

From Learning to Leadership: The Role of Civil Society and Peace Education on Socio-Political Change in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: For holistic peace in any society, a sustainable socio-political change is required that needs integration of all stakeholders. To achieve this goal, educating the youth can play a vital role. In Pakistan, more than 48.4% among the total youth aged 5-16 years are out-of-school. Such a large number of children needs schools equal to what Pakistan could build since its independence in 1947, leaving a gap for civil society to fill. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the role of Peace education and civil society in bringing a positive socio-political change in Pakistan. The study takes data through semi-structured interviews from the founding members of two Islamabad based civil society organisations (CSOs) and peace education experts. Secondary data is gathered from the official websites of relevant organizations. The findings reveal that CSOs in Pakistan are actively working to empower the youth through educating the uneducated mostly using traditional education system as well as grooming the learned. The study recommends that CSOs needs to incorporate peace education which is more important for bringing socio-political awareness and positive peace in a society.

KEYWORDS: Holistic Peace, Out-of-school-children, Peace Education, Civil Society, Socio-Political Change

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Introduction

The role of civil society organizations in bringing Socio-Political Change in any society is quite significant (Zharkevich, 2010). Civil society can be termed as the “Third Sector” in a country, distinct from the government and the business community and include the family and the private sphere (Anheier, 2005). The private sphere refers to non-governmental organizations, community groups, and other grassroots movements, that advance the interests and will of citizens and play a crucial role in advocating for social and political change (Gibbon, 1998). In the modern democratic world, on one hand civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as a vital entity performing contributory roles such as dealing with humanitarian crisis, human development, poverty alleviation, imparting education and contributing to the democratic culture of governance (Jahan, 2021).

Education, on the other hand, empowers individuals with knowledge and critical thinking skills, enabling them to engage in rational decision-making and participate actively in the socio-political processes (Lauder, 1991). If majority of a society is educated, positive socio-political change is likely. In Pakistan, today, education

system faces long-standing problems in access, quality, and equal opportunity at all levels: primary and secondary schools, higher education and vocational education in spite of recent rapid spread of private schooling and expansion of higher education opportunities (Aziz, 2014). More than 26.2 million children which are around 11.6% of total population and 48.2% of the total children under 15 years of age are out of schools (O'Neill, 2024); a number that cannot be ignored. Among the numerous causes of illiteracy in Pakistan, several key factors stand out: poverty - approximately 40% of the population is living below the poverty line which significantly limits access to education; State is under 223.86 billion US dollars public debt and liability; expensive private schooling system - making education unaffordable for many (Aziz, 2014); uneducated parents - often prioritize immediate earning over their children's education (Abbas & Hussain, 2021). Social barriers also play a crucial role, with only 49% of women receiving education compared to 72% of men (UN Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan, 2023). Furthermore, the inadequate allocation of resources, with only 1.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dedicated to education in 2023 (Economic Adviser's Wing, 2023), hampers the development and accessibility of educational opportunities.

Under the prevailing economic situation, the government seems to be ill-equipped for providing quality education to such a large number of out-of-school children (OOSC) alone, hence, leaves a gap for civil society to shoulder responsibility by initiating own projects of educating these street children. Therefore, the current study is conducted to explore the influence of education and role of CSOs towards socio-political change in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

- ▶ To explore the role of civil society organizations in educating out-of-school children in Pakistan.
- ▶ To highlight the importance of educated youth in initiating and sustaining a positive socio-political change in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How civil society organizations can play their part in educating out-of-school children?
2. How educated youth can contribute towards a sustainable and positive socio-political change in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

The study is likely to open up a debate on how civil society can contribute towards educating OOSC in Pakistan. It will document the role of civil society organizations in educating OOSC that would help in bringing socio-political change in Pakistan. It will also help towards achieving UNO SDG No 1: No poverty; SDG No 4: Quality Education; SDG No 5 and 10: Gender equality and reduced inequality, SDG No 16: Peace, justice and strong institution and SDG No 17: Partnership for the Goals.

Main Argument

Education empowers individuals through knowledge, critical thinking, and rational decision-making - necessary for participation in bringing a socio-political change and Civil Society can influence this process of change by educating out-of-school children.

Literature Review

Friedrich Hegel believed that conflicts mostly arise due to socio-political inequalities, economic disparities and conflicting political interests within a society and when the state fails to maintain the civics (Colas, 2013). According to the Libertarian Cato Institute Washington DC, "aim of Civil Society Organizations is to keep a check on the manifestos of political parties, protect expansion of free market and individual liberty, protect freedom of speech, and challenge elite power, tyrannical market policies and authoritarian rule (Edwards, 2009). The UN and World Bank term civil society as one of the keys to good governance, illiteracy and poverty alleviation (Punyaratabandhu, 2004). While Gramsci has termed civil society as the site of rebellion against the orthodox and the cultural hegemony which is expressed through families, school colleges, voluntary associations and media (Fonseca, 2016). However, Karl Marx had a different opinion and termed civil society as one of the vehicle in the hands of elite class in a capitalist society (Chambers, 2002).

Highlighting importance of education, Paulo Friere argue that education does not change the world, in fact it changes people who then change the world. Uneducated people opposes liberal values, lack tolerance towards divergent opinion and want to impose their orthodoxy even by force (Macedo and Freire, 2005). Muddanagouda Patil in his comparative study, involving a sample of 120 children selected from different schools {Montessori method of schooling (n=60) and Traditional method of education (n=60)} concluded that the former method focuses on personal development rather than exams, produces more mature, creative and socially adept children as compared to the later method. To measure aggression and frustration levels among these children, Patil used the aggression scale developed by Pal and Naqvi and the frustration test developed by Chauhan and Tiwari respectively. The findings revealed that the children of traditional schools have higher level of aggression and frustration than the children of 'Montessori Method of Education (Patil, 2016). According to Michael W. Apple, "education can and should do something about society. Michael while referring George Counts has further argued that education or school can build a new social order and can actually lead the reconstruction of a society in terms of what schools do and what educated people can do to challenge the relations of dominance and subordination in a society (Apple, 2012).

Literature review suggest that civil society activism in the field of educating the youth has led to a gradual change in the Burma/Myanmar's authoritarian political culture (Tin, 2008). In Bangladesh and Japan too, the role of civil society in formulating and implementation process of educational policies is very constructive. Both are among those nations that benefited from the efforts of civil society in promoting education and accountability, hence paved way for positive socio-political change (Mustary, 2022). The role of civil society in social mobilization led to fair elections in South Korea in 1997 in which an opposition candidate was elected as the president making it the first democracy in Asia. The process made possible a horizontal transfer of power through the electoral process and breaking down the authoritarian regime through democratic transitions. Civil society also ensured the subsequent post-transition democratic consolidation (Kim, 2002). The South Korean case, in fact, has served as one of the crucial precursors in the emerging wave of 'bottom-up' transitions that ultimately swept Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe (Kim, 2003a).

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan and the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), 60.6 million out of 128.6 million registered voters exercised their right to vote in Pakistan's 12th general elections held on 08 February, 2024. The lowest turnout was in KP (39.5%), followed by Baluchistan (42.9%), in Sindh

(43.7%) and in Punjab turnout remained 51.6% while the highest turnout (54.2%) was in Islamabad Capital Territory (FAFEN, [2024](#)). Looking at the literacy rates in these regions, Punjab leads with 63%, followed by Sindh (60%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (53%) and Balochistan (44%) while Islamabad has the highest (94%) literacy rate (Pakistan Economic Survey 2022-23, [2024](#)). A comparison of literacy rate with voters' turnout suggests that education does play a role in social mobilization and awareness among the masses about the value of vote.

Research Gap

Many Civil Society Organizations in Pakistan are working voluntarily to educate OOSC but neither their efforts nor their contributions towards socio-political change are adequately documented and sufficiently highlighted through academic work, therefore, provide a gap in the current literature to be thoroughly researched.

Research Methodology

The current study is deductive in nature as it makes a generalized statement - education brings awareness and civil society can play a role in educating 26.2 Million OOSC that will help in bringing a positive socio-political change in Pakistan. The study has followed a descriptive mode to describe the characteristics of 'out-of-school children' and civil society as population, while socio-political change in Pakistan as a phenomenon. Descriptive research is also suitable for further exploring and documenting the influence of CSOs and education in bringing socio-political awareness. The generalized statement has been tested with two organizations as sample: one is the "International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning (iFeel) and second is "The Black Hole (TBH), both based in capital city Islamabad of Pakistan:

The International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning or the 'iFeel' envisioned back in 2007 by a few educated young women lead by Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, started weekly visits to the slum suburb areas of Islamabad, Pakistan to provide ration, medical assistance, winter clothing, and food to the OOSC who were spending their time on the streets or garbage heaps (iFeel, [2024](#)). These young women realized that instead of giving meagre temporary monetary assistances, a more durable good to these OOSC can be education which will empower them to stand on their own feet.

The Black Hole or the TBH was launched on 5th March 2022 by Mashal Books headed by Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, with the aim to groom the educated youth through dialogue. The TBH though in its nascent stages, is a non-profit, open-to-all, casual educational and intellectual space for science, art, and culture. TBH has an international advisory board having eleven members of various fields from different countries of the world. There are twenty sponsors of TBH all are civil society organizations, industrialists and philanthropists. The managing committee comprises of five members, including Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, all working voluntarily. TBH is run by eleven team members youth working free of cost (The Black Hole, [2024](#)). TBH is a forum for educated and learned citizens of all ages unlike the 'iFeel' which work for out of school children. TBH after two years of its inception, has a 60-capacity auditorium, a small library, and a children's science Laboratory.

Primary data has been collected through semi structured in-depth interviews with open ended questions from the founding members of both the CSOs, students taught or groomed by these CSOs, experts on the subject of education, and civil society activists. Secondary data has been collected from the concerned books,

government published statistical data, research articles, and official annual reports. Qualitative inquiry and comparison with already work done in other countries on influence of education and civil society in bringing socio-political change was reviewed as literature and followed as reference in analysis of the data. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to and names of some participants are mentioned with their consent while pseudonyms have been used for those wished to remain anonymous. For biases control, triangulation of data and self-reflexivity was kept in mind. There is no funding nor conflict of interests involved in this study.

Contextual Background of the Problem: According to the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), a governmental institution tasked with comprehensive data collection in the education sector, during the academic year 2021-22, an enrollment figure of 54.87 million students from pre-primary to tertiary levels was recorded across 0.313 million educational institutions spanning, with an instructional cohort comprising 2.14 million teachers (Pakistan Institute of Education Statics for [2021-22](#)). Similarly, in the year 2023 around 40% of Pakistanis are living in poverty (NCHD Report, [2023](#)). National Education Foundation (NEF), entrusted with the responsibility to open schools for such out-of-school children has been able to open such schools only in Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training: National Education Foundation. [2017-18](#)). The Basic Education Community School (BECS) is another national level government organ which supports education projects by providing pay to teachers while local notables give space and teachers has reported that poor parents feel financially overburdened with books and uniform etc., (Mughal, [2022](#)), therefore, never enroll their children whole heartedly:

The Education Landscape of Pakistan: Despite of abovementioned government efforts, “out of the 54.87 million total enrolled children, 53.5% are in public sector schools while 46.5% are enrolled in private sector schools. Similarly, out of 0.313 million schools, 56.2% are in public sector while 43.8% schools are run by private sector” (Pakistan Education Statistics for the year [2021-22](#)). While, more than 26.2 million children between the ages of 5 to 16 years are still unable to attend schools. It is the world’s second country wise largest number of out of school children according to UNICEF (UNICEF, [2023](#)). Among these 26.2 Million OOSC, 55% are male while 45% are female children in 2020-21 (NFEMIS, [2020-21](#)). Province wise data shows that 11.73 Mil in Punjab, 7.63 Mil in Sindh, 3.63 million in KPK, and 3.13 million in Baluchistan while 0.08 million in ICT are OOSC. According to the Labour Force Survey 2020-21, literacy rate in Pakistan was 62.8% in which female literacy rate was only 27% (Qureshi, [2024](#)).

The Current Role of CSOs in Pakistan: According Pakistan Institute of Education, more than five hundred non-profit and charity-based organizations are working for literacy promotion which includes managing schools for primary education, conducting adult literacy programs, vocational skill-based training and children with special needs and differently abled individuals. These civil society organizations can play its role in educating the world’s second-highest number of OOSC aged 5-16 years, representing 48% of the total population in this age group (UNICEF, [2024](#)). The eldest among these 48% of OOSC will be eligible voters in a two years timespan, and if not treated as an important resource or not declared as education emergency, are likely to become criminals and violent extremists due to unemployment and environment already plagued with political instability, economic crisis, and terrorism (Yousuf, [2024](#)).

An educated population is more aware hence, is more likely to participate in democratic processes, advocate for change, and hold leaders accountable. However, Pakistan due to the current worse economic conditions alone cannot educate more than 26 million OOSC, which leaves a gap for civil society to play its role in shouldering the responsibility. High illiteracy brings rising unemployment - 5.6 million Pakistani are unemployed (ILO, 2023); increased child labor - 2.05 million of the children aged from 10 to 14 years are working as labor (Rehman, 2023); slow economic progress - Pakistan GDP growth rate for year 2023 was 0.3% well below the 4.2% required (Economic Growth in Pakistan, 2023); growing domestic violence - 28% of women aged 15 to 49 years are victim of intimate partner violence (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2018); and soaring religious extremism and ethnic divide (Yaseen & Muzaffar, 2018). All these factors lead to frustration, aggression, and absolute deprivation which can result political violence – an impediment to socio-political change and societal development. By fostering an educated and civic engagement culture, civil society can challenge existing power structures, trigger political activism and drive positive socio-political change.

Major Findings

The following are the major findings of the study:

Educating the Uneducated: According to the CEO of iFeel Islamabad, Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui (interview on 16 May, 2024), “the idea was materialised with one room, one student and one teacher. Soon four more students joined and gradually the number increased. The mission gained momentum in year 2009 when four rooms were allocated to educate overage children. Around thirty students were initially enrolled, and the project was named ‘Out of School Children’s School’ or OSCS”. Seema Ahmad (interview on 16 May 2024) working as Director Administration in iFeel Islamabad told that in year 2013, OSCS was named “iFeel’ – International Foundation for Education, Empowerment, and Learning” and by now is partnering with Abrar Foundation, Rahat Kada, Friends Welfare Trust and Federal Directorate of Education for educating out-of-school children in Islamabad area. Since inception the foundation has recovered eleven thousand five hundred and thirty-six Out of School Children, more than five hundred of them are now in higher education.

According to Chief Executive Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui (interview on 16 May 2024) of ‘iFeel’ Islamabad, “among many reasons of such a huge number of out of school children in Pakistan, economic conditions are the major cause. Poor families prefer sending their children to labour or to beg instead of schooling. This is very common mostly in large cities, where children and even complete families are brought from rural areas to beg. Such families can be seen on main traffic junctions in major cities of Pakistan. Another reason is fathers of such children are either dead or are drug addicts and such children are not having birth certificates or Form B required for admission. Moreover, large scale mafias are also involved who are rich and powerful and use poor, orphans, handicapped, old and divorced women for begging in an organized way. Non-availability of public schools and teachers in some rural areas, either because the government has never constructed a school or because teachers refuse to go to these remote areas. That is why for the current number of OOSC in Pakistan, the schools required is equal to the total number of schools established by the state since the creation of Pakistan.” Saima Sayyed (interview on 17 May 2024) of ‘iFeel’ pointed out that private schooling system is expensive and the poor cannot afford it. In average private schools, the fee generally ranges from Pakistani Rs 3000/- to Rs 10,000/- or the US \$ 11 to US \$ 36 per month per child and if a family of six family members have to send three children will cost a minimum of Rs 9000/- or US \$ 32 per month only in fee.

Books, copies, uniform and transport charges are additional, so if monthly income of a father is around Rs 37000/- or US \$ 133 per month (government approved wage for a low paid employee), it is impossible to manage his children schooling.

Zaki Bakhtiar (interview on 16 May 2024), an electrical Engineer with almost twenty four years of service in the world's largest integrated service company, Schlumberger, followed by another nine years in the world's largest Saudi oil company Aramco and at present is working voluntarily in 'iFeel' said that many parents view girls education as unnecessary just because in rural areas girls are to do the domestic works. According to Farzana Zaidi (interview on 16 May 2024), a retired government servant with a 39 years' experience as a teacher and a Principal and working voluntarily in 'iFeel' since 2015, "other reasons of girls being deprived of basic education include religio-cultural challenges of veil, lack of school boundary wall, non-availability of separate schooling facility, early marriages of girls, harassment of girls at schools and lack of transport facilities. Age is also an issue in many cases as over-aged children are not given admission in traditional schools. No system or curriculum has been developed for overage children to give them fast track education." According to Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, "another challenge is the large drop out ratio from schools at the primary level. Some of the reasons are teachers being abusive, children being orphans or overage hence misfit in class, migration of students due to their parents' nomadic lifestyle in search of good fortune, language barriers for being from the peripheries of the country, learning disorders and loss of one or both parents in early age."

The 'iFeel' is also working with some civil society organizations in the rural Sindh where more than one hundred classes are managed in sixteen the low-income areas of district Tharparkar and Badin Sindh where children may not have the opportunity to attend school at the appropriate age. Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui shared that an accelerated primary education program has been designed to bridge the educational gap for OOSC who have missed out on their early years of education. This specially designed program offers a condensed curriculum of three and half years that covers seven years of formal education. In addition, the 'iFeel' has adopted a combination of formal, non-formal and hybrid education approaches yet following "Single National Curriculum (SNC) based Learning Plans (LPs) for Grade 1 to 5 that include English, Urdu, Mathematics and General Knowledge as subjects. Similarly, 'iFeel' is also using the 'Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)' which is equivalent to national curriculum 2006 and is also aligned with single national curriculum 2021. The program is adopted by Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Federal Education Ministry and is being implemented to accommodate overage OOSC who have difficulty in studying in formal schools (Gill, 2022). The Jugnu Maize literacy program with a curriculum of four books called 'Jugnu Sabaq' is also used in which in a period of 03 months, an illiterate adult is able to read the newspaper and write letters. The curriculum is available in many languages to cater all provinces of Pakistan. Our students purchased the Urdu Jugnu Sabaq, got training from a trainer and launched this program in 'Chanesar Goth' to teach a group of women and older children. They have completed 2 books to date (Maize, 2024). Books developed by "The Citizen Foundation (TCF)" are also made part of 'iFeel' curriculum. The Citizens Foundation (TCF) is a professionally managed, non-profit organization set up in 1995 by a group of citizens who wanted to bring about positive social change through education. At present, TCF is one of Pakistan's leading organisations in the field of education for the less privileged with 1921 schools and 286000 students (TCF Pakistan, 2024).

The 'iFeel' understanding the importance of morals and grooming, has special focus on teaching ethics and ensure that teachers are also given training of good manners and ideal behavior. Motivation lectures by role models from different walks of life are arranged and meet up of 'iFeel' excelled children with the new entrants are planned. Muneera Javed, a volunteer member in the 'iFeel' informed that additional support to students such as free books, stationery, and uniforms, nutritious lunch, and Ration for family etc., are also provided to these children A friendly and caring environment is provided at 'iFeel' schools with zero tolerance towards corporal punishment by teachers. Picnics and outings are also arranged for students. Daily lunch is also provided at schools. Monthly Ration packs for Orphans families and assistance is also incentivize with full attendance, good performance in studies etc. The aim is to remove the barriers that prevent children from accessing education, and empower them to achieve their full potential and succeed in their future endeavors.

On the question of reaching out to such children and gathering funds, Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui shared that 'iFeel' conduct campaigns through public messages on mobiles, using social media platforms, posters at public places especially slum areas, public spaces to spread the message, meeting parents of Out of School Children to convince them to send their children for education, community meetings involving mosques, community centers etc. To have maximum enrollment, door-to-door campaigns are also conducted on regular basis.

Grooming the Learned: According to "Najaf" (pseudonyms), senior team member at TBH interviewed on 19 May 2024, "programs in TBH are divided into two categories: for adults contemporary issues related to science, arts and culture while for children topics of science subjects, fiction, movies and cartoons are included. Children can visit 'TBH' at any time and get knowledge from the science Lab and library and can attend lectures and movies of their interests. The programs for the grownups are generally arranged in the evening and everyone can join by physically visiting TBH or login to the live-streamed events. Lectures, roundtable discussions, and video screenings are scheduled throughout the week on every subject having community level importance. A weekly scheduled is announced for the information of interested people. The guest speakers and scholars use simple Urdu and English language to explain concepts of science, technology, arts, humanities, linguistics, contemporary affairs for easy understanding."

According to Dr. Pervez Amir Ali Hoodbhoy (interview on 19 May 2024) - a Pakistani nuclear physicist, author, media commentator, and social activist, "TBH has a non-political and non-religious agenda and aims to educate and nurture young people in every field, create greater societal rationality, cultural diversity, and tolerance, so all citizens of Pakistan can participate fully in socio-economic, and political life of the society through formal and informal talks, lectures, presentations about social issues. Its main purpose is to provide a forum to express one's thoughts, views and experiences about problems and challenges people as members of society face every day."

"Salma Mansoor" (pseudonyms), member managing committee TBH interviewed on 19 May 2024, told that to improve the teaching methodology of those already in teaching field, TBH also arrange a week long 'Teacher Training Programs'. These programs are mostly for Physics and Math teachers. In the last program held in November 2023, a total of 497 candidates applied for this educational initiative. Following an initial evaluation, 229 candidates were shortlisted for the entrance test. The top 27 scorers from the entrance test held on 14 October 2023 were invited for interviews on 10-11 November 2023. After rigorous assessments, 06 applicants were selected to join the program. "Samina Ahmad" (pseudonyms), another member of the

managing committee of TBH shared that another initiative of TBH is, 'Get a Mentor Program' in which Pakistani university students doing research work can have a free mentor of the concerned subject area for guidance in their thesis work, etc. Top achieving Pakistani students currently studying at US universities as well as post-doctoral fellows have volunteered to mentor such students in Pakistan. Similarly, Dr. Pervaiz Hoodbhoy told that under the 'Teach yourself' program at TBH, pre-recorded videos related to science subjects in module form are available on TBH website both in English and Urdu language. Anyone can access, listen to it and get themselves taught. TBH is also using social media platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook to reach as many as possible audience and viewers free of cost.

According to Dr. Pervaiz Hoodbhoy, "main reasons of educational and moral demise in Pakistani society is institutional inabilities, corruption and social injustices. Pakistan was unlucky that its founding leadership died soon after independence and no future framework or roadmap was given to the nation. Subsequently, efforts were made to keep the country on development track but political instability, institutional interferences and rising unemployment led to brain drain. You need brain to develop and invent but you also need to brain to keep these inventions working. The political system in Pakistan was such that either illiterate elite remained in power or military centric regimes were running the country. This led to focus on military development instead of education, economy and political reforms. On the other hand, India had democratic governments, though having many issues like human rights etc., but managed to improve education, agriculture and economy and today is standing very up in the list in terms of socio-political growth from Pakistan. TBH is a small step to bring awareness, socio-political maturity through peaceful means of educating minds and teaching citizens to listen to everyone, adhere to merit and not cast, creed, ethnic or religious basis. Civil society and the youth can trigger the realization that political leadership should not use shoulders to climb to the ruling chair rather the vote must bring change. Many small steps like TBH if taken in other cities of the country by civil society will definitely bring a socio-political change."

According to Dr. Afshan Huma, an educationist, interviewed on 31 May 2024, "among many reasons of such a high number of OOSC in Pakistan, access to schools especially for girls in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan; relevance of education in the eyes of parents; quality of education – what the children will get after education and teachers' behaviour etc; need of education – many parents are not convinced of the importance of education for their children, and cultural / extremist or terrorist groups' pressure and fear over parents to not send their children or fear of their children safety in schools especially in the terrorism affected areas, are the major reasons. Children who are on the streets and are not getting any kind of education or have no supervision, are more likely to end up in the hands of criminals and extremists. The paradox of the existing class room pedagogy in most of the school level education institutes in Pakistan is that it limits mental creativity but expect creativity from these students at the university level." On Single National Curriculum (SNC), Dr. Huma believed that it is more a political slogan and there has been never a practical SNC developed. The state may prepare National Curriculum Framework (NCF) instead of SNC as other countries have done. The state should not dictate books, learning materials, content, learning resource, and classroom learning experience with any of the slogans. The National Curriculum Framework needs to incorporate value based as well as place-based learning. Peace education is value-based learning and should be made part of the initial twelve years of education for children as by this age, according to psychologists and scientists, value building of a child is completed. At this stage, a child enters into his/her

teenage and several hormonal changes take place in their bodies and if not equipped with value-based learning are likely to get diverted from the desired societal way of life. So, to address high risk sexual behaviour, anger, negative competition and materialistic approach during teenage, peace education can be an effective way. For place-based education, the process of learning should start from a child's locale and in this regard, parallel learning spaces such as TBH, Knowledge Cafe, Mukalma (Debate), if spread to every part or locale of the country, can be useful and will contribute towards bringing awareness necessary for socio-political change. Such places provide space for catharsis, dialogue, and critical thinking.

Empowering the Youth: There is an understanding that illiteracy, poverty, political instability and extremism are the major root causes of frustration, aggression and chaos at the socio-political level in Pakistan (Akash, 2023). To address these challenges and bring a positive socio-political change in society, educating out of school children and developing intellectual maturity among the educated children is equally necessary for youth empowerment:

According to Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, "educated youth can raise awareness about social and political issues such as freedom of speech, responsible expression of own viewpoint, and questioning government policies. Educated youth can better advocate for policy reforms and mobilize communities to push for positive change. This will lead to promotion of accountability and socio-political activism, youth will actively participate in democratic processes such as critical discussions on socio-political, economy, rules and regulations, voting, and engaging with elected officials." According to Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, "educated and intellectually matured youth can ensure their voices are heard and influence government decision-making process. They can become advocates of peace rather to perpetrators of hate and extremism." About the efficacy of the text books in Pakistan, Dr. Huma told that these books are being prepared at the Federal Ministry of Education which is neither their job nor they are qualified for it. These books are designed in such a way that a student cannot think beyond what is written in those books, as the students will lose marks in exams, views supported by already research done which agree that fears block students' creativity and limit social awareness contrary to peace education which leads to civic engagement on community related issues (Balsano, 2005). Trained and skilled youth can start initiatives and projects under 'Social Entrepreneurship' that will help in addressing social challenges, create employment opportunities and contribute towards an overall development of their communities (Bornstein & Davis 2010). Hoodbhoy also asserted that by sharing their knowledge and skills with marginalized communities, educated youth can empower others to access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, leading to more inclusive, equitable and peaceful societies. Educated youth can promote tolerance, understanding, and dialogue among diverse groups, helping to reduce tensions and build a more cohesive society. Dialogue can initiate the process of 'Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution' from local level to national level (Ngozi, 2017). Understanding the power of vote can only come with value-based education as only then the youth can use rationale and exercise own will instead of deciding under socio-cultural or ethnic pressures to decide who deserve to rule the country.

Conclusion

Education is the first step towards a long-term measure, as without educated and intellectually groomed youth, sustainable socio-political change in any society may hardly take place. Illiteracy has been one of the major reasons for religious extremism, ethnic divide, economic crisis, and population explosion in Pakistan.

Today, on one hand around 40% of the Pakistanis are living below the poverty line while on the other hand, the state is under 223.86 billion US dollars public debt and liability (The World Bank Report, [2023](#)). The government alone cannot provide education to such a huge number of OOSC and to protect them from terrorist and extremist groups. The private education system is profit oriented, so is expensive hence, only elites can afford it. Besides immediate steps, long term measures such as integration of civil society and imparting value-based peace education to youth for political awareness are equally essential.

The 'iFeel' and 'TBH' are two small steps taken in one of the cities of Pakistan, to bring peaceful socio-political change. The former is educating the street children in a formal way while the latter is grooming the already educated youth in an informal manner. The iFeel has brought thousands of OOSC into the umbrella of education while TBH has nurtured a fair number of educated youths towards dialogue, discourse and socio-political awareness. Suppose, thousands of such civil society organizations start contributing in different parts of Pakistan, the number of OOSC would start reducing from millions to thousands and may be hundreds. This will pave way for a peaceful, tolerant and prosperous socio-political change in society.

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