

# **Out of School Students (OOSC): The Missing Brick in Pakistan's Educational Infrastructure**

As evident by the declining education conditions, deteriorating employment prospects and lack of robust reforms, Pakistan's educational dilemma has metamorphosed into something more dangerous for the nation. This venus flytrap continues to engulf the illiterate populace into a life of ignorance, whose roots are firmly anchored in a single primary challenge: "*Out of School Students.*"

Now, let's discuss how this antagonistic factor contributes to the fragility of the educational fabric of the next generation of Pakistanis. Out of School students (OOSC) simply refers to the "**Students that classify as kids of school-going age but are actually not enrolled in any institution.**" The term leads to the depressing '*High dropout rates*' that many regions of Pakistan have become quite prone to. What's important is not getting to know the problem, but why has it germinated within our homeland, and how will it migrate away?

Diving deep, OOSC is not only prevalent within remote regions but also in major cities, like the capital Islamabad. Breaking it down, what actually propagates this chain of events is a permanently cemented gap in service provision, both in terms of expansion and quality. For example, schools in an under-privileged district, such as Chaghi and Kohlu (Balochistan) may not be able to compete qualitatively with a school in the urban areas. Similarly, moderately-sized cities, like in Rahim Yar Khan district may not have an outreach to all the people living there, owing to the disproportionate increase in population, as compared to human developmental resources. Resultantly, economic constraints are one of the major obstacles in curbing high dropout rates, especially in primary education.

Furthermore, dropout rates soar due to a diverse range of factors, apart from economic challenges. Pakistan's traditional norms significantly hinders access to these schools. Socio-cultural barriers lead, and ancestral backwardness together hamper access and retention of marginalised communities. If those people are stuck in such a loop for generations, then the skillsets of the new generations are being suppressed and the country finds it hard to employ capable men, willing to dedicate their lives to its success in the digital era. Look at computer literacy statistics for example. For a country like Pakistan, if dropout rates are more than those admitted each cycle, this means more precious assets are lost. Less families make themselves familiar with the necessity of computers, and consequently can't amend Pakistan's economic and social dynamics: Switching its dependency on the primary sector to a more refined tertiary sector.

On the contrary, critics can often argue that factors such as income inequality are the main factors that impede equitable distribution of educational facilities. However, what people actually don't realise is that the problems Pakistan is facing originated from one foundational problem, and that is high dropout rates contributing to educational troubles. This is

imperative to understand because if the educational system can't compete with those of other countries, this means the nation would always remain a minor player in world politics and markets, since competent people aren't being prepared to balance the immense responsibilities of the nation.

Reiterating such causes, OOSC is often due to derogatory experiences too. If someone from that family studied up till undergraduate, let's suppose, and then doesn't find a job that could suffice his family, the people would supposedly be discouraged from dedicating their efforts to such a field. Instead, kids at an early age prefer to be farmers that ensures a stable income, which however is also becoming unstable considering the advancements in genetic engineering and biotechnology. The missing piece of the puzzle is a lack of proper implementation of refurbished policies and innovative pedagogical programs that could transform the statistics into a renewed hope for the future.

Yes, there are other non-comprehensive steps that have added fuel to the fire. Extremely large distances between schools and home in geographically disadvantaged terrains and lack of proper incentivisation for students aspiring to explore varied careers are just a few of the pathogens.

What's needed is to help build strongly and committedly on mobile educational policies such as "***Schools on Wheels Initiative***" which would provide education to those overwhelmed, for example, economically and geographically. Equitable policies and their inclusion within the educational frameworks could help expand this outlet to people of various socio-economic backgrounds. Apart from general awareness through digital media, one of the primary solutions should be the inculcation of more innovative, up-to-date and extensive pedagogical programs that aim to teach and test intellectual and analytical skills, rather than memorisation. In addition to that, the set-up of skill development centres could aid the next generation in developing the right skills for their preferred job markets. Only such initiatives, if implemented with fervour, could reduce the contagious problem that's spreading exponentially and prepare students to help Pakistan illuminate itself in a new, bright light in the future.