processes and

(2) the need for a more integrated approach to career and behavioural guidance.

While other issues have been discussed in different chapters—some common to all children, others specific to post-primary levels—this chapter focuses on these two areas for specific reasons.

Beyond remedial learning, two other challenges emerge at the post-primary level. The second is the need for a different approach to managing student behaviour, particularly issues related to adolescence. The third is the early development of career awareness. By the time students reach secondary school, they have already taken the first step toward shaping their future careers through the bifurcation into science and arts streams. In higher secondary, this focus narrows further, with students choosing among schemes such as pre-engineering, pre-medical, and commerce. This means that from post-primary grades onward—starting as early as grade 6—students should be systematically introduced to the range of options available in the world of work.

11.1 Objective

1. Enhance quality of education at the post-primary levels for current cohorts to provide equitable chances to all children for progressing to higher education and develop skills and knowledges relevant to the present and future markets.
2. Enhance relevance of children graduating at secondary and higher secondary levels to succeed in higher education and the market.

11.2 Strategies

1. Develop courses for remedial learning for children who cannot cope with the requirements of the curriculum at the given level.
2. Provide and expand counselling services for children that include psycho-social support and exposure to career choices.

11.3Remedial Learning Options

Remedial learning at post primary level is not possible within regular school times and resources. If children need to develop requisite levels of reading and critical analytical ability as well as understanding of the more complex subjects specialised interventions will need to be developed at this stage. FDE as a whole and individual schools will explore innovative interventions and partnerships outside the regular school structures.

11.3.1Policy Recommendations

1. **Conduct Diagnostic Assessments to Identify Learning Gaps**: Systematically evaluate the disparity between actual

student learning outcomes and curriculum benchmarks at the post-primary level by administering standardized diagnostic tests and gathering structured feedback from teachers. This data will inform targeted interventions.

2. **Establish Equitable Remedial Learning Partnerships**: Develop a comprehensive remedial education plan that leverages resources from organizations such as Teach for Pakistan and local private tuition academies. Prioritize enrolling students from low-income households in after-school learning programs to bridge educational inequities.

3. **Implement Vacation-Based Remedial Summer Camps**: Recruit existing teachers through additional remuneration to conduct intensive summer camps during school vacations. These camps should focus on students who have fallen behind, providing them with accelerated learning support to catch up with grade-level expectations.

4. **Produce Community-Supported Audio-Visual Remedial Content**: Create specialized audio-visual materials designed as remedial lessons for underperforming students. Ensure these resources are accessible for use in households with community support, enabling continued learning outside school hours.

11.4 Provision of Counselling Services

Adolescents require counselling on a range of issues, including learning difficulties, socio-emotional management, and coping with bullying or abuse when needed. Additionally, students benefit from career counselling early in their post-primary years. Currently, such services are absent in most schools, with only limited voluntary support from individual teachers: most of whom lack proper training for this role. While hiring specialized counsellors is not feasible due to a shortage of qualified professionals in the market, a practical alternative would be to train selected teachers within schools to serve as counsellors. FDE has recently introduced a counselling intervention which is in a nascent stage. It needs to be reviewed and, if effective, expanded. At the same time FDE requires to develop internal capacity for counselling to make these interventions more sustainable. The Policy recommendations are focussed on the latter.

11.4.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish an Implementation Structure for Counselling:** FDE, with the help of specialist partners from the private sector, will develop a needs-based training programme for teachers designated as counsellors and provide the training with refreshers after every two years. At least one teacher will be selected from a central middle or secondary school to be trained as counsellors for up to ten schools assigned to each counsellor. To incentivise the effort each counsellor be provided with additional allowance to visit one assigned school every week. In addition to trained teachers specialised counsellors be hired to help children explore potential areas of employment based on their interest and aptitude, similar to the intervention currently being implemented in FDE.

2. **Awareness and Accessible Counselling Services for Students and Parents:** Students and parents will be given awareness pamphlets on availability of counselling services and also videos will be developed to help with development of choices. As physical travel will not always be easy, online synchronous sessions will be arranged for student to interact with counsellors.
3. **Engagement of Potential Employers for Career Exposure:** Potential employers in public and private sector be approached for sessions with secondary and higher secondary students on possible employment options and practical approaches to enter the world of work.

12 Islamic Education and Provisions for Religious Minorities

Religious Education (RE) in Pakistan forms part of the national education system within the constitutional framework of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Within the broader education framework, Religious Education is designed to contribute to the development of morally responsible, socially cohesive, and ethically grounded citizens who demonstrate integrity, tolerance, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity while remaining rooted in their respective faith traditions.

The National Education Policy Positions Religious Education not merely as a subject of doctrinal instruction but as a transformative educational process that contributes to character formation, national cohesion, and responsible citizenship. It serves the dual purpose of preserving Pakistan's Islamic and cultural heritage while simultaneously promoting universal ethical values and peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

The conceptual framework guiding Religious Education in Pakistan rests on several interrelated principles. Foremost among these is strict alignment with the Constitution, which collectively mandate the promotion of Islamic values while guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities. Equally important is the commitment to respect religious diversity and ensure that educational provisions remain inclusive and non-discriminatory. The framework further emphasizes the need for developmentally appropriate, pedagogically sound, and competency-based instruction that reflects contemporary educational standards. Within this paradigm, Religious Education is understood as an integrated component of the broader educational experience rather than an isolated domain.

12.1 Religious Education in the Contemporary School System

Religious Education in Pakistan shall continue to serve as a source of moral guidance, spiritual development, and national cohesion while fully upholding the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, equality, and non-compulsion. Federal Education Policy 2026 strengthens Islamiat for Muslim students, ensures equitable provision for minority communities, and promotes tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and responsible citizenship. By aligning curriculum, teacher preparation, textbooks, and assessment with constitutional principles and contemporary educational needs, the policy aims to enhance the quality and credibility of Religious Education nationwide. It also recognizes the important role of Deeni Madaris and provides structured pathways for their constructive engagement with the mainstream education system to support educational mobility and social integration. Effective implementation will require sustained federal–provincial coordination, professional capacity building, and continuous monitoring to ensure that Religious Education contributes to the development of ethically grounded and constitutionally aware citizens.

Within the formal school system, Religious Education is delivered through the compulsory teaching of Islamiat and the Holy Qur'an for Muslim students, while faith-based Religious Education is provided for students belonging to major non-Muslim communities in accordance with constitutional safeguards. The teaching of the Holy Qur'an Nazra is implemented at Grades I–V, followed by Qur'an translation at Grades VI–XII, ensuring progressive development of religious understanding among Muslim learners. In parallel, non-Muslim students are offered structured faith-based curricula corresponding to their respective religious traditions in lieu of Islamiat and Ethics in lieu of the Holy Qur'an. The National Curriculum of Pakistan (2022–23) further reinforces the integration of Seerah studies, ethical values, and character education across selected subjects, thereby promoting a whole-school approach to moral and values education.

In contemporary schooling, Religious Education is expected to move beyond rote learning toward the development of authentic understanding, moral reasoning, and ethical decision-making capacities among learners. Properly implemented, it contributes to social harmony, strengthens civic responsibility, and helps counter misinterpretations that may lead to intolerance or extremism. The modern pedagogical vision emphasizes age-appropriate content, contextual understanding, inquiry-based learning, and alignment with broader competencies required for the twenty-first century.

Notwithstanding these advances, policy reviews and stakeholder consultations have highlighted several areas requiring strengthening. These include the need for greater pedagogical modernization, improved professional preparation of teachers, more systematic inclusion of minority perspectives, stronger alignment between curriculum, textbooks, and assessment, and more explicit linkage between knowledge acquisition and character formation. Addressing these gaps remains an important policy priority.

12.2Importance and Significance

Religious Education occupies a position of central importance within Pakistan's educational vision due to its profound impact on individual development, social harmony, and national stability. In a society where religion remains a significant source of identity, values, and social organization, the provision of balanced and well-structured Religious Education is essential for nurturing responsible citizens and cohesive communities.

At the level of the individual learner, Religious Education contributes to the development of moral and ethical character by cultivating honesty, integrity, empathy, and a sense of accountability. It supports the formation of a stable personal identity and promotes spiritual well-being, which in turn enhances emotional resilience and responsible decision-making. Through structured engagement with ethical teachings, learners develop the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, appreciate the consequences of their actions, and demonstrate respect for others.

From a societal perspective, Religious Education plays an important role in promoting social cohesion and interfaith harmony. When delivered in a balanced and pedagogically sound manner, it reinforces respect for diversity, discourages sectarian and communal intolerance, and fosters peaceful coexistence among Pakistan's diverse religious communities. It also contributes to strengthening the moral fabric of society by encouraging civic responsibility, lawful conduct, and community service.

Given Pakistan's demographic realities and plural religious composition, the development of a balanced, inclusive, and pedagogically modern Religious Education framework is not only desirable but essential for sustainable national progress.

12.3Constitutional and Legal Provisions

The provision of Religious Education in Pakistan is firmly anchored in the constitutional and legal framework of the State. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides a comprehensive basis for promoting Islamic values while simultaneously safeguarding the rights and freedoms of religious minorities. A national policy on Religious Education must therefore operate within this carefully balanced constitutional architecture.

The Objectives Resolution, now forming a substantive part of the Constitution through Article 2A, establishes the foundational principle that Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in accordance with the teachings of Islam as set out in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. At the same time, it explicitly guarantees that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to freely profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures. This dual commitment forms the cornerstone of Pakistan's Religious Education policy framework.

Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to profess, practice, and propagate their religion. This provision provides the legal basis for ensuring that minority students receive appropriate Religious or Moral Education consistent with their faith traditions. Complementing this, Article 22(1) clearly stipulates that no person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction relating to a religion other than their own. This constitutional safeguard underpins the long-standing policy of providing alternative religious instruction for non-Muslim students in public and private educational institutions.

Article 31 places an obligation upon the State to enable Muslims to live in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam and to promote the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Islamiat. This provision provides the constitutional foundation for Islamic education for Muslim students within the national curriculum framework. At the same time, Article 25, which guarantees equality of citizens before law and equal protection of law, requires that Religious Education policies remain fair, non-discriminatory, and respectful of all recognized religious communities in Pakistan.

Successive National Education Policies and the National Curriculum of Pakistan (2022–23) have operationalized these constitutional provisions by mandating Islamiat and the teaching of the Holy Qur'an (Nazra at Grades I–V and translation at Grades VI–XII) for Muslim learners, while providing Ethics and structured faith-based Religious Education for non-Muslim students. These policy instruments also emphasize the integration of character education and Seerah-based values across the curriculum and acknowledge the role of Deeni Madaris within the broader national education framework. The present policy builds upon these foundations to establish a coherent, inclusive, and forward-looking Religious Education framework that is constitutionally compliant, pedagogically contemporary, and socially integrative.

12.4Objectives of Religious Education

Religious Education in Pakistan shall aim to:

I. Develop sound understanding of the fundamental beliefs, teachings, and practices of students' respective religions.
II. Foster moral and ethical values promote honesty, responsibility, compassion, and respect for law.
III. Strengthen students' identity as responsible and peaceful citizens of Pakistan.
IV. Promote interfaith harmony, tolerance, and respect for religious diversity in line with constitutional principles.
V. Encourage reflective thinking and application of religious teachings to contemporary personal and social issues.

VI. Support the holistic development of learners across cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains.
VII. Ensure that no learner is compelled to receive instruction in a religion other than his or her own, in full compliance with Article 22(1).
VIII. Align Religious Education with national curriculum standards and modern pedagogical practices.

12.5Guiding Principles for Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) under the Federal Education Policy shall be designed and implemented in accordance with the following guiding principles to ensure constitutional compliance, educational quality, and social cohesion:

I. All provisions of Religious Education shall fully adhere to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, particularly Articles 20, 22(1), 25, and 31, ensuring both the promotion of Islamic values for Muslim students and the protection of minority rights.
II. Students shall receive Religious Education pertaining only to their own religion. No learner shall be compelled to study the religious content of another faith.
III. The system shall ensure equitable provision of Religious Education for all recognized religious communities in Pakistan, with appropriate curricular and institutional arrangements where student numbers are limited.
IV. Religious Education shall foster respect for diversity, interfaith harmony, peaceful coexistence, and national unity while maintaining fidelity to each faith tradition.
V. For Muslim students, Islamiat shall reflect the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah and the ideological foundations of Pakistan, while remaining academically sound and pedagogically appropriate.
VI. Curriculum content shall be developmentally appropriate and structured progressively across grade levels, moving from foundational knowledge to reflective and applied understanding.
VII. All curricula, textbooks, and instructional materials shall be accurate, authentic, and developed in consultation with qualified scholars and representatives of respective religious communities.
VIII. Teaching of Religious Education shall employ modern, learner-centered pedagogies that promote understanding, reflection, and ethical application rather than rote memorization alone.
IX. While maintaining national minimum standards through the National Curriculum Council wing, provinces and areas shall have flexibility in contextual implementation consistent with the post-18th Amendment framework.
X. Religious Education shall avoid sectarian, discriminatory, or hate-based content and shall promote balanced, respectful, and constitutionally aligned perspectives.
XI. Effective mechanisms shall be established for curriculum review, textbook vetting, teacher preparation, and classroom monitoring to ensure faithful implementation of policy provisions.

12.6Scope and Structure of Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) under this National Education Policy shall be structured to ensure constitutional compliance, curricular coherence, and equitable provision.

I. Islamiat shall be offered as a compulsory subject, structured in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah and aligned with the provisions of the Constitution.
II. Translation of the Holy Qur'an and Qur'anic Arabic shall be progressively embedded within the Islamiat curriculum across grades to ensure age-appropriate and systematic development of learners' understanding.
III. Faith-specific curricula shall be provided for recognized religious communities in Pakistan. Ethics will be embedded in the religious education curricula. Students shall receive instruction only in their own religion in compliance with Article 22(1) of the Constitution.
IV. Curriculum provisions shall reflect the religious composition of Pakistan and ensure that minority students are provided equitable academic arrangements, including where enrolment numbers are limited.

12.7Grade-wise Progression

Religious Education shall follow a structured developmental progression across schooling levels:

- **Early Childhood & Primary Level:** Introduction to foundational beliefs, basic practices, moral values, and character development.
- **Middle Level:** Expanded understanding of religious teachings, ethical conduct, civic responsibilities, and application in daily life.
- **Secondary Level**: Analytical engagement with religious principles, contemporary social issues, citizenship responsibilities, and moral reasoning.
- **Higher Secondary Level**: Advanced understanding, reflective analysis, and application of religious teachings to modern societal, ethical, and global challenges.

The curriculum shall ensure continuity, coherence, and increasing depth across grades.

12.7.1Compulsory Status and Time Allocation

Religious Education shall remain a compulsory subject within the national schooling framework. Time allocation shall be determined in accordance with national minimum standards.

12.8 Teacher Preparation and Professional Standards for Religious Education

Effective implementation of Religious Education (RE) depends fundamentally on the quality, competence, and professional conduct of teachers. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, in coordination and relevant teacher education bodies, shall ensure that Religious Education teachers are appropriately qualified, professionally prepared, and continuously supported.

12.8.1 Qualification Requirements

I. For Islamiat Teachers (Muslim Students): Teachers shall possess relevant academic qualifications in Islamiat/Islamic Studies or equivalent recognized credentials, along with professional teacher education (B.Ed. or equivalent).

II. For Minority Religious Education Teachers**:** Teachers shall have verified subject knowledge of their respective religion and appropriate pedagogical training. Recruitment processes shall ensure authenticity and community validation where applicable.

12.9 Professional Competencies

Religious Education teachers shall demonstrate the ability to:

- Deliver accurate and authentic subject content.
- Apply learner-centered and age-appropriate pedagogies.
- Promote tolerance, respect, and ethical conduct.
- Maintain classroom neutrality and avoid sectarian bias.
- Support students' moral and socio-emotional development.
- Use assessment strategies aligned with curriculum standards.
- Integrate relevant digital and supplementary resources.

12.10 Textbooks and Instructional Materials for Religious Education

Textbooks and instructional materials are central to the effective implementation of Religious Education (RE). The development, review, approval, and dissemination of such materials shall be guided by constitutional principles, national curriculum standards, and professional quality benchmarks.

12.10.1 Development Principles

All Religious Education textbooks and instructional materials shall:

- Be strictly aligned with the approved Curriculum
- Reflect authenticity, accuracy, and scholarly validity of content.
- Be age-appropriate, pedagogically sound, and developmentally sequenced.
- Promote tolerance, social cohesion, and constitutional values.
- Avoid sectarian bias, discriminatory language, or hate content.
- Encourage understanding, reflection, and application rather than rote memorization alone.

12.11 Faith-Specific Authenticity

- For Islamiat, content shall be derived from authentic sources of the Qur'an and Sunnah, presented in a balanced and academically sound manner.
- For minority Religious Education, textbooks shall be developed in consultation with qualified scholars and recognized representatives of respective religious communities to ensure faithful and respectful representation of beliefs, teachings, and practices.

12.11.1 Teacher Guides and Supplementary Materials

In addition to core textbooks, the following shall be developed to strengthen classroom delivery:

- Comprehensive Teacher Guides with lesson plans and pedagogical strategies.
- Activity-based learning materials.
- Digital and multimedia resources.
- Supplementary readers promoting ethical reflection and civic responsibility.
- Digital versions of textbooks shall be made available through approved platforms.

13 Governance and Management

Education in ICT is governed by several laws, with the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 serving as the overarching statute. This law defines the principles of education governance based on children's rights as enshrined in Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan. It mandates free education for all children, including those with disabilities and those from migrant families. Another provision requires private schools to admit children from disadvantaged households, ensuring they constitute at least 10 percent of each class. The Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) cannot achieve these objectives without leveraging the capacity of the private sector.

The governance and management of education in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) require a comprehensive review, given the changing ownership patterns and demographic challenges. Beyond this overall review, traditional priorities—such as empowering head teachers, improving reporting and monitoring systems, and enhancing parental engagement—must be strengthened across all school types, both public and private.

Under the new realities and shifting governance model, the most significant challenge will be revising the approach to regulate and utilize the services of the large private sector in the city. Synergies need to be created between the FDE, the Private Education Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA), and private sector institutions to support better quality education for all children. Currently, PEIRA and FDE function as parallel institutions. PEIRA regulates private institutions, while FDE has no role in that process.

PEIRA's regulatory framework includes school registration, tuition fee oversight, and enforcement of official curriculum and textbooks. Any learning material that violates official policy is removed from schools. However, PEIRA does not monitor or inspect the teaching-learning process in classrooms beyond checking certain inputs, such as teacher turnover.

In contrast, FDE has its own processes for regulating teaching and learning quality in the schools it manages. These established structures have their own limitations and require review for enhanced effectiveness. However, FDE's capacity to expand student enrolment remains limited, and any significant increase would come at a high per-unit cost. As a result, this expansion will have to be targeted through private schools.

These private schools can, in turn, leverage FDE's superior capacity to develop quality products and processes - such as teacher training, assessment frameworks, and data management. Other areas of collaboration can also be added. The new governance model should be built on a coordinated partnership where FDE's assets, including the quality of its human resources, are utilized to improve the teaching-learning process in low-cost private schools.

PEIRA's experience and established trust with the private sector can be an asset in facilitating this transition for the benefit of low-cost private schools and others needing support. This will also require a revision of PEIRA's role and capacity, allowing it greater leeway to assess learning outcomes and categorize schools based on the quality of their outputs. Such categorization should initially be used to support schools, not penalize them—at least in the first few years. This model will work best when more comprehensive information about private schools is available, which will require trust-building with the sector.

Even as the governance model adjusts to the new reality of simultaneous delivery through public and private schools, some fundamental gaps in FDE's current situation must also be addressed. An important level is that of head teachers. There has been increase in the administrative and financial powers of head teachers. However, this has not translated into

capacity of head teachers to support the teaching and learning process – a requirement highlighted at multiple places in the document. Another area of improvement is better community engagement in school management.
The Policy also calls for enhanced use of data and empirical evidence. While this has improved over the years, the need for more widespread capacity has been felt at different times. Finally, the issue of finances. While there are limitations to growth of fiscal space due to larger structural issues, the education budget has to be restructured to make it more responsive to the needs of education research, planning and monitoring. At present it is not possible to track allocation and use to specific outcomes like gender gap reduction, learning and others.

13.1 Objectives

1. Development of a governance model that can addresses the requirements of the changed realities of education service delivery in Islamabad through strengthened inclusion of the private sector in a partnership model that includes FDE, PEIRA ad the private schools.
2. Enhance capacity of key players at the decentralized level in school regulation, management, monitoring and mentoring.
3. Improved community engagement in school management.
4. Informed decision making, planning and policy development.

13.2 Strategies

1. Development of a model that enhances the benefits from the private sector through regulation and partnership.
2. Creates synergies between the FDE, PEIRA and the private sector.
3. Review and enhance current capacity of PEIRA
4. Strengthen and capacitate head teachers for greater autonomy in administrative and academic decision making.
5. Training of head teachers and teachers in community engagement.

13.3 Cooperation and Synergies with the Private Sector

It is important for the governance system to ensure regulation that encourages quality of learning in private sector institutions, while also following the fundamental requirements of the national curriculum—especially the shared value systems. This will require close coordination between the FDE and PEIRA, as well as an enhancement of PEIRA's scope of work and capacity. To achieve this, a clear model for cooperation and partnership will need to be built.

13.3.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish an Integrated Education Governance Framework:** The Ministry of Finance, Education, and Planning & Training (MoFE&PT) will develop a comprehensive policy that adopts a unified approach to education governance. This policy will recognize both public and private schools as essential partners in achieving quality education for all. The framework will, among others, address the following key areas:

a. ***Institutionalized Collaboration between FDE and PEIRA:*** Mandate regular, structured interaction between the senior management of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA). Quarterly meetings will be held to review monitoring results, assess the state of education in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), and address emerging challenges. MoFE&PT will also encourage the exploration of additional mechanisms for cooperation, such as joint working groups and shared data analysis.

b. ***Reformed Monitoring for Quality and Inclusivity:*** MoFE&PT, in consultation with FDE and PEIRA, will revise the current monitoring model to ensure a more robust assessment of learning quality and the delivery of an inclusive curriculum. The revised model will be applied uniformly across both public and private institutions.

c. ***Standardized Data and Reporting Systems:*** MoFE&PT, in consultation with FDE and PEIRA, will establish a uniform data reporting mechanism for all schools. The mechanism will mandate the regular and systematic inclusion of private school data into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to enable evidence-based planning and oversight.

2. **Support Compliance of Private Schools with the Right to Education:** To ensure compliance with the Right to Education legislation, the government will provide free textbooks to all students enrolled in low-cost private schools. The definition of "low-cost" will be determined by PEIRA based on a clearly defined fee threshold.
3. **Introduce a Public-Private School Access Model:** MoFE&PT will develop and implement a public-private partnership model to address gaps in access to government schools. Under this model, children who do not have access to a nearby government school will be accommodated in private schools through the provision of fee vouchers or similar financial incentives. PEIRA will be capacitated to manage PPPPP, in addtion to routine regulatory work.
4. **Strengthen Regulatory Capacity of PEIRA:** Revise the mandate of PEIRA to explicitly enable it to regulate effectively under the new integrated governance model. To achieve this, conduct a comprehensive assessment of PEIRA's current institutional capacity and develop a targeted plan to enhance its human, technical, and financial resources.

13.4Head Teacher Empowerment and Community Engagement

The role of the head teacher remains central to the quality of teaching and learning in schools. In the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), schools were traditionally known by the names of their head teachers. These individuals possessed exceptional ability, but their expertise was not the result of any structured training program - a gap that still persists. Although the devolution of financial and administrative powers has empowered head teachers, the lack of systematic training remains a shortcoming. The current policy places high value on effective head teachers in both public and private sectors, emphasizing school transformation through improved training in academics, administration, and community engagement. An important concomitant to empowerment is accountability. This is not a linear process. Perfomance of head teachers cannot be divorced from the realities of the community

that a particular school serves. This must be considered when developing metrics for evaluation of the work of a head teacher.

13.4.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a System of Continuous, Need-Based Professional Development for Head Teachers:** FDE and PEIRA will develop and implement ongoing training modules for head teachers that are tailored to identified needs and periodically reviewed for relevance and effectiveness. In addition videos on guiding head teachers in school management including academic support will be developed. Technology based asynchronous training modules will also be developed. These modules can be developed best by highly rated head teachers from within FDE schools
2. **Institutionalize Regular Head Teacher Conferences for Policy Feedback:** Mandate regular conferences where head teachers can present challenges and issues to inform the periodic review of education policies, curriculum content, and textbook design.
3. **Ensure Inclusive Participation of Low-Cost Private School Head Teachers:** MoFE&PT through PEIRA will extend all professional development trainings and policy consultation conferences to include head teachers from low-cost private schools to ensure a comprehensive and equitable approach.
4. **Prioritize Training in Community Engagement and Parental Mobilization:** Provide targeted training for head teachers in strategies for community mobilization and actively engaging parents in their children's education.
5. **Utilize Summer Vacations for Targeted Parental Outreach:** Implement structured outreach programs during summer breaks, with a specific focus on parents of children from economically disadvantaged households and those who are struggling academically.
6. **Revise Head Teacher Performance Metrics to Reflect Contextual Factors:** Update performance assessment criteria for head teachers to account for base-level school conditions, household poverty rates, parental literacy levels, and available community resources.

13.5 Informed Decision Making

All policies, plans, and key reform decisions should be based on robust information. The primary source of such information is the data available from the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and other attached departments of the Ministry. At present, many of these datasets are disparate and underutilized.

The FDE collects data for its own schools, while PEIRA maintains information on registered private schools. The requirements and details of these datasets differ. For instance, EMIS contains student-level data, whereas PEIRA only holds data on schools at the point of registration and relevant to this particular requirement. There is no Management Information System (MIS) to update information on enrolments, dropouts, teachers, or other key indicators. This gap has significant implications for planning.

Data for non-formal educationis entered into the NFEMIS, while information on Madrassas is maintained separately by the Directorate of Religious Education. The situation for special and inclusive education is similar, with its own distinct datasets. There is no centrally coordinated database that can track children's progress or their movement across different systems.

Additionally, there is no standardized structure for data reporting. This hinders policy development, planning, and monitoring. Protocols for data sharing are also lacking. Such protocols are important not only for internal use within the Ministry but also for providing data for research that can support better-informed decision-making and planning.

Another issue is the capacity to analyze and use data. This capacity needs to be built across all relevant sections. The Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), which already has some experience in data utilization, can be leveraged to develop this capacity.

13.5.1 Policy Recommendations

1. Develop and agree on a standardized data reporting structure for all education streams, starting with PEIRA and FDE. The standards should define minimum reporting requirements. Each stream can add additional data as per their need.
2. To enable tracking of students across school systems (including NFE), and dropouts, develop a unique student ID.
3. Develop a system for data sharing that can help obtain the larger picture and support more realistic monitoring and planning.
4. Train officers of FDE, PEIRA and other relevant organizations on use of data.

13.6 Finance and Budget

The structuring of the education budget needs to be reconsidered to enable more informed decision-making. A systemic capacity to trace how funds translate into value addition - particularly in relation to specific, targeted educational outcomes - would greatly support the planning and allocation of budgets to the highest-priority areas. Currently, budget structures do not allow for an assessment of value for money in terms of key outputs and outcomes, such as learning achievement, reduction in gender gaps, increased enrolment, and improvements across different educational levels. To address this, the budget structure should be aligned with the requirements of service delivery, making it easier for policymakers, planners, and researchers to link the effectiveness of spending to educational outcomes.

13.6.1 Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a Joint Task Force for Budgetary Review:** The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) will constitute a specialized task force comprising

education planners and financial specialists. The mandate of this task force will be to conduct a comprehensive diagnostic study to identify the key structural weaknesses in the current budgetary format, specifically regarding the ability to trace financial allocations to defined educational outcomes.

2. **Propose Budgetary Realignment for Outcome-Based Tracking:** Based on the findings of the aforementioned study, the task force will present a formal set of recommendations to the Finance Section of MoFEPT and the Ministry of Finance. These recommendations will focus on realigning existing budgetary lines to facilitate the systematic tracking of key performance indicators, including improvements in student learning outcomes, the reduction of gender gaps in education, and other strategic outcomes as determined by MoFEPT.

National Response Areas

This section discusses areas where national coordination and collaboration is required. These include the more traditionally accepted areas of international reporting data undertaken by the Federal government and the governance structures in place like the Inter-provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC) and the Inter-Board Coordination Commission (IBCC). In addition, the area of madrassa education which is overseen by the Directorate of Religious Education (DRE) across Pakistan has also been added in this section as an area for national response to educational issues. The need for national research on Pakistani languages has been added. This has been recommended in view recognition of the principle of mother tongue based-multilingual education proffered in the National Education Policy Development Framework (NEPDF) 2024. The area of "Education and Artificial Intelligence" has also been added here as the need for a national response is essential to this very important area for the future of the country and, by default, education.

14 National and Inter-Provincial Coordination

National cooperation and agreement on minimum standards remain essential. This can be achieved through dialogue and structured interaction between provincial and federal governments, without compromising the requirements of the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The Inter-Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC) already serves as a model for national-level standardization - specifically, the equivalence of certificates - a function that can only be performed by a national body.

Two important areas emerged in the post-18th Amendment period: agreement on minimum standards and the review of curricula. Provinces demonstrated varying capacities, yet there was national consensus on the need to review minimum standards for quality education and the national curriculum. Even the National Education Policy 2009, approved after the 18th Amendment, was developed through inter-provincial consensus and remains the current national policy.

The Federal Education Policy 2026 proposes two areas for federal-interprovincial processes: establishing a regular structure for interaction and reaching agreement on minimum standards for curriculum review. These standards would ensure compatibility of learning for students moving between provinces. Without them, inequalities in national development may increase, and individual students will struggle to adapt to different curricula when migrating. However, this should not dilute the autonomy of provinces to develop their own curriculum standards and content according to their specific contexts.

Finally, there are two further areas of focus: international reporting of national data and the standardized equivalence certificates issued by the IBCC. Recommendations to improve both are included below.

Additionally, the mainstreaming of madrassa students into the national curriculum—and the enhancement of their employability across the country—is a federal mandate led by the Directorate of Religious Education (DRE) of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MOFEPT).

14.1 Cooperation, Coordination and Consultation

The Inter-provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC) has been an informal structure that has continued to meet over the last twenty years. It has consistently proven to be a useful forum for inter-provincial coordination, learning, and policy alignment across various provinces. However, there are two key deficiencies in the process.

First, the IPEMC is not institutionalized. This means there is no defined timeline for the regularity of meetings, nor clear mandates or participation requirements. The last IPEMC was held in 2022.

The second gap lies in the follow-up of IPEMC decisions, as there is very minimal interaction among technical-level officers. There is no secretariat for these officers. Such forums could be used to support the implementation of IPEMC's decisions on standards, curricula, learning materials, examinations, and lessons learned from reforms.

14.2 Objective

More effective coordination and cooperation among provinces on education issues of national concern.

14.3Strategy

1. Institutionalise the forum of Inter-provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC) to allow regular meetings for improved coordination across provinces and the Federal government.

14.4Institutionalisation of IPEMC

Institutionalisation of the IPEMC will require an approved, standardized process for regular meetings and a clear mandate for decision-making. Furthermore, a technical secretariat is essential to ensure institutional continuity and growth. The establishment of this secretariat will itself be a key component of the institutionalisation process.

14.4.1Policy Recommendations

1. **Formalize the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC):** The MoFE&PT in consultation with provincial departments of education a will develop a joint, binding document to institutionalize the IPEMC process. This document will be formally adopted by each province, notified by the Federal Government, and approved by the IPEMC. The framework shall clearly define the following:
    a. **Meeting Structure:** The composition of the conference, including permanent and special invitees, the chairing mechanism (e.g., rotation among provinces), and the rules of procedure for conducting sessions.
    b. **Mandate:** A clear and concise mandate outlining the IPEMC's role in policy harmonization, dispute resolution, and setting national education standards, while respecting provincial autonomy.
    c. **Regularity of Meetings:** A fixed, binding schedule for meetings (e.g., bi-annually or quarterly), with provisions for special sessions.
    d. **Follow-up Mechanisms:** A standardized procedure for recording, communicating, and monitoring the implementation of decisions, including mandatory progress reports to the CCI.

2. **Establish and Institutionalize an Inter-Provincial Secretaries Conference (IPSC)**: To ensure effective operational follow-up, an Inter-Provincial Secretaries Conference forum will also be formed. This body will be institutionalized under the same legal and procedural framework as the IPEMC. The meetings of the IPSC will be strategically scheduled to complement the IPEMC sessions.

3. **Create a Permanent IPEMC Secretariat with a Structured Communication Mechanism:** A dedicated, permanent Secretariat for the IPEMC will be established. This Secretariat will be staffed with designated officers from the MoFE&PT and the respective provincial education departments. A formal mechanism for regular communication and interaction among these officers will be implemented, including a shared digital platform.

15Inter Boards Coordination Commission

The Inter Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) is one of the few functions that survived the 18th Constitutional Amendment. It is a body whose membership includes all examination and textbook boards across the country. Its purpose is to standardize examinations and learning materials nationwide. To this end, it regularly holds meetings with all examination and textbook boards to prepare recommendations aimed at improving the quality of their products and ensuring standardization across the country, including courses offered by Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU).

Another important function of the IBCC is to provide equivalence certificates for students who appear in examinations other than the routine secondary and higher secondary exams conducted by the boards of intermediate and secondary education. These include international examination boards and systems, as well as exams conducted by bodies such as the madrassa boards.

The main weakness of its coordination function with other boards across the country is the absence of a process to ensure the implementation of its recommendations. This can be remedied by reviewing its mandate and obtaining approval from the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Committee (IPEMC) to allow the IBCC to develop an effective implementation process.

The process of providing equivalence certificates for students appearing in international examinations is very complex. At present, the number of such examinations is very high. The IBCC has developed its processes through years of experience. This policy cannot recommend any changes to these processes that would improve upon the work already being conducted by the Commission. However, there is a need to create awareness among students about the methods used by the IBCC to provide equivalence certificates. This would help dissipate the skepticism and sense of unfairness felt by many students and their parents.

15.1.1Policy Recommendations

1. **Amend the Rule of the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC):** Propose a comprehensive revision of the IBCC's governing rules to strengthen its enforcement capacity. The amendment will provide clear mechanisms, timelines, and accountability measures to ensure that recommendations made by the IBCC regarding equivalency standards are implemented in a timely and effective manner by all member boards.

2. **Submit Revised rules for Approval of IPEMC:** IBCC, through MoFE&PT, will present the amended rules to the Inter Provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC) for formal approval. This submission will include a detailed rationale for

the changes, a comparative analysis of current versus proposed rules, and a projected implementation plan to facilitate swift adoption by all provincial education authorities.

3. **Launch a Multichannel Public Awareness Campaign:** IBCC will develop and disseminate a series of audiovisual and print-based informational materials designed to educate parents and guardians about the IBCC's equivalence procedures. The campaign should specifically clarify the methods and criteria used to evaluate certificates from international examination bodies and madrassa boards, thereby reducing confusion, promoting transparency, and ensuring that families are fully informed of their children's academic standing and prospects.

16 Minimum National Standards and Processes for Curriculum and Learning Material

Lessons learnt in the years since the 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed has been that provincial autonomy needs to be balanced with a national perspective on education where minimal standards of learning and values are stewarded jointly by the Federal and provincial governments. The IPEMC as a forum, when institutionalised, will provide the umbrella and support for such interaction and outcomes.

The recommendations of the Policy have been developed to balance the need for national standards and compatibility of curriculum across Pakistan with the requirements of provincial autonomy in development of curricula and learning material as suited to their context.

16.1 Objectives

1. Nationally agreed policy on curriculum review.
2. Minimum standards for curriculum.

16.2 Strategies

1. A National Framework for Curriculum Development and Review to guide all stakeholders in designing curricula that are context-sensitive, inclusive, and aligned with shared national goals.
2. Minimum Standards for Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes building on existing frameworks such as the Minimum National Standards for Quality Education (2016), and all other curriculum supplements that have been developed since, to ensure a baseline of educational equity and comparability across provinces.

16.3 Policy Recommendations

1. **Conduct Provincial Consultations:** Initiate a structured process of consultations with all provincial governments to inform the development of a comprehensive curriculum framework for stewardship and management of curriculum preparation and implementation through a national process. This framework will guide the development of curricula with sufficient flexibility to respect provincial autonomy, while simultaneously incorporating the essential content, competencies, and expectations necessary to ensure a cohesive national education system.

2. **Secure Multi-Tiered Approval:** Following provincial consultations NCCW will submit the draft curriculum framework for review and approval by the relevant competent authorities at both federal and provincial levels. Subsequently, MoFE&PT will present the approved draft for final endorsement by the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC).

3. **Develop Minimum Curriculum Standards:** Upon finalization of the curriculum framework MoFE&PT, through NCCW and the provincial governments through relevant curriculum bodies, will commence the process of establishing minimum

standards for curricula. This will be undertaken in close collaboration with provincial governments, a select cohort of teachers, and academic experts. The scope of these minimum standards will be mutually agreed upon with the provinces.

4. **Revive and Institutionalize the National Curriculum Council (NCC):** Revive the National Curriculum Council (NCC) as a permanent, standing body with balanced representation from both the federal government and all provinces. The NCC will deliberate on matters of national importance concerning the quality, delivery, and periodic revision of curricula. The National Curriculum Council Wing (NCCW) of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) will serve as the permanent secretariat for the NCC.

17 National and International Reporting of Data

Education-related data is produced by multiple sources. Over the years, there has been an enhancement in the capacity and reporting of data in all provinces, especially in EMIS. The information provided by the various databases has expanded over time as new needs have been identified. In the case of EMIS datasets, this expansion has often been driven by demands for international reporting or by development partners supporting activities on the ground.

Provincial Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) collect the largest set of information each year. These systems have been collecting and digitizing data on school education since the early 1990s. At the national level, the data is collated under the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS). Previously, NEMIS was housed within the Academy for Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM). After the 18th Amendment and the devolution of education to the provinces, this process continued. At the federal level, AEPAM has been replaced by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE). PIE took on the responsibility of NEMIS for collating national data and reporting. In addition, assessments conducted by the National Education Assessment System (NEAS) and its successors were also included in PIE's mandate. These are now reflected in the annual National Assessment Tests (NAT).

In the last few years, all provinces have begun more regular monitoring of key indicators, adding to the corpus of data both in terms of additional information and trends. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) also produces regular data on socio-economic indicators that are directly and indirectly relevant to education. The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) also has education-related data as a requirement for its various sub-programmes that support education. Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education hold large datasets on examination results spanning several decades. Many of these datasets remain disconnected from each other and are often inaccessible to policymakers and researchers.

Despite this progress, Pakistan has struggled to produce comprehensive and reliable data consistently. This has limited its ability to meet the needs of international reporting and domestic planning.

The key areas of weakness in data collection, management, reporting, and utilization are:

1. **The expanded private sector, including madrassas, is not a regular part of the reporting system.** This has implications for provincial and national planning, as well as for international reporting.
2. **Datasets produced by various organizations are not integrated to provide a clear picture of the education landscape.**
3. There is no standardized mechanism for producing learning data. Learning data is being generated by different sources without standardization across provinces. Each province has its own methodology. At the federal level, the National Assessment Test (NAT) produces learning data for selected levels prior to secondary and higher secondary education, where data is produced by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education.
4. Despite years of effort, gaps in the reliability and validity of examination data from these boards have not been addressed.

5. Similarly validation of data produced by EMIS has not been undertaken for years. It is important that these datasets which form the spine of Pakistan's education reporting are validated.

These multiple sources and methodologies without standardisation and validation undermine the reliability of data for national comparison and international reporting. Resultantly, among other issues, Pakistan provides information on only a limited number of SDG 4 indicators. This is symptomatic of data management and reporting issuesthat persist despite expansion of data sources.There are multiple causes for this limitation, including systemic capacity issues at both the provincial and federal levels.

Finally, access and use of data available should be enhanced through providing it publicly, with safeguards, and development of data sharing protocols.

17.1Objective

1. Enhance the quality and reliability of data in education.
2. Strengthen Pakistan's reporting against SDG 4 indicators.
3. Enhance availability and use of data for academic and policy purposes.

17.2Strategies

1. **Strengthen National Data Infrastructure for Inclusive and Reliable Reporting**: PIE, in consultation with provincial governments, will develop and implement standardized processes to connect disparate datasets (e.g., Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), social services, census data) and establish a mandatory, regular validation framework to ensure the accuracy, completeness, and reliability of educational statistics across all reporting bodies.

1. **Build Institutional Capacity for Comprehensive SDG 4 Reporting**: PIE will coordinate a process to enhance the technical and operational capacity of national and provincial institutions to ensure that all public and private education institutions are fully integrated into the EMIS. The process will mandate regular, standardized data submission cycles to facilitate accurate monitoring and reporting against Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) targets.

2. **Harmonize Data Collection and Reporting Mechanisms Across all Jurisdictions**: PIE will coordinate with the relevant organisations of the provinces to standardize data collection instruments, definitions, and reporting protocols across all

provinces, regions, and administrative areas. This alignment is essential to eliminate inconsistencies and enable the generation of a single, authoritative national dataset for comprehensive education sector analysis.

3. **Integrate Education Data with Broader Socio-Economic Indicator:** Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) will establish a centralized data integration framework that combines education data with relevant socio-economic data (e.g., health, poverty, employment) generated by various government agencies and organizations.
4. **Improve Availability and Use of Data:** PIE will develop systems to accompany the above processes with clear, open protocols and data-sharing agreements to facilitate ethical, secure, and equitable access for all stakeholders, including policymakers, education managers, and academic researchers.

18 Madrassa Education

Madrassas form an important part of education service delivery in Pakistan. Children from some of the poorest families in the country study in these madrassahs where they are provided education and, consequently, find opportunities of employability that would have been outside their reach without these institutions. The number of employments to these children, however, remain limited. Over the years various governments have made attempts to mainstream these children to expand their choices in the job market.

Madrassahs are historical institutions where education was provided to Muslim students across various Islamic polities including the subcontinent during the rule of Sultans of Delhi, the Mughal Empire and the Southern Muslim Bahmani Kingdoms. Learning in these institutions was not limited to religious subjects. Historically Madrassas taught, algebra, geometry, logic, social science, and other secular subjects in their curricula. These were categorised as "*Maqoolat"*. Many senior bureaucracy and scholars in Mughal and other courts were product of these institutions.
After the arrival of the British and introduction of English and western knowledge systems in newly formed schools the Madrassas lost their primacy as conduits to the job market and were relegated from first choice institutions of learning. They began to cater more to children of the poorest households or those from the elite who refused to adapt to the new needs. Graduates of madrassas could not find the best jobs in the job market. While some brilliant Islamic Scholars were still produced by these institutions the majority of their graduates were often employed in low end ecclesiastical work. Some of the princely states like Hyderabad Deccan continued to employ some of the high end products of the more known madrassas but their options in the larger scheme of market and policy shrank. The larger madrassa systems even added options of vocational skill development to improve employability of their graduates who were unable to complete the highest degrees. Inclusion of madrassa graduates into mainstream markets remained a struggle within the social fabric of Muslims in British India.
After independence, in the first National Education Conference held in December 1947, employability of Madrassa students was one of the key policy areas. Integration of religious education with formal. Mainstreaming of these students through coupling of their knowledge with key, marketable, subjects of the national curriculum has been an ongoing effort since last many years.

A further concern was added in the national policy on madrassas after the 1980s when elements of extremism began to sprout in a number of these institutions. The state now had to view madrassas with not only mainstreaming of children of these institutions for better earning opportunities but also to check the trend of extremism among some of them and prevent their recruitment in proscribed terrorist organisations. It was equally important to dispel the impression among sections of national and internation communities that all madrassas were producing extremists. These perceptions widened the distrust between the government and these institutions for education[1].

The situation meant that the government treads carefully to mainstream madrassa education to allow the graduates of these institutions greater employability options, but also to check any tendencies for extremism. Both these objectives had to be achieved without any

[1] There has been a historical schism between madrassas and the western educated Muslims from the early days of educational reform in the Indian sub-continent led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Leaders of madrassa education have guarded their ground as important havens for preparing future scholars of Islam.

disruption of the core objectives of these madrassas: preparing future scholars of Islam who play an important role in formation of religious thought in society. With these objectives the government began the process of reviewing, and renewing, engagement with madrassa leadership across the country. Some of the key steps taken included establishment of the "Pakistan Madrassah Education Board" PMEB in 2001. The purpose was to establish model madrassahs, improve and secure registration, regulation, standardization and uniformity of curricula and standard of education of these at par with the general education in Pakistan to enable recognition of certificates and degrees awarded by these board for equivalence with those awarded by the institutions like secondary and higher secondary examination boards and universities. Unfortunately, the Ordinance prepared for establishment of PMEB was never notified by the Federal government.

In 2019 the Federal cabinet decided that the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Trainings will be given the subject of Madrassas and the required entry was made in the Rules of Business 1973. A Directorate of Religious Education was established, as part of the Ministry with its head office in Islamabad.

The Directorate now has 16 offices across Pakistan and is responsible for all matters relating to madrassas and mainstreaming of religious education in the country. DGRE Has registered 20000 Madaris all over the country. To support imparting contemporary education teachers have been provided to madaris.

National curriculum has been implemented in Madaris and free books have been provided to students studying in these Madaris.

Most madrassas are managed by a "Wafaq" or a board responsible for the syllabus, academic work, including assessments at key stages and overall policy for institutions affiliated with it. The "Wafaq" also awards the relevant degrees and certificates. DGRE works with these Wafaqs for achievement of national objectives for which it has been mandated.

18.1 Objective

Mainstream all madrassas to enable children of these institutions to gain more employability options in the country and abroad and also to eliminate any tendencies towards extremism that may threaten social harmony and peace while facilitating the primary objective of imparting Islamic education for preparation of leaders of religious thought and scholarship for the coming generations.

Dr. Zaigham Qadeer
Director Policy & Research
Monday, 26 January, 2026, 9:37:55 AM

18.2 Strategies

a) To mainstream religious education in Pakistan.
b) To register all Dini Madaris of Pakistan.
c) To collect the data and other relevant information on Madaris
d) to facilitate all the registered Madaris for the opening of their bank accounts in the scheduled banks of the country.
e) To facilitate foreign students in obtaining Pakistani visas (maximum nine years) for admission in Pakistani Madaris.
f) To facilitate Madaris to get affiliated with the board of intermediate and secondary education as well as board of technical education for SSC/ HSSC and in technical and vocational education examinations for the Madaris Students.
g) To facilitate all the Dini Madaris to introduce the contemporary subjects at SSC/ HSSC in the next five years.

h) To facilitate all Dini Madaris in adopting national curriculum.

i) To facilitate Madaris to enhance national harmony peace stability and socio economic development in the country through organising various Co curricular and extracurricular activities.

18.2.1 Policy Recommendations

1. Expand the reforms initiated across the country through continued engagement with all Wafaqs and individual institution.
2. Enhance the all-round knowledge base of madrassa students to compete with other streams of education including provision of skill sets in collaboration with organizations like the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) to enhance options for these students in the job market.
3. Provide faculty to teach contemporary subjects needed for mainstreaming at large stage.
4. Train existing faculty in teaching of these contemporary subjects.
5. Provide equal opportunities to madrassa students by enabling them to obtain degrees from affiliated boards for general and technical and vocational education.
6. Expand the “Paigham e Pakistan” programme to enhance national harmony, peace and stability.
7. Include madrassas certificates and “Asnads” in the National Qualifications Framework.

To ensure sustained reforms adequate funding may be ensured.

Dr. Zaigham Abbasi
Director Policy & Research
Monday, 26 January, 2026, 9:13:33 AM

19 National Languages Research

International research

International research and experience show that congruence between a child's home language and the language of instruction is the most significant contributor to strong literacy skills and lifelong learning. Based on internationally accepted principles on language learning, as well as feedback from experts and practitioners, the National Education Policy Development Framework (NEPDF) 2024 emphasized a review of school language policies to balance children's needs with national aspirations.

In Pakistan, however, only three languages are officially used for literacy development: English, Urdu, and Sindhi (the last only in Sindh province). Until 2013, Pashto literacy was also taught in select districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but the practice was discontinued in favor of an increased emphasis on English. Consequently, a large number of children are deprived of the opportunity to acquire literacy in their home language. This incorrect choice of language for literacy represents a major contributor to low literacy and numeracy levels across the country. These policies need to be corrected in line with established principles on language learning.

19.1Why the Need for Research?

School

School language policy in a country with multilingualism is a complex challenge. Pakistan has not been successful in development of effective child centred approaches to language learning and learning through languages.Like most post-colonial states, the situation is further accentuated by the presence of an elite language inherited from the colonists - English in the case of Pakistan. The aspiration to learn English is rational, given the socio-economic and socio-political realities of the country. The language opens avenues for higher education, social mobility, and access to elite jobs. Simultaneously, Urdu, as the national language, has a permanence enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan. The process to acquire both these languages has been compromised over the years by extraneous pressures uninformed by child centred approaches to language learning and education.

Given that neither of these languages constitutes the mother tongue for a large percentage of the population the process of acquiring them must be structured across a ladder built on the child's language endowments. While comprehension of Urdu has expanded across the country due to its use in media, this understanding remains largely intuitive. What is needed is an actual language mapping to identify proficiency levels in Urdu across communities. This mapping would also be required for other regional languages and their dialects. Such a data-driven assessment would help decide the appropriate set of languages for school education, specifically for early literacy acquisition and for teaching in post-primary classrooms.

Literacy acquisition presents its own set of challenges. Every language has unique features of oral structure and script. Languages are arbitrary; there are no universal principles that apply across all of them. Each language has unique features in sounds, syntax, and grammar. As a

result, literacy acquisition paths and timelines differ for each language. The best method for developing literacy skills depends on multiple factors, and without research and application, it is not possible to predict the most effective approach.

However, research on literacy acquisition in Pakistani languages has never been conducted. This includes the national language, Urdu. Most work on Urdu has focused on translating scientific terminologies from English, and the impact of this work has never been assessed, but most teachers and educators are of the view that it has added to the difficulty level of learning. Regardless of the outcome, the right methods for teaching Urdu and other languages in Pakistan remain unexplored due to a lack of research. Often, methods of language acquisition are simply borrowed from other contexts without being tested locally.

Literacy acquisition is not the only area requiring research. When a language is adopted for formal learning in schools, multiple aspects must be studied. These include the oracy (spoken vocabulary) prevalent for each language before a child enters school, as literacy acquisition must build on this base vocabulary.

Most importantly, when languages are included in school curricula, the objectives of each must be clearly defined. Currently, advanced literature is included, which unnecessarily adds to the difficulty level. As a result, many children continue to struggle with even the basics in senior grades like secondary and higher secondary. Equally significant, the high literature content means that students of sciences must spend extra time on these languages rather than on the core subjects in which they need greater proficiency for higher education. A better approach would be to teach literature as an optional subject in secondary and higher secondary classes, available only for students with the aptitude and interest.

19.2Objective

1. Develop a child centered school language policy that helps in strong literacy acquisition while helping every child learn languages that will provide them with equitable opportunities in life.
2. Strengthen development of learning material and textbooks in different languages in Pakistan.

19.3Strategy

Establish a national languages academy to promote research on Pakistani languages with a view to their effective use in schools for their utilization as conduits of learning and learning of these languages (as elective subjects).

19.4Set up a National Languages Authority

Languages must be adapted to learners' needs in order to become effective tools for literacy development in schools. Each language has unique features that require ongoing research to improve its teaching and learning: especially in the early years. However, such research on Pakistani languages, including the national language Urdu, has not yet been conducted. Instead, approaches originally developed for English are often adapted for teaching Urdu.

If mother-tongue-based multilingual education is to be introduced in education systems across the country, research on the best methods for teaching and transition needs to be explored on an ongoing basis. Establishing a National Languages Authority would

complement the work of the existing National Language Authority. This new body could support research not only on the effective use of Pakistani languages for early learning but also on their development as elective subjects in later education and for their general advancement.

19.5Policy Recommendations

1. **Establish a National Languages Academy:** Prepare a concept for development of a "National Languages Academy" in consultation with the education professionals and academia. (The current National Language Authority can be converted into a National Languages Academy through change in its law, mandate and structure). Based on the feedback undertake the following steps:
    a. Clearly articulate the mandate of the organisation in terms of research on language from a school and child based perspective.
    b. Develop an organizational structure and mandate for the academy.
    c. Obtain relevant approvals from the Cabinet for setting up of the academy.
    d. Prepare a PC-1 for setting of the NLA after approval of the law and establish the Academy.

20 National Response to AI and Education

UNESCO's "Framework on Education and AI" describes the future as "AI Centric," noting that "all indications suggest that AI will be transformative." However, the most significant concern is to keep AI "Human Centric." Education plays a vital role in achieving this. The term "Human Centric" encompasses several outcomes: ensuring human agency over AI, addressing values and ethics that AI may put at risk, and - most importantly-eliminating the digital divide, which now increasingly includes an AI divide.

Education must evolve alongside AI, as its implications extend to changes in society, employment structures, and even the functions and service delivery of the state. Therefore, education must prepare children for this future world. This challenge manifests in different ways and at multiple levels. For Pakistan, a coordinated national response - especially regarding learning through artificial intelligence platforms - is critical to the future of education and national development. How can this be achieved? The answers are not easy.

In education, AI raises more unanswered questions than perhaps any other area of modern digital technology. There is broad agreement on AI's centrality in life and the need to include it in curricula and as a learning tool. Yet the costs and benefits of learning through AI remain unclear. UNESCO's framework itself admits an inability to provide definitive answers and advises caution. While it does not oppose AI in education, it acknowledges the absence of conclusive research.

This caution is echoed in the broader field of digital learning. With a longer history of scaled-up use, digital learning is now being re-evaluated for young children, as emerging evidence suggests that excessive screen time suppresses cognitive development, reading ability, and other critical faculties. Research in this area continues. In the case of generative AI, learning scientists are even less clear about the benefits and unintended consequences of its use in classrooms.

A cross-cutting theme in the recommendations is to learn, assess, and implement iteratively. For Pakistan, this will require a national effort, ideally coordinated by the federal government.

20.1History and context

The use of technology for education in the post-industrial world began with educational films in the early 20th century, followed by radio in the 1920s. In the 1960s, television was introduced as an educational tool. These were technologies used outside the classroom. The overhead projector can be considered the first modern audio-visual aid to enter the classroom itself. It was first used in the 1930s but became more widespread in the 1960s.

Technology used directly by individual students began in the 1970s with handheld calculators. The arrival of personal computers in the 1980s, combined with the spread of the internet by the 1990s, enabled faster completion of lower-order tasks, greater availability of research materials, and the evolution of writing software as a replacement for pen and paper.

The 21st century saw further growth in internet speeds and the resources available on the World Wide Web. It also witnessed a greater spread of laptops and tablets among individual

students. Key innovations included learning-focused interventions like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in higher education and the use of video platforms such as YouTube for delivering lessons and explaining concepts. Digitised databases of research material expanded, and Learning Management Systems (LMSs) - customised to the needs of institutions and courses - began to spread, again mostly in higher education.

The excitement surrounding these tools led to the development of "child-centred" software applicable from early childhood education through to the highest levels of schooling. Today, a new era has dawned with the inclusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI), although the earliest evidence of its use in education dates back roughly 40 years. This transformative technology has raised hopes, expectations, and fears. Driven by commercial concerns, its aggressive adoption in classrooms was perhaps inevitable. Specialised AI-based open-source and learning programmes have begun to spread in schools - but so far, only in a limited number of developed countries.

20.2The Digital and AI Divide

Without context, the brief history of technology in education can be misleading. The technology lag between developed and developing countries - and between the rich and the poor – is real and large. It has meant unequal benefits, deepening existing inequities. Many schools in the developing world, including those in Pakistan, lack electricity connections. Even archaic technologies like overhead projectors have never been used in many schools. Computers were placed in select schools but were never optimally used - due to fear of breakage and a lack of teachers capable of using them for teaching and learning. The technological divide has evolved into the digital divide, and will now exponentially enhance inequity through an emerging AI divide.
In Pakistan, the use of technology in elite private schools (and elite households) completely outstrips its employment in government and low-cost private schools. Even among these last two categories, there is massive variation across provinces and within provinces. Technology introduced through development projects in limited schools often never scales up and mostly fails to sustain. The digital divide is an added layer on Pakistan's educational issues, and it continues to widen as transformational technologies like AI outpace the capacity of poor households and weak government systems to keep up. This adds to a the many demands on Pakistan's education policy and its implementation processes.

20.3 What Can AI Achieve?

Digital technology, especially when augmented by AI, has the potential to achieve results more quickly than in the past. This expectation primarily drives the policy desire to introduce digital learning tools - and increasingly, AI - into schools.

But can digital technology actually transform these outcomes? Evidence from more developed systems reveals both limitations and unintended negative consequences of technology use. While research into potential improvements continues, early findings on AI for learning suggest a need for caution. The outcomes of engaging a child's brain with learning technology are far less linear and uniform than its use in fields like health, where the application targets human physiology rather than child psychology. Child psychology, by contrast, has profound implications for cognition, socio-emotional development, and other crucial areas of human growth.

In systems with low capacity to deliver education - due to limited human resources - expectations for digitization, and especially AI, must be set with great care. Technology best augments outcomes when human agency remains central. In settings with weak human resource capacity, such augmentation is difficult to envision. If core education processes are poorly understood, designed, or implemented, technology will not augment learning. Instead, it may be seen as an intrusion - or even dysfunctional. In other cases, it may encourage lazy use, at the cost of cognitive effort, creativity, and socio-emotional development.

Systemic preparedness - including teacher readiness - requires more than just familiarity with digital tools. True readiness involves a solid understanding of education itself, combined with the ability to use technology and grasp both its potential and its limitations.

Teacher readiness cannot be pursued in a vacuum. Systemic capacity to understand both the benefits and risks of technology integration, along with adequate resources and a willingness to research and learn, are essential.

Education delivery should benefit from the inclusion of all relevant technologies, especially AI. However, expectations must be tempered by lessons from other jurisdictions, a realistic assessment of local context and capacity, and awareness of resource and procurement constraints. The path forward should be prepared accordingly.

Definition of Artificial Intelligence
"Machines capable of imitating certain functionalities of human intelligence, including such features as perception learning, reasoning, problem solving, language interaction and producing creative work"
UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)

20.4 The Current Use

Technology integration remains low in both government and low-cost private schools. Only elite private school systems have adopted advanced digital technology - including AI. While this section primarily focuses on government systems, teachers, and learners, there is also a need to review AI use in elite private schools. Doing so can help identify and manage unintended consequences, some of which have already been documented in developed countries that use digital mediums for classroom teaching and learning.

Similarly, higher education in Pakistan has experienced a much more rapid rise in technology use, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this sector requires a separate, needs-based evaluation. The most critical priority within higher education is strengthening the preparation of AI specialists to build indigenous capacity.

The discussion here is limited to school education (as defined above) and is split into three levels: system, teacher, and learner. Effective implementation, especially, in the case of the latter two requires careful research and design. International research flags the highest risks in learner-facing AI, followed by teacher-facing AI, with the lowest risks in system-facing AI. The research does not prohibit AI use but calls for more informed responses and ongoing learning as AI is applied in different contexts, so that human agency is not compromised.

As UNESCO has long affirmed, education is not only a vehicle for knowledge transmission, skills development or economic advancement. It is also a relational, social, ethical and civic undertaking, rooted in the values of human dignity, solidarity, inclusion and justice. Yet, many global discussions on AI and educational futures are driven by narrow metrics of innovation, often informed by commercially powerful actors and framed in terms of speed, scale and optimization. In such framings, the priorities of teachers, learners and communities, especially those in under-resourced or marginalized contexts, are frequently excluded. Perspectives from teachers working in constrained systems, students navigating linguistic and digital exclusions, and researchers outside elite institutions are too often absent from the global AI in education discourse. To challenge this, we need spaces where divergent perspectives can not only co-exist but meaningfully engage with one another.

UNESCO 2025: AI and Education Framework

20.5Moving Forward

To move beyond the current integration, we must first review where we stand, compare our situation with global experiences, and then introduce reforms based on the lessons learned. For now, the policy limits its scope until more information is added to the growing body of knowledge on AI and education, as well as to learning and system capacity enhancement. This learning must include the ethical use of AI, protection against privacy abuses, and safeguards for users, especially, children. Most importantly, education must ensure that AI is used in a human-centric way. This all requires learning more about AI and education and its application in the national context.

20.6Objectives

1. Prepare Pakistan's education system for engagement with AI as a tool to be learnt and for learning.
2. Ensure that human agency is not diminished in an AI centric world i.e AI is human centric and capacitate the education systems that use AI to augment human capabilities instead of developing "lazy learners" dependent on AI for creative outputs.

20.7Strategies

1. **Establish a Multisectoral Task Force for AI in Education**: MoFE&PT, in consultation the provincial government and the Higher Education Commission (HEC), will constitute a dedicated multisectoral task force comprising educationists (including practicing teachers), national AI specialists, policy-makers, and data specialists. The mandate of this task force will include learning from global best practices. Specifically, the task force shall be required to:

    a. Conduct national-level workshops to map the current use of AI in education, identify constraints to scaling

up AI initiatives, and assess associated risks (e.g., data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equity concerns).

b. Organize exposure visits to countries where AI has been significantly and effectively integrated into education systems, with a focus on understanding operational, pedagogical, and regulatory frameworks.

c. Prepare a comprehensive report recommending concrete objectives, implementation plans, and procedural guidelines for the use of AI in the learning process, ensuring alignment with the broader policy objectives of education.

2. **Commission Targeted Academic Research on AI and Education**: To further inform the work of the multisectoral task force, MoFE&PT will, with the assistance of development partners, commission academic studies on AI and education. These studies will focus on specific areas identified during the initial national workshops, addressing evidence gaps and providing data-driven insights to guide policy decisions and implementation strategies.

20.8The Role of Higher Education

National

The **National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025** prioritises investment in human resource capabilities to expand AI expertise in Pakistan. This emphasis on talent development is central to the adoption of AI across all sectors, including education. The Policy specifically states:

"Launch a scholarship program, in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the private sector, to offer 3,000 scholarships annually for postgraduate and doctoral programs in AI including AI ethics and allied technologies."

Building on this, the Federal Education Policy 2026 borrows from the AI Policy's objectives to the specific needs of school education. It outlines how targeted implementation of the scholarship program can be used for the benefit of school education. FEP also recommends use of capacity and role of higher education for promotion of learning on AI and Education.

20.8.1Objective

Strengthen the support systems and capacities to tailor digital (AI) interventions to the needs of the school education system including cyber-security and ethical use needs.

20.8.2 Strategies

1. **Establish Dedicated Scholarships for AI in Education:** Within the 3,000 scholarships outlined in the National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2025, allocate a dedicated quota of at least 200 annual scholarships for research on AI and education. These scholarships must be earmarked specifically for specialization in the intersection of education and artificial intelligence, with distribution governed by provincial quotas to ensure equitable geographic access.

2. **Establish Centers of Excellence for AI and Education:** Mandate the creation of dedicated Centers for AI and Education within the Institute of Education Development at a minimum of four public universities. These centers shall serve as hubs for research, curriculum development, and pedagogical innovation focused on the integration of AI in teaching and learning.
3. **Integrate AI and Education into Pre-Service Teacher Training:** Require the introduction of compulsory courses on the theory, practice, and ethics of Artificial Intelligence in Education across all pre-service teacher education programs. This will ensure that all new educators are equipped with foundational competencies to effectively leverage AI tools in their future classrooms.

22 Higher Education

Higher Education Commission (HEC) established in 2002 through a special statute replaced the previous University Grants Commission (UGC). The HEC has over the last nearly quarter of a century guided the growth of universities in Pakistan. There are currently, xxx, universities in the country. The period has also seen a growth in the number of doctorates funded through generous scholarship offers by the HEC. These include Phds completed in national as well as international universities.

HEC, since its inception, has also developed quality assurance systems to regulate the quality of research and learning. The structure of undergraduate degrees has been changed to transit from the older two years bachelor programme to four years. Curricula have also been revised through inclusion of faculties, professional bodies (where relevant) and employers from the relevant field. A ranking system for universities is also in place. This ranking gives primacy to research carried out by the faculty of a university. Promotion of faculty is also contingent on research produced and a tenure track structure has been introduced accordingly.

Unlike school education, higher education, has remained in the federal domain. It has, however, been placed in Part 2 of the Federal Legislative List. This means that while the Commission continues to have the role setting standards in higher education, its policies and recommendations need approval of the Council of Common Interest (CCI).

The opinions on the impact of these reforms varies.

There has been no independent assessment of the impact of these reforms. While there has been an expansion of universities the critique targets loss of quality through expansion. Universities have been opened on a larger scale than the number of quality human resource available for filling faculty needs. In many cases these universities have been established in remote areas where it is difficult to attract and retain quality faculty.

Reports from employees like the federal and provincial public service commissions also decry low quality of graduates. The examiners' reports of these bodies highlight poor analytical ability and expression and weak knowledge of subject areas. The situation of private universities is perceived to be worse (with the exception of some high end, well resourced universities that have invested in faculty and infrastructure and expanded through a deliberate process focused on quality and not commercial considerations).

Assessment of the impact of higher education on employment, research and innovation is required. This will not be a simple process as the number of faculties of higher education are numerous and continue to grow. Changes in technology, development in sciences, environment, local economic needs and many other variables impinge on the objectives and structure of higher education. The need for review of the overall vision, objectives and goals as well as the needs of each sector are overdue. So is an independent identification and assessment of the performance gaps and the causes thereof. The latter also needs to assess the governance structure of delivery that consists of universities and degree colleges as well as the provincial departments responsible for higher education.

The Policy, therefore, recommends an approach to comprehensively review the entire higher education sector as the engine of economic and socio-politic growth and development of the country.

A clear missing area on which work can already begin is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). At present the scope of NQF is limited and there are two different sets of NQFs – one notified by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the other by the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC). The school sector is missing in both. There is a need to develop a single, flexible and comprehensive NQF.

Interaction between higher education and intermediate.

22.1Policy Recommendations

1. Conduct a national workshop on Higher Education to assess the impact of reforms of the last decade, the gaps therein and the causes. The workshop will also recommend policy changes including further sector reviews.
2. Review the gap between the quality of, and access to, higher education in various critical sectors, with the help of professionals and professional bodies with the responsibility for quality assurance of the relevant field.
3. Set up a joint body of HEC, NAVTTC, and National Curriculum Council (NCC) to review the current NQF and develop a comprehensive framework that covers the market needs.
4. Revise the policy of pre-service teacher education to enhance its quality and relevance to school education in Pakistan.

23Implementation of the Federal Education Policy

The Policy will be implemented through development of medium-term plans. These plans will prioritize the policy recommendations. These plans will be time bound, costed and monitored for implementation and impact. The Implementation process will require the following:

23.1Secretariate for Implementation of the Policy

The secretariate will be the custodian of the Policy and oversee its day to day implementation. The starting point of this process will be development of a three year costed plan. The Secretariate will monitor implementation in coordination with the relevant organizations responsible for the specific area as per their mandate. The plan will include indicators, including means of verification, for effective monitoring.
The secretariate will develop a dashboard based on the plan to monitor progress and send monthly reports to the Secretary MoEFPT and the relevant heads of organisations. The secretariate will also be responsible for coordinating meetings of the Oversight body and the Implementation Committee. This will include development of progress reports to be presented to these committees and identification of issues in implementation that may require a review of the plan or the policy or both.

23.2Oversight Committee

Oversight body will be headed by the Minister for Federal Education. Other members will include:

1. Secretary
2. Additional Secretary
3. Heads of all attached departments and autonomous bodies.

The Oversight Committee will meet at least once in three months to review progress and give direction to the concerned departments and officials, including, the secretariate. These directions can include changes in the plan and the policy.

23.3Implementation Committee

Implementation Committee will be headed by Additional Secretary and include representatives of all attached department and autonomous bodies. The committee will meet once a month to review progress against respective targets and indicators. The implementation committee will guide improvements in the implementation and monitoring process and identify, if needed, additional resource needs to be presented to the Oversight Committee.