



PIPS Policy Brief Counter-Violent Extremism

Working Group 9

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Education reforms

Summary

- This brief summarizes the findings of the ninth working group's meeting on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), exploring how education in Pakistan can be reformed to curb extremist tendencies.
- Endorsing that reforming education sector is a must to counter extremism, the group underscored that any measure aimed at reforming education should help achieving knowledge-based society.
- The country's multi-directional educational system itself deepens the social divides, the members noted.
- The education-extremism link does not come out from those who are uneducated. It also comes from the way the prevailing curriculum have radicalized students.
- The worldview presented in the curriculum is not dissimilar to that of the extremists'. Introducing courses on citizenship, extracted from the constitution are greatly needed.
- Madrassas are producing graduates who are already in abundance in the society. But blaming madrassas for being non-serious about reforming themselves is not the whole truth. Bureaucratic delays and political inaction are to be blamed too.
- Educational infrastructure shall be laid in militancy-affected areas like the tribal belt.
- Excluded groups like non-Muslims should be taken on board on revised curriculum.

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Background

On May 2, 2017, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) convened meeting of the ninth working group on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), exploring how education can be reformed to curb extremist tendencies.

This was the ninth in a series of 10 planned meetings on CVE; below are summaries of the previous sessions:

- The first working group, which met on March 20, 2017, deliberated about the mechanism for shaping a religion-based narrative that counters those of extremists.
- The second group, which met on March 27, 2017, discussed the mechanism for reintegrating militants willing to shun violence and denounce *takfeer* (the practice of declaring fellow Muslims out of creed of Islam).
- The third group, meeting on April 3, 2017, pondered upon the need for a national dialogue to address critical politico-philosophical issues in the country, especially those producing extremism, and whether a revised social contract could provide answers.
- The fourth group, which met on April 10, 2017, discussed the implementing mechanism of National Action Plan, the country's counter-terror plan announced in January 2015.
- The fifth working group, meeting on April 17, 2017, brainstormed as to how extremism revolves around lack of equal status and physical services to all citizens. The group observed that on the one hand, areas excluded from the mainstream provide space to violent extremists, on the other hand, they often target religious minorities, an excluded group.
- The sixth working group, meeting on April 18, 2017, exploring the way youth are being radicalized in the country, and what can be done in the first place that they don't fall for extremist provocations.
- The seventh working group, meeting on April 24, 2017, explored the way in which media can be engaged to counter extremism.
- The eighth working group, meeting on April 25, 2017, suggested opening up cultural spaces to curb narrow extremist thoughts.

The themes of these working-group meetings are largely driven from the CVE model PIPS proposed in 2016. A group of scholars, experts, and practitioners had, in a series of meetings, brainstormed over different components of a Pakistan-specific CVE model, one of them being engaging the youth.



This meeting was convened to discuss how education reforms can eliminate extremism and militancy. The county's dismal education system is blamed for feeding militancy in more than one way. The "quantity" of education outreach is limited, with many children not properly enrolled; these un-enrolled students are easy bait to militants lurking around. Same is the case with the illiterate lot. That is, if young minds have studied in their school and college time, they would have resisted militant onslaught. But this argument is incomplete, without taking into account the influence of the "quality" of content students rot, on radicalizing them. Several rounds of previous consultations elicited urgings to explore how education itself has been radicalizing students, and what can be done to that education to help de-radicalized them. This consultation brought forth those debates.

Key considerations

- The group endorsed reforming education sector a must to counter extremism. Expecting that radicalization will wipe away without reforming education sector, is fallacious, the group noted. The group, after reviewing different approaches towards education, argued that any measure aimed at reforming education should help achieving knowledge-based society. Only then can individuals be made more immune to the monolithic messaging of militants.
- Pakistan's education system is deeply flawed. The group argued that the country's multi-directional educational system itself deepens the social divides. There are public schools, some capable to offer courses in English, others relying on Urdu mostly; private schools, aligning with the financial status of the parents of the students; madrassas, registered with one sect-based board, among other types of schools. A student in one school grows with a worldview completely dissonant with that of another. When they grow up, their interests and fear completely diverge, sometimes, in contestation to each other. Even though radicalization these days is a cross-cutting phenomenon, the role of students varies from school to school. Worst of all, all these students are inter-connected with one another too, thereby exchanging positive as well as negative experiences.

Providing education is state's duty. If the state is serious in addressing extremism, the state shall put all its effort in revamping education system, the group noted. It is a right duly acknowledges in Article 25-A, but this constitutional obligation, of providing free education to children, is not duly met. The group called for holding the state responsible. At least, some uniformity in the system be attained.

- The group also pondered upon the authorities looking after education policies. Generally, they agreed, the state has not much prioritized education.

After the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, education is transferred to provinces; the group called for assessing impact of that transfer. Some even reasoned that in reality, there has been no progress in the status of education. It remains in the same place as it was before 2010.

Others hinted that provincial governments can make difference on educational front, if they want so. However, hardly any positive example was quoted. Instead, one participant recalled that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the coalition government has reversed the changes brought about by the previous government in the curriculum.

- Members delved upon the need for reforming curriculum to produce enlightened minds. The education-extremism link does not come out from those who are uneducated, that the illiterate ones readily fall for exclusive messages. Far from it. In Pakistan's the link comes from the way the prevailing curriculum have radicalized students. Today, they are uncomfortable with condemning the militant acts, which they were thought are the right acts.

Two subjects repeatedly mentioned in this session (as well as previous consultations) that require complete review are Islamiyat (Islamic Studies) and Pakistan Studies. Several studies have found intellectual and moral flaws in the content of these subjects for a diverse country like Pakistan: non-Muslims are made to read the subjects too; the subjects interpret some historical events in purely religious languages; historical events are selectively presented, without offering the viewpoint of the other side; all the role models are warriors; war itself is eulogized, besides others.

In short, the worldview presented in subjects like these are not dissimilar to the extremists'. It is therefore unsurprising that students from mainstream educational institutions are unable to clearly shield against the incursion of militant ideology.

The indoctrination via studies was first made under General Zia (1979-88), one said, adding that all educational institutions were oriented in one direction, towards extremist thoughts. Subjects like Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies were declared compulsory for all levels of education in 1979. A member called for razing the project raised during Afghan jihad. Only then can we emerge out of the dark shadows of militancy.

Members realized that reforming curriculum is not an easy task. There are different political groups, who want their conception of right and wrong be accommodated. Still, introducing least controversial content can be tried. Literary subjects are one example; similarly, courses on citizenship in light of the constitution will help instill the value of adhering to constitution as well as respecting each other, irrespective of one's faith.

The group argued the entire curriculum aimed at instilling a conception of Pakistani that discards diversity. At times, "we glorify pan-national values ourselves", said one participant. Another called for inculcating some sense of Pakistani-hood, which embraces all communities and their cultures. One of the ways out of these debates is to source our nationhood on fundamental rights.

- Some were even skeptical if immediate results could be achieved by reviewing the curriculum alone. More than three decades have passed. A whole generation has been raised studying the narrow course books. Even if curriculum is revised (and it has been in some cases), the issue boils down to teachers. A sensitized teacher can orient students towards positive symbols, even if curriculum is contested; a sensitized teacher can turn out otherwise. Today, Pakistan faces the second state.
- A member was curious to learn about the impact of the four-year bachelor program for all disciplines, introduced in the 2000s. The program is praised by its architects, but it ended up ignoring social science, promoting applied sciences; one member said the program linked education with market, resulting in proliferation of low-grade educational institutes. The group was suggested to demand academic audit of the 4-year program since it was first introduced.
- Members grappled with resolving the mystery behind madrassa reforms. Every step towards reforming them is meant fresh steps in that direction. As if all the previous steps were useless.

Some in the group asked for justification of the way madrassas have been teaching. The number of madrassas has increased overwhelmingly. Their graduates, students in Dars-e-Nizami, are trained to either teach in a madrassa or lead prayers in a mosque, hence the continued cycle. But today, one noted, the society is not in need of the graduates of Dars-e-Nizami; what is required are experts in Islamic subjects, who can perform *Ijtihad*, one of the key sources of Islamic law which entails intellectual effort to derive appropriate legislation from the Quran and Sunnah for novel cases. Another member called for discouraging education that produces sectarianism.

At the same time, the group reminded that blaming madrassas for being non-serious about reforms is unreal. They have signed agreements again and again. At least, some progress should be made on the past promises. A group member recalled his organization had rather successfully introduced peace education in around 1,500 seminaries, with the permission of madrassa boards. There are thus avenues to be explored.

- Education doesn't stop with textbooks. It doesn't start with them either. Education incorporates all those aspects that enable anyone to comprehend, ranging from promoting mother tongue to encourage sporting activities.

It was suggested that students' activities on the campuses be encouraged; literary clubs share healthy spaces. Banning the entire student unions on the pretext of their link to violence was wrong. Unions provide platform for debating a variety of issues; if left un-debated, people resort to violence.

One member argued that early specialization should be reviewed too. "Because we go towards early specialization, we come across doctors who have turned radicals too. They have no knowledge of social sciences."

Another called for shaping pedagogy towards critical thinking, instead of rote-learning.

- The quantity of education is gravely felt in militant-infested areas like FATA, where Taliban destroyed schools and threatened girls from attending educational institutions. Yet, a member said, in the last five years, not a single (public) school has been allowed to be raised. The group called for building schools there and providing enabling environment for students in the areas. Utmost attention be given to girls education.
- A member called for reforming education to the acceptance of non-Muslims too. Presently, non-Muslims are supposed to study Islamic Studies too. "We need to differentiate between religious and educational institutions", one said, referring to the faith-based terminologies used with reference to historical events. Scriptures of non-Muslims are subtly rejected as untrue, one complained. The group called for acknowledging the contribution of non-Muslims in Pakistan.

Recommendations

- Any measure aimed at reforming education shall help achieve knowledge-based society.
 - The nexus between education and market be broken.
- National and provincial legislatures are the right forums in overseeing effective implementation of all the provisions about education.
 - "Education as right" shall be reflected in all government's policies.
 - An accountability mechanism shall be adopted to enforce Article 25-A
 - Policies shall be adopted for standardization of education, having certain common goals and objectives.
- There is an urgent need to reform curriculum.
 - An independent inter-provincial board shall be constituted to oversee curriculum development.
 - Positive ingredients of culture shall be included in the education
 - In the history and Pakistan Studies books, the contribution of non-Muslims in Pakistan shall be acknowledged, besides lauding non-warrior role models, such as poets, activists.
 - Fundamental human rights, as enshrined in the constitution, shall be made the basis of citizenship education.
- All types of educational institutions shall be regulated.
 - Academic audit of all types of schools, especially foreign-funded, international, Islamic, and private schools, shall be undertaken
 - All provinces shall regulate madrassas and shape their curriculum.
 - Universities shall be oriented towards research

- Infrastructure of education shall be improved in conflict-affected areas.
 - Enabling conditions shall be provided in militancy-affected areas like tribal areas
 - Enabling conditions shall be provided for girls education, which face a variety of constraints, including from militants.

Table: Working table on recommendations and implementation mechanism on “Education reforms”

	Recommendations	Implementing mechanism
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge-based society be created • Bring in the positive ingredients of culture, in education • Education is a right, not tool in the hands of the state • Establishment of state-hood on the basis of equality of citizens and acceptance of cultural diversity in the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the implementation of 25-A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accountability mechanism to implement 25-A be charted • Make fundamental human rights, including right to education, as enshrined in the constitution via its chapter on fundamental human rights, as the basis of citizenship education • Parliament and provincial assemblies shall oversee the implementation of the constitutional provisions • All biases (religious, sectarian gender, ethnic) shall be removed from the courses
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove inequalities and disparities from the educational systems • Regulatory mechanism to oversee schools, especially foreign-funded schools • Curriculum committee should be made accountable • Create independent bodies to monitor education system • Adopt policy within the framework of social accountability • Madrassas, private, public schools – be brought within the framework of child’s rights • Universities shall be oriented towards research; “the trend of creating university for the sake of university shall be discouraged” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt policies to standardize education, having common goals and objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ State shall discourage non-formal schools • Bring in all types of schools, esp. international/foreign-funded, under some sort of regulatory mechanism • Regulate schools of banned outfits like JuD • Perform curriculum/academic audit of all (types of) schools, especially foreign, Islamic, private • Adult literacy programs be revived • Reconstruct the schools affected by militancy, in FATA and elsewhere • Remove cultural and physical constraints to girls education by creating enabling conditions

Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical teaching of social sciences be promoted • Review Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies subjects; revival of Diniyaat • Subjects on history and citizenship be made compulsory, for students of natural sciences • Content on equality, social harmony be included in Islamiyat • Non-Muslim heroes be acknowledged in the curriculum • Role models should be selected from among the poets, social workers, writers, intellectuals, etc, including both men and women • Encourage critical thinking and scientific thinking • Co-curricular activities be encouraged; sufficient time be given to these activities • Student councils be created • Role of local government and the community should be given in education/schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent inter-provincial board be constituted to oversee curriculum development • Independent inter-provincial board to oversee the writing and reviewing of history books
Religious education reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madrassa reforms – non-sectarian restructuring of madrassa boards • Provinces should play their role in regulating madrassas and shaping their curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific time be divided for formal and madrassa education

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