



Child Friendly Schools

Education is concerned with the development of a whole person. It involves students acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will be part of their life.

Universal Fundamental Right

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental right of a child.

On any given day, more than a billion children are in primary or secondary school. However, schooling may not always be a positive experience for children. It could mean braving against extreme temperatures in absence of proper premises or electricity, poor sanitation, long distances from home, mental or physical abuse at the hands of teachers and much more.

The condition of the education sector in Pakistan is not encouraging. Low enrolment rates both at the primary and secondary levels, wide disparities between regions and genders, lack of trained teachers, deficiency of proper teaching materials, hostile community attitude towards female education and inadequate physical infrastructure are indicators of the poor performance of this sector.

What is a Child-Centered Approach?

Child-centered approach allows freedom to think, experience, explore, question, and search for answers. A child grows and develops not in a vacuum but as part of a family, a community, a culture and a nation. Many different actors and institutions are accountable for fulfilling rights of children, including teachers.

All teachers must remember that:

- ✦ All children have a right to an education that helps them grow and develop to their fullest. This basic premise is at the heart of our understanding of child-centered education. Therefore, daily interactions with children should be based on the fundamental question, 'am I teaching and supporting all children in their growth and

development across all domains—social, emotional, physical, linguistic, and intellectual?' Such teaching is at the heart of developmentally appropriate practice.

- ✦ Every child is a unique and special individual. Consequently, we have to teach individual children and be respectful of and account for their individual uniqueness of age, gender, culture, temperament and learning style.
- ✦ Children are active participants in their own education and development. This means that they should be mentally involved and physically active in learning what they need to know and do.
- ✦ Children's ideas, preferences, learning styles, and interests are considered in the planning for and implementation of instructional practices.

What is a Child Friendly School?

A child friendly school is child-focused and child-centered which ensures a healthy and safe learning environment, eliminates gender stereotypes and encourages child participation.



Child Friendly School Environment

- ▲ *Physical Infrastructure:* School attendance and learning achievements are closely related to physical infrastructure. Presence of a boundary wall, school gate, electricity, water supply and latrines attracts the students and prompts parents and teachers to come to school. Poor infrastructure is an issue confronted by schools across Pakistan.
- ▲ *Recreation (Playground):* For a large number of children, playtime/recess is the most important part of their school day. A child's play activity is directly influenced by the type of quality and diversity of children's play environments. Compared to private schools that fall short of provision of playground facilities, government schools offer wider playground areas to students.
- ▲ *Libraries and Laboratories:* A healthy learning environment cannot be achieved without provision of designated areas for reading and equipment to practice the theory.
- ▲ *Curriculum:* Good curriculum not only plays an important role in forging life-long learning competencies, but also inculcates tolerance and respect, promotion of human rights and societal values. Unfortunately, absence of a uniform system of education and discrepancy in the education system in Pakistan mars the very spirit of learning, giving rise to class differences.



Role of Stakeholders

School Management Committees (SMCs)/ Parents Teachers Councils (PTCs):

SMCs/PTCs aim to foster educational development at the grassroot level through community participation and devolution of financial and administrative powers at the school level. SMCs/ PTCs are responsible for administering the overall affairs of schools, ranging from identifying the developmental and infrastructural needs to the implementation and monitoring of development projects.

A dormant SMC or PTC thus results in lack of accountability of the school management. It is accordingly vital for schools to have active SMCs and PTCs in order to ensure that all parties such as parents, teachers and school administrators, work together to provide for a brighter future for the children by creating a child-friendly environment.

Teachers/Academia:

A teacher can make or break a child's future. Quality of education can only be improved through well trained teachers in their respective disciplines with teaching methods focused on a child-centered approach.

All great educators have believed in the basic goodness of children;

The teacher is to provide the environment for this goodness to manifest itself.

Constitutional Right

Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan makes it binding on the State to ensure provision of free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 5 and 16 years. The State has yet to take any meaningful steps to comply with this constitutional mandate. But even getting all the school-going children into schools would be meaningless, in the absence of proper infrastructural facilities. All schools require modern standardized school buildings, proper playgrounds, modern laboratories, excellent teaching and learning material, and competent teaching staff. Deserving students should be provided grants-in-aid to support schools if and when they have problems incurring the costs.

Schools should operate in the best interests of the child with a safe, healthy and protective environment, endowed with trained teachers, adequate resources and appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning. Child rights must be protected in all schools and children's voices must be heard.

Learning environment actually should be a heaven for children to learn and grow, with innate respect for their identities and varied needs.

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