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## The State of Value Education in Early Childhood: The Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan.

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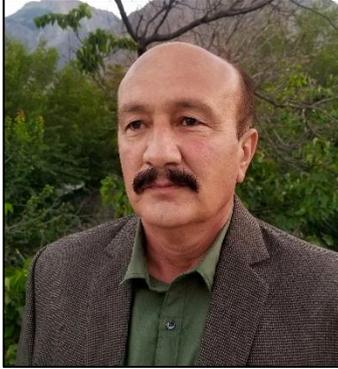
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# The State of Value Education in Early Childhood:

## *The Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan*

### **Abstract**

*Values are the scaffolding of a society within which members exercise their socio-economic roles. They are the fundamental principles, conceptions, and standards which guide the behaviors and actions to be judged as desirable. Therefore, values education is a conscious effort to enable the children to learn and understand commonly-recognized values in order to practice them as a representative member of the community. In developing countries, technological advancements and economic competition are forcing a revision of traditional values and the processes of their formation. Therefore, values education is becoming more important than ever before. In these contexts, like Pakistan, apart from teachers, there are multiple factors such as parents, the broader society, and academic resources, that are all playing significant parts in the value formation of young children. The role of the teacher in this process, therefore, cannot be seen in isolation; rather, there are multiple factors and conditions that collectively impact values education. Therefore, this paper is intended to take a wider stance to reflect on the multiple factors influencing the overall state of values education and the challenges that are in play for values orientation of young children in the early childhood context of Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan.*

### **Introduction**

Schools have traditionally been the centers for values formation where young children are provided the opportunities to communicate, experience, and negotiate values that societies have deemed worthwhile. In developing the context, the state regulates education through curricular and co-curricular intervention and tries to convey and transmit its own identified values to the next generation. Therefore, schools are playing the foundational role for teaching the importance of history, the transfer of traditional ideals, and general values formation (Unal, 2016). Schools are turning into cultural settings where the values formation process of students is not only influenced by educational instruction, but also by the entire school environment. The pictures, quotations, and mottos portrayed on the school walls are all efforts of influencing the values formation process of children and a conscious intervention of transmitting specific values. Technological advancements and economic competition are forcing values revisions. To survive in the competitive environment, entrepreneurship,

competitiveness, and individualism are gradually replacing traditional values to become the core values of educational instruction (Unal, 2016). Preschoolers learn values from their school context environment, from their fellow students, and from their teachers. These children learn values consciously and unconsciously from their schools and particularly from the responses of their teachers (Johansson, 2018b). Within the academic setting, young children learn from school rules, events, prohibitions, role models, and social relationships (Johansson et al., 2014). Hence, the school environment represents a powerful tool to influence young minds – beginning at the preschool level.

## **Values Identified**

Values have been considered as the “determiners of how people will live in harmony and peace without hurting one another and become virtuous individuals within the community” (Khathi, Govender, & Ajani, 2021, p.404). These fundamental principles and conceptions have been categorized by Turkkahraman (2013) into individual, societal, national, and global values. According to Turkkahraman, “*individual values* are answers to the questions like which values make me great or inspire me ... whereas *societal values* are criteria shared by most of a society in an ideal sense, all of which led them to the better society. Societal values regulate and organize daily life. Such values as honesty, sedulity, helpfulness, and modesty are some of these societal values. From a sociological perspective, ideally, real values are only unique to one society.” The third category has been identified as the *national values* of a nation. According to Turkkahraman, “National values are values that are necessary for a nation’s unity and existence... National values function as keeping us together at home while keeping us different from the rest in the world. Societal values and national values do not contradict, just the opposite, they are built on each other. In that sense, no societal value can exist against the constitutional system which is defined by national values.” The final category is comprised of *global values* which are shared by all societies. “Global values are not relative like societal ones but are universal although this very saying depends on societal choices. For example, one can either stay in the global arena or rest in the societal sphere. The main problem is how a traditional society surrounded by traditional values can move beyond the limitations posed by the society itself” (p. 635).

## **Values Education at the Preschool Level**

Values education is a conscious effort to encourage children to learn and understand the values so that they practice them as desirable members of society (Johansson, 2018b). The main purpose of values education is to promote inculcating values that are instrumental for young children to live confident and happy lives in their respective communities. The promotion of values can be embraced by young children as a code of life for functioning as individuals and members of society (Ulavere & Veisson, 2015). Turkkahraman (2013) believes that “the purpose of values education is to create values and raise individuals who convert their values to behaviors. Values cannot be gained by telling or describing. They should be experienced directly, internalized, and should be given with the feelings related to them” (p. 636). This description of values education refers to the importance of consistent self-awareness by the learners and demonstration of harmonious interaction in the classroom and out on the playground (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013). The preschool context is a limited world for young children where they spend several hours of their school day interacting with their peers and teachers; in this setting, both conscious and unconscious values processing occurs. In this regard, Tofteland (2018) emphasized the importance of the daily routine of a child such

as meal time, cleaning time, and playing time; these are identified as the most significant opportunities to learn democratic values. In this kind of real-world experience, children share a meaningful social context whereby values transfer are always in progress; students continually experience, express, and negotiate their values in their preschool environment. Similarly, they live in a microcosm of the world in which they learn curricular directives and teacher-initiated rules and regulations.

### **Role of Teachers in Values Education at the Preschool Level**

The literature on values education regularly emphasizes the critical role of the teacher for values formation of children within the academic context. Radha (2016) mentioned that “Teachers are role-models for the students. Their actions convey more than their words. Students learn values from what the teachers are rather than from what they say. Teacher makes a maximum impact on the personality of a student in the formative years. Students absorb virtues and vices knowingly and unknowingly from these role models. Teachers demonstrate the appropriate behaviors of their students by their actions” (p. 56). Teachers play a critical role to help the children to reflect on their values and valuation processes and acquire the needed and desirable values for their societies. Another important function of the teacher is to ensure a line of communication between families and schools for uniform values orientation for the young children in a preschool setting. Young children bring certain values to the school acquired from their families. Sometimes young children get confused when there is a variance between family and school values. Teachers face challenges to accommodate or synchronize the two sets of values. For example, a school may try to teach students to be helpful to everyone whereas parents might instruct that being helpful to a stranger may harm their children (Gui et al., 2020).

The personal and professional competencies of the teachers are fundamental for leading this complex endeavor of developing values education of young children in their academic settings. Teachers must be aware of their own values that might affect the values formation process of the children. Secondly, educational institutions have a variety of competing values such as those espoused by principals, administrators, and system authorities, against the backdrop of family values which collectively influence the development of the children (Gokce, 2021). Teachers are the custodians of the learning environment of the classrooms and often knowingly or unknowingly interject their own perspectives which impact values formation in their students. Teachers must synthesize and maneuver these competing values for the benefit of protecting children from any deleterious consequences. Therefore, it is important for instructor educational programs to review and develop courses to train teachers to identify incongruities and assist with streamlining values.

### **Role of Parents and Society for Values Education at the Preschool Level**

Apart from teachers, there are multiple factors such as parents, the broader society, and available resources within the school that are playing a significant part in the values formation of its students. Schools and the community cannot work separately. They are part of a single social process, cultural pattern, and political and legal system. Their role in values formation, orientation, and cultural transmission are indispensable and irreplaceable. Parents need support from the school and the school needs support from the parents to instill values (Frydkova, 2013). Therefore, “The moral development of students is under the responsibility of schools, teachers, parents, and society. Every party should cooperate in developing

students' morality no matter at home, in school or in the community" (Gui et al., 2020, p.58). The collective role and effective collaboration between parent, community, and school in values acquisition can help construct the character and personality of a young child (Saputri & Marzuki, 2022). Paramount is the ownership of value education by the parents and the broader community who co-create and organize programs that will make a valuable contribution to the community (Azahari, 2019).

Families are key components as young children learn from their parents and other family members a plethora of beliefs deemed "right" and "wrong" even before coming to school for the first time. Therefore, families represent the fundamental sources of transmitting values in young children (Saputri & Marzuki, 2021). However, a substantial proportion of parents from disadvantaged classes tends to be less involved in the academic process. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2012) reports that, "Disadvantaged parents tend to be less involved in their children's schooling, for multiple economic and social reasons. Policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools prioritize their links with parents and communities and improve their communication strategies to align school and parental efforts" (p.12).

Apart from the collective role of teachers, parents, and society at large, the learning environment within the school plays a vital role. Ulavere and Veisson (2015) argue that: "In the context of teaching values, the design of the learning environment in preschool institutions is important... Similarly, the attitudes and values transmitted by the behavior of teachers and parents are also important" (p. 110). In addition, the availability of resources is another dominant factor that influences the school operations which impact values education. Dangara (2016) argues that in developing regions, the scarcity of resources is a persistent problem. Therefore, the judicious use of the available resources is extremely important to avoid waste. "This is because when a given level of resources is efficiently utilized, more services are provided through the balanced usage and adequate maintenance of the available facilities" (p.30).

In a nutshell, the role of the teacher in the values formation of young children cannot be seen in isolation from home and larger community environments. Successful values education is influenced by the local community and larger government in developing programs, allocating resources, and generating political will (Saputri & Marzuki, 2021). Therefore, this paper has intended to take a wider stance to reflect on the multiple factors influencing the overall state of values education and the challenges that values orientation of young children face in the early childhood context of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

### **The State of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan**

Pakistan has promised the international community to fulfill its commitment about early childhood education by signing the *Jomtien Declaration for Education* which states that learning begins at birth. The *National Education Policy of 2009* and the recently finalized education sector plans have paid significant attention to early childhood education. However, the most critical gap remains the budget for ECE to address the fundamental right of children to education and care.

The recently developed *National Curriculum of Pakistan* endeavors to build a nation with exemplary attitudes and behaviors, capable of dealing with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

(p. 5). The aim of education pronounced in this *Single National Curriculum* document is to educate Pakistani people to be:

- *Seekers of truth and knowledge who can apply it for the progress of society.*
- *Creative, constructive, communicative, and reflective individuals.*
- *Disciplined, productive, moderate, and enlightened citizens.*
- *Citizens capable of effectively participating in the highly competitive global, knowledge-based economy, and the information age;*
- *Citizens committed to create a just and civil society that respects diversity of views, beliefs, and faiths (p. 14).*

Within the frame of these broader aims, the document pronounces specific values related to objectives for early childhood education which aims to:

- *Provide for the holistic development of the child, which includes physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and moral development.*
- *Nurture tolerance and respect for diversity.*
- *Nurture in children a sense of identity and pride in being a Pakistani citizen.*
- *Create in children a sense of citizenship in community, country, and the world.*
- *Foster a sense of independence, self-reliance, and a positive self-image.*
- *Equip the child with life-long learning skills.*
- *Develop values, morals, ethics, and civic sense.*
- *Sharpen aesthetic sense of children.*
- *Develop teamwork and a sharing attitude (pp. 14-15).*

International commitments, national education policies, and curriculum-based documents are increasingly focused on early childhood education. More importantly, the aims highlighted in these policies and documents are heavily loaded with references to values. These commitments and documents are in line with Johansson (2018a) who argues that “it is crucial for policymakers to reflect on what values children should learn and strive for as citizens of society and what kind of society these values can create. Values based on diversity, democracy, and community cannot be taken for granted; they must always be defended” (p.50). In developing countries like Pakistan, the documents and policies seem attractive in terms of commitments and promises, but the problem starts at the implementation stage. Imparting values education at the early childhood level requires the active collaboration of multiple social institutions; therefore, it cannot be considered the sole responsibility of the schools. “Many factors (such as family, school, religion, and media) play roles in forming the individual’s mental and moral world. Unless these social institutions constitute a synergic blend, the values that are given at schools will be inadequate for the values education. In this sense, it is essential for these kinds of social institutions to collaborate for the target within the framework of a blended model” (Turkkahraman, 2013, p. 637). Therefore, the resources and capacities of multiple social institutions to meaningfully collaborate for implementing a values-based educational model remains a challenging task.

## **The Challenges of Values-Focused Education During Early Childhood in Pakistan**

Values-based education is vital at the early childhood level because “the most crucial years in the formation of permanent values are the childhood years when children’s minds are pure.

It is very difficult to change the values that are gained in these years” (Turkkahraman, 2013, p. 637). Therefore, the access of a child to early childhood education, the capacity of teachers to lead values-focus educational endeavors, the availability of resources for childhood education, parental involvement, and home-school relationships are all necessary to fashion a successful developmental program in this area.

### ***Access to Early Childhood Education***

Like other developing countries, Pakistan is attempting to cope with the challenge of providing childhood education to its eligible citizens. ASER Pakistan (2017) reports that “61% (rural) and 42% (urban) children between ages 3-5 are out of school in Pakistan. This highlights an urgent need to address this problem and work towards an alliance which models and incorporates necessary Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for all.” Therefore, a comprehensive and multidimensional awareness campaign must be launched to improve accessibility to partake in early childhood education programs. In this regard, Ahmad (2011) emphasized that: “All possible modes and means – such as workshops, conferences, symposia, forums and the mass media – should be utilized for raising awareness about the issues that need to be promoted” (p. 90). He further suggests that the “parliamentarians or members of legislatures are key to the implementation of early childhood care and development of a plan of action, the success of which will require that they promote raising awareness, adopt necessary legislation, facilitate and appropriate the financial resources needed for this purpose, and monitor their effective utilization” (p.91). Partnerships with non-government organizations, the private sector, and philanthropic organizations can significantly improve opportunities to partake in early childhood education. In addition, early childhood education can be made mandatory throughout the country. Under the prevailing circumstances, if a nationwide, values-focused educational intervention is provided to young children without exception, the educational sector would be able to reach out to only 39% of rural and 58% of urban children because, according to the ASER report, “61% (rural) and 42% (urban) children between ages 3-5 are out of the school.” Therefore, improving access is critical in the country to reach out to the maximum number of children with a values-based curriculum.

### ***Lack of Resources***

Lack of resources is integrally linked to the access issue of young children to early childhood education. “Pakistan spends 2.4% GDP on education. At the national level, 89% of education expenditures is comprised of current expenses such as teachers’ salaries, while only 11% is comprised of development expenditures which is not sufficient to raise the quality of education” (Yousafzai, 2019, p.2). “The ECE budget is insignificant and the allocation of capital to the ECE to reform the education sector is too small to come across the requirements of 8 million children of all age groups” (Arshad & Zamir, 2018, p.139). The country, especially with respect to the public sector schools, is suffering from the shortage of material resources to effectively operate early childhood education (Khan, 2018). The public sector’s early childhood centers need physical resources which must be met through additional budgetary allocations from federal and provincial governments. The basic physical resources such as classrooms, educational resources, and materials, drinking water, pick-up and drop-off service, audio/visual aids, playgrounds, and bathrooms are imperative for a quality, early childhood education (Ahmad, Anjum, & Rehman, 2015). Apart from increasing funding, it is important to make newly-allocated funds non-lapsable and non-transferable so that it

becomes mandatory for the authorities to spend the allocated budget on the provision of early childhood educational services. In addition, non-government and community-based organizations are playing a significant role in providing quality early childhood education throughout the country. Therefore, partnerships could be developed between these organizations and public sector education departments to improve accessibility and quality of early childhood education in the country (Ahmad, 2011). This scarcity of resources is yet another setback for initiating planned values education at this age level.

### ***Teacher Training***

Imparting values education at an early age involves multifaceted and complex processes which demand adequate professional competencies for the teachers. According to Zachrisen (2018), these teachers must have the traits of self-reflection about their beliefs, values, and an interpretation of diversity and equality in their pedagogical work. These teachers are continuously involved in weighing and balancing different options and different individual needs in a preschool context. Therefore, in these changing circumstances, the teachers need a set of tools that are in line with the holistic nature of values education (Puroila & Haho, 2017).

The *National Curriculum Document of Pakistan* (2009) explicitly emphasizes that primary schools maintain mandatory, early childhood education centers. It also proposed to enlarge additional budgetary resources to train teachers for at least two years. However, the shortage of trained teachers in early childhood education has been a historical problem which is still persistent to this date due to limited, government investment. Therefore, the least qualified and most poorly-trained teachers are directed to early childhood education (Hunzai, 2009). Also, 50% of teachers in the department lack professional qualifications. *The National Education Census* (2005) claimed that out of the 1.35 million teachers, only 3,860 were employed in pre-school education.

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in Islamabad (2017) carried out a study to explore the status of early childhood education in Pakistan and claimed that the “specialized training of teachers as recommended in the policy could not be provided to the ECE teachers in the provinces and regions. While exploring reasons for not providing specialized training to the teachers, it was found that in the provinces and regions, a single teacher policy in primary school was the main hurdle, because a single teacher could not be spared for training. Other reasons include the lack of financial resources and the distance of the school from the training institution” (p. IX). The public sector teachers in the country at the preschool level do not have a mechanism of an ongoing organized and focused training program. The teachers in the private sector, however, receive occasional, but limited training opportunities (Wasi et al., 2018). Above all, “none of the public universities in Pakistan offer degrees, graduate courses, teacher training programs and world-class research in education for ECE teachers” (Khan, 2018, p. 315). Therefore, Ahmad (2011) proposes that “special provision should be made for the training (both pre-service and in-service) of ECE teachers. All teacher training colleges/institutions in the country should initiate ECE teacher training programs. Similarly, research on various aspects of ECE may be conducted and, based on the research findings, curricula, training, and assessment and evaluation program should be strengthened” (p. 92).

### ***Parental Involvement***

“Parents have the most time in educating their children in the family environment, so parents have the main role for the success of imparting values education to their children. Therefore, parents are the party most responsible for the process of instilling values in their children. Children, as successors to parents, must have good-bad and right-wrong values and be able to apply good values in their environment (Azahari, 2019, p. 108). Surely, parents and other family members represent a critical component of education, and the values-based orientation process of a child is almost incomplete without their active involvement. Most of the time, children live with their parents and tend to perceive their parents as social role models, imitating their behaviors and actions. This is how the values orientation of children takes place at their homes with their parents. Therefore, Frydkova, (2013) argues that: “Formation of value awareness of a child in its first years is determined mainly by family life and role models, parents predominantly. Later, education is influenced by the school life of a child: environment, interaction between peers, and cooperation between family and school. Family becomes part of a school community and both the child’s success at school and the shaping of values consciousness are formed by cooperation between school and family, as well as by the family’s participation in the educational process” (p. 2311).

Pakistan as a developing country has its own socio-economic challenges. The public sector, which maintains the largest schooling system in the country, offers free education; therefore, it is the priority of the parents and children from lower and low-to-middle income classes of the population to partake of this benefit. Most of the parents from these socio-economic groups are struggling with poverty; maintaining their livelihood is their biggest worry before being concerned with the education of their children. Thus, they are the least motivated to be involved in the education of their children (Cameron et al., 2015). A study conducted in Pakistan by Ahmad, Ronka, and Perala-Littunen (2021) reported that: “Teachers believed that susceptible socioeconomic circumstances and adherence to local customs hindered many parents from participating in their children’s education. In line with this, teachers frequently held negative perceptions regarding children’s parents, and these perceptions have the potential to adversely affect parent–teacher communication and children’s learning” (p. 1).

The second challenge is the educational level of the parents throughout the country. Most of the parents from lower and low-to-middle classes are uneducated or have a low level of education. Hence, their perception about the importance of school and the education process of their children is not encouraging. Most of the time, these parents believe that by enrolling their children in school, the ongoing task of educating their children is the sole responsibility of the schools. And because of their low level of education, they are unable to make a meaningful contribution to the education of their children (Perriel, 2015). Secondly, like other societies around the world, these lower and low-to-middle class individuals share a common geographic area and form a community. Hence, minimal interest and motivation towards the education of their children creates a local culture throughout these communities; a neighborhood is developed which pays less attention to the education of children and is characterized by a low level of parental collaboration with schools.

The perception and attitude of the teachers towards the parental community is another problem in developing countries like Pakistan. Due to the lack of professional development, teachers consider parents a burden and disregard them as meaningfully involved in the education of their children. In this regard, Malik et al. (2021), studied the views and perspectives of selected parents in the Pakistani context, reporting that “the participants of

the study have complained about the reluctant behavior of teachers in public schools. Mostly, ECE teachers show less concern with the child's performance in schools. Participants reported to be uninformed about the daily performance of their children by the school" (p. 793).

## **Conclusion**

The transition from traditional to the modern market economy has created chaos and turmoil in many developing countries. The traditional social orders were rapidly overshadowed by a preference for economic ascension. "Education has become a business today. This has changed the outlook for students as well as the parents and it has further resulted in the deterioration of respect for teachers and all those who are part and parcel of the education system. The (growing) political, social, and scientific attention to the moral aspects of teaching also concerns teacher education. In today's era of competition and survival, we observe laxity in values. Industrialization has led to the emergence of affluence lifestyles and has raised the standard of living for many people. It has made men and women rich in a materialistic sense but eroded the ethical fiber of society" (Gul, 2017, p. 1).

In many developing societies, the role of meaningful values-based education is attracting more critical review, not only for its social cohesion and national integration but also for cultivating a peaceful, tolerant, and contributing world society irrespective of physical boundaries. "Value shapes our relationships, our behaviors, our choices, and our sense of who we are. The more positive our values, the most positive our actions" (Indrani, 2012, p.2). The current era demands that a more aggressively planned values-based education be started at an early childhood age. "Values education must be done from an early age as the most fundamental phase in human life. Early age is the phase of golden age from which human life must be utilized as optimally as possible because it will never be repeated throughout the span of human life" (Fauzi & Novikasari, 2019, p. 289)

Research has proven that planned values education intervention has yielded significant results in these developing contexts. For example, in the Turkish context, Dereli-İman (2014) surmised that the "social skills, psycho-social development and social problem-solving skill levels of the children who participated in the Values Education Program (experimental group) were significantly higher than the children who did not participate in the education program (control group)" (p.266). Therefore, despite the many challenges, early childhood education in Pakistan needs a comprehensively planned, values-focused educational program to better equip younger generations to successfully meet the emerging challenges of the modern market economy and develop into contributing and beneficial citizens not only of the country, but of the world at large.

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