

## **Investing in Education: Pakistan as a Traditional Society in a Modern World**

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### **Abstract**

*Developing countries have seen a direct influence of foreign players on their educational policies. This influence of foreign players on the Pakistani educational policy has been direct and prominent after 9/11 attacks. This paper looks into the effectiveness of money spent by the donor nations to malign the effect of Islamization in the Pakistani society. This research was conducted taking into consideration the ideas that investment in the Pakistani education sector by foreign donors have not westernized the Pakistani youth and that there is no difference between the perception of the Pakistani youth and their parents with regard to culture and religion. The sample selected consisted of 120 youngsters aged between 16 to 18 years of age. A questionnaire consisting of 17 yes/no questions was used to collect the required data. The results from the research showed that the family structure in Pakistan was half way between traditional and western. There were certain things that the Pakistani youth understood as an essential part of their lives, and there was no compromise on the traditional values, whereas there were other things that the youth considered less important and these were steadily disappearing from their set of traditional values.*

**Keywords:** human capital theory, modernization, traditional society, western society

### **Introduction**

States have invested in education under the umbrella of Human Capital Theory according to which, "All human behavior is based on the economic self-interest of individuals operating within

freely competitive markets”(Fitzsimons, 1999, p. 1). The impact of education in social, economic, and political development of a country is recognized (Tilak, 2013), but to achieve the end of delivering education to their masses, developing countries have taken financial aid from more developed countries and as a result, these countries are dependent on donor countries for forming their educational policies (Tilak, 2013). Even though South Asian countries have taken steps to improve the state of education at home and have made various policies, but the lack of political commitment has not made these efforts conducive (Tilak, 2013).

Pakistan is no different in this regard and has taken aid from donor countries to give boost to its degenerating educational system and has come up with a multitude of educational plans and programs. None of these plans and programs have so far worked and the reason may lie in the very basis of Pakistan’s existence; the two nation theory emphasizes that the ideology of Pakistan springs from the ideology of Islam. The Islamic ideology requires the people of Pakistan to live their lives according to the code of conduct given in the Quran and the Sunnah (way of life) of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). As Islam gives a complete code of life, no policy, no ideal, no law needs to be borrowed from any culture or society; rather, the Islamic ideology encompasses all the needful to run a state. It is thus natural for Pakistan to adopt policies and practices that have their roots in Islamic ideology. The Pakistanis; therefore, identify themselves as Muslims and followers of Islam where the identity is, “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning” (Castells, 2010, p. 6). Since the advent of Pakistan, there has been an attempt to create a state based on an Islamic model (Cohen, 2002), but Pakistan has not as yet succeeded in doing so due to constant foreign intervention in decision and policy making. This paper will look into the effectiveness of the money spent by the donor nation to malign the effect of Islamization of the Pakistani society. The paper attempts to understand the effect of education aide given to Pakistan by the donor countries on the youth of Pakistan.

## Literature Review

When considering the Human Capital Theory, the sector that is most important for investment is the education sector, as it is a source through which a country is provided the basis of socio-economic development (Sattar, 2012). Through skilled manpower, a country is better able to lead in sustainable economic development (Memon, 2007). Memon (2007) and Sattar (2012) both believe that most third world countries fail to obtain their objective of increased literacy rate. The reasons Sattar (2012) has given are, “scrawny institutional capacity, pitiable government system, political instability or legacy effects of past conflict” (p. 100), whereas, Memon (2007) has pointed out that extremely low level of public investment is responsible for the sorry state of education in Pakistan. Other than the reasons given above, ineffective policy is another cause of the downward trend in education.

After 9/11 attacks on the US, the dismal state of education in Pakistan was highlighted to the world and the roots of militancy were attributed to this state of education (Winthrop & Graff, 2002). A link between militancy and poor Pakistani educational system was created which holds that the militants are able to recruit those with negative worldviews as the schools fail to impart citizenship (Winthrop & Graff, 2002). To combat militancy, the government of Pakistan increased investment in education from 2% to 7% of its GDP and millions of dollars started to pour in by the donor countries (Winthrop & Graff, 2002). The most important donor country for Pakistan’s educational system was the United States of America, which has been injecting funds through USAID. In 2002, \$100 million dollars were handed over to Pakistan to improve its education sector and then it was decided to give \$65 million in 2005, for Pakistan’s primary educational program (Kronstadt, 2004). These donations were to cater for long term US interest and promote modernization and democratic values in Pakistan and to reverse the Islamic influence of the Pakistani society (Kronstadt, 2004). This led the US to play a major role in the construction of the educational policies of Pakistani, the sole purpose of which was to develop international

trend and human capital that is befitting for the global market.

Winthrop and Graff (2002) are of the view that the educationists are usually busy in debating issues such as, teacher management, learning outcomes, and enrollment rates, but they sideline much more important issues of policy making, which have a direct influence on political and social agendas along with the issues related to identity building and nation building. They warn that educational issues should not be mixed with the anti-militancy objectives as the objectives of the investment should be conflict-sensitive. If such sensitivity is not adhered to, then Winthrop and Graff (2002) propose these investments may exacerbate rather than mitigate militancy. On the other hand, Cohen (2002) believes that the United States should refine the idea of Pakistan as a moderate Muslim state through investing in its policy making.

Pakistani education policy makers have failed to achieve its aims of making the educational content relevant and effective for economic growth and nation building (Memon, 2007). A very pertinent question that arises is if it is possible to refine the very ideology of Pakistan? The roots of Pakistan lie in the two nation theory according to which the state Pakistan was to be more than a state providing welfare and justice to its citizens; it was to be the “Ideological and political leader of the Islamic world” (Cohen, 2002, p. 109). Cohen (2002) proposes that the US should assist Pakistan in redefining its identity as a moderate Muslim state. Redefining Pakistan's identity would mean redefining the identity of Pakistanis as well. Pakistanis define themselves as practicing modern Muslims and such a shift will create an identity problem for the majority of Pakistanis. Merry and Driessen (2005) opine that “Even the non-practicing Muslims who smoke, drink alcohol, eat forbidden food, and get themselves involved in anti Islamic vices, seldom renounce their Muslim identities” (p. 412). Rana (2011) showed that 92.4% of the Pakistani youth consider religion as an important factor in their lives even if they do not regularly pray. Rana also mentioned that there is a growing trend towards religion in the educated Pakistani youth and is a source of their identity, yet they seem confused whether or not religion is the answer to all their problems.

Even though it is apparent that the Pakistani state and its educational program donors are in favor of implementing a policy that would help the Pakistani state to develop into a more modernized and moderate nation, it becomes critical to understand what the Pakistanis themselves want. Nelson (2006) conducted a survey of Pakistani parents in the area of Rawalpindi to understand the local educational demands. The results of his research suggested that parents favored religious education as opposed to the whims and wishes of the donor agencies, which encourage secular education. But does this survey mean that the parents are against modernity? They may be against the western norms and values and against the secular educational system, but they are probably not against modernity.

According to Wreth (2005), the idea of modernity itself is encompassed by the intellectual framework of Islam. He explains that modernity is a part and parcel of Islamic tradition, unlike how the west portrays it to be where Islam and modernity are at extreme ends. For Pakistanis, both these ideas are interlinked and interrelated. He points out that Islam is the identifying field of oneself, as well as the world, keeping in mind the cultural factors. The Muslim world with its Islamic traditions which includes Pakistan, fall in the range of modernity, but for them there is a difference between modernity and Westernization. Therefore, it is clear that where the west sees Pakistanis as religious fundamentalists, the Pakistanis identify themselves as Muslims and modern at the same time. Here it becomes a necessity to bring forth the idea of modernity as given by Farhat-Holzman (2012), which is to advance scientifically, whereas the westernization consists of ideals that are rooted in 2500 years of Greek civilization. She points out that westernization and modernization are two separate things and “Modernization can exist without westernization, but unfortunately it is not recognized by many Western leaders” (p. 51). We can therefore conclude that the forces of the west are trying to westernize the Pakistani society by introducing secular values under the umbrella of modernization. On the other hand, the Pakistani society is embracing modernity as a part of their life, yet rejecting westernization. The west considers the secular values to be in opposition to the traditional values. Traditional societies according to Inglihart (2008) emphasize on religion, have respect for

authority, and possess high national pride. The west is of the view that Pakistani society is a traditional society, where the freedom of choice does not exist. This research was conducted to understand if the Pakistani youth were traditional or modern in their thought, keeping in mind the definition of traditional society and modern society as given by the west. This research provides a snapshot of the perceptions regarding religion, culture and tradition that exist in the Pakistani youth and the extent to which these perceptions have changed due to the introduction of a more globalized curriculum.

### **Research Methodology**

Since the purpose of this research was to look into the perceptions of the Pakistani teenagers; therefore, a dichotomous questionnaire having yes/no responses was used to collect the data. This helped the researcher to draw the cross sectional data that was required for the research. Descriptive analysis was done to calculate the findings of the collected data.

### **Research Participants**

The sample is defined as the subset of a population (Hoy 2010) and it must meet the strategy of data collection (Carr, 1994). In the present research, the sample selected consisted of 120 youngsters aged between 16 to 18 years of age. Out of 120 questionnaires, 116 were taken into consideration and four were invalid due to incomplete information. The sample consisted of 55 male and 61 female students studying in grades eleven and twelve from three private colleges of Karachi.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to collect data for the research was a questionnaire consisting of 17 yes/no questions developed by going through the relevant literature on the topic of study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: eight questions regarding family perceptions and nine questions noting student perceptions.

Since the purpose of the instrument was to measure traditional and modern values of individuals; therefore, every answer that supported the western thought was given one point and every answer that showed the traditional thought was counted as two. For example, regarding the first question, 'Are you free to leave science subjects and enter another field if you want to?' If answered as 'yes', a value of one was attributed to it and if answered 'no' then a value of two was denoted to the answer.

## **Results**

The results from the questionnaire showed that the family structure in Pakistan was half way between being traditional and western. There were certain things that the Pakistani youth understood as an essential part of their lives and there was no compromise in these traditional values. The participants in the findings came out to be highly traditional, with no or very little difference between the male and female respondents when answering to questions given in Table 1.

Table 1. Highly traditional aspects of Pakistani youth

Questions	Male %age		Female %age		Combined age	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you feel that dupatta is an integral part of our dress and must be worn by all girls?	84	16	86	14	87.5	12.5
Will you be allowed to marry outside your religion?	4	96	2.8	97.2	2	98
Is it rightly thought that the fundamental duty of women is to take care of the house and family first – a woman's job is secondary to her family obligations?	76	24	70	30	64	36
Do you think that life should be enjoyed instead of working hard for a better future, as the future may never come?	36	64	33	67	30	70
Is it correct to say that your first obligation to yourself and then comes your family – each person is responsible only for himself or herself, not for the whole family?	34	66	33	67	32	68
Do you believe that marriage should be maintained as long as you are enjoying it, and must be dissolved when its no more enjoyable?	18	82	14	86	10	90
Do you feel that there are certain things in your religion that may not be practical?	28	72	19	81	11	89

It can be said that all the seven questions mentioned above are in some way related to religious Islamic values. The surprising factor



here is that even though only 57% of the parents force their children to pray, yet it is clear from the answers given by the students that they value their religion. On the other hand, there are some aspects of the Pakistani culture that have seen a shift from traditional to western thought; therefore, some of the common cultural beliefs are not as strong as they supposedly were thought to be as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2. Aspects of Pakistani youth with shift from traditional to western thought

Questions	Male %age		Female %age		Combined age	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you free to leave the science subjects and enter another field if you want to?	60	40	59	41	59	41
Was to take science subjects in intermediate solely your own decision?	86	14	86	14	86	14
Do you enjoy studying science?	92	8	85	15	79	21
Do you buy what you want to, without the interference of your mother or father?	38	62	42	58	45	55
Are you allowed to go out with your friends whenever you want to?	76	24	63	37	52	48
Will you be allowed to marry outside your cast?	84	16	74	26	64	36
Can you discuss your friends of the opposite gender with your parents?	76	24	66	34	57	42
Do you think that it is the fundamental responsibility of sons, not daughters to care for their aged parents?	68	32	35	65	5	95

There were two aspects where 50% of the respondents carried western thoughts, whereas 50% carried traditional thoughts. These are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Aspects of Pakistani youth with western and traditional thoughts

Questions	Male %		Female %		Combined%	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you pressured by your family to obtain good grades?	66	34	58	42	52	48
Do your parents pressurize you to pray?	62	38	57	43	52	48

To further understand the influence of the western culture upon the Pakistani youth, the questions in the questionnaire were divided into two categories: ‘Student point of view’ and ‘family point of view’. Surprisingly, it was discovered that the participants were slightly more traditional than their family. Instead of becoming more westernized due to the influence of media and the global education agenda, they seemed to be more traditional.

## Discussion

According to the results obtained, the youth held quite a traditional approach towards all questions that dealt with religion or in some way were linked to the spirit of Islam. Since the people of a traditional society focus on strong family structure and reject divorce, they respect authority and emphasize social conformity (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). The same results were obtained from the research that was conducted on the Pakistani students with regards to the questions on family structure and religion. The results showed that they were not in favor of divorce even if the marriage was not enjoyable. They knew that taking care of a home was the first and the foremost duty of women (Baig, 2014; Nasir, 2005). Thus, the

occupational choices for men and women are different in Pakistan as women feel that their families and children should not be neglected because of their occupational choice (Nasir, 2005).

They also believed in working hard for a better future and that their first obligation was to their family. The reason could be that the centralized syllabus of Pakistan's text boards is based on Islamization (Kronstadt, 2004) or maybe because the Muslim modernists aimed at economic and intellectual progress of the Muslim societies and could see that the Muslim community was sound socially and spiritually and did not need any reforms in socio-moral spheres (Rehman 1970). Chattoo, Atkin and McNeish (2004) noted when they started their research project on young Pakistanis and their families that, "The significance of religion in the life of an overwhelming majority of the young people and their families who participated in the research was marked beyond debate" (p.25). Religion was not a sphere of life, but a way of life for these young Pakistanis and their families were a source of identification (Chattoo, Atkin, & McNeish, 2004). It was observed that the Pakistani urban youth were not willing to compromise on their religious values. The findings of Hussain (2011) revealed that for a typical Pakistani family in the USA, religion is the most important ingredient in maintaining a healthy family life and it is through religion that various issues are resolved. The Pakistani parents want to build an Islamic foundation of their children upon which they can spend the rest of their lives (Hussain, 2011).

The second part of the results dealt with the shift that is seen in the Pakistani society, from a traditional society to a western one. The participants seemed to be more liberal than the traditional parents and the majority of them had decided to take up science not because they were forced to, but because they wanted to. It was also noted that the youngsters were able to go out with their friends, although it seemed that the boys had more liberty to do so than girls. As Chattoo, Atkin and McNeish (2004) showed through their research that Pakistani parents were more liberal towards their sons than daughters. Considering that the Pakistani society is conventional where freedom of relationship between opposite sex is not appreci-

ated, it was found through the survey that a large number of youth could discuss their friends of opposite gender with their families. When it came to taking care of the aged parents, there was a significant shift in the approach and it was considered that it was not only the responsibility of the sons, but of the daughters too, though there was a difference in how the two genders perceived the situation. The majority of the boys thought that it was the responsibility of the sons only, whereas the girls thought otherwise. It was also discovered that even though the trend was shifting from marriages strictly within the cast and the majority of the individuals were optimistic that they will be allowed to marry outside their caste, yet the idea of marrying outside the religion did not come across too well. Similar results were achieved through a research that was conducted on the second generation South Asians. It was revealed that they wanted a traditional life mate. (Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2005). The results of this research oppose the results of Hussain (1999). This research showed that more than anything the religious values in choosing a life partner were upheld, whereas Hussain's (1999) research concluded that it was the socio-cultural choices that dominated the marriage choices. More research in this direction may be helpful to understand the phenomenon holistically.

The Pakistani society is doing away with the obsolete thinking that was a part of the sub-continent culture, that is, the traditions that were not religious but only cultural. It can thus be concluded that even though it may seem that the Pakistani society is changing from traditional to western society, the reality is that it is fundamentally a very religious society, where the youth are well aware of their boundaries laid by their religion. To the outside observer, there may be a shift from a traditional to western society, but in no way do the values incorporated in the shift are against the laws and rules of Islam. The results of this research coincide with the observations made by Farhat-Holzman (2012) that the Pakistani society is not a western society, but by all means it is a modern Islamic society.

It also seems that the Pakistani youth is slightly more traditional in nature than their parents. It can be said that they want to identify themselves with their religious value more than their parent's, the reason may lie in the aftermath of 9/11 that caused the world

to view Muslims with suspicion. There were also questions to which the answers revealed that the Pakistani youngsters were half way between traditional and western concepts. In such cases, it is suggested that there are still parents who want to retain their traditions in their family structure, whereas others are willing to give more freedom to their children. The shift in the values of the Pakistani society seems to be a healthy one and does not negate any of the Islamic values.

## **Conclusion**

Even though educational reforms are travelling from the western countries to the Asian nations to be adapted by them (Hallingera, 2010), yet Nasir (2005) opines that in a Pakistani society, there are “Socio-cultural factors this society has inherited and maintained” (p.77). We can therefore say that there is a shift in the Pakistani society from traditional to modern, but not western; as the results prove that it is still a very religious society and there is no fundamental difference between the way the parents perceive the values and the way the present generation perceives it. There may be a compromise on the cultural aspects of values, but not on the religious aspect. The investment in education, thus made by the donor nations should not try to malign the Islamic identity of the students by introducing western moral values; rather, it should try to bank on the modern values that exist within the Islamic structure. This paper thus proposes implementation of Islamic educational policy. Another problem that can easily be resolved if the Islamic educational system is implemented is the problem of identity. It is not a surprise that the results of the research showed that Pakistani youth wanted to be identified as religious individuals, even if they may not be practicing Muslims. Although the objectives of the donor countries, making large investments in the Pakistani educational sector does not include strengthening of Islamic identity, yet it was found that the students were slightly more traditional in their outlook than their families. Instead of becoming more westernized due to the influence of media and the global education agenda, they seemed to be more traditional. Islamic educational policy will give a sense of direction to the students and eliminate the confusion that exists in them.

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