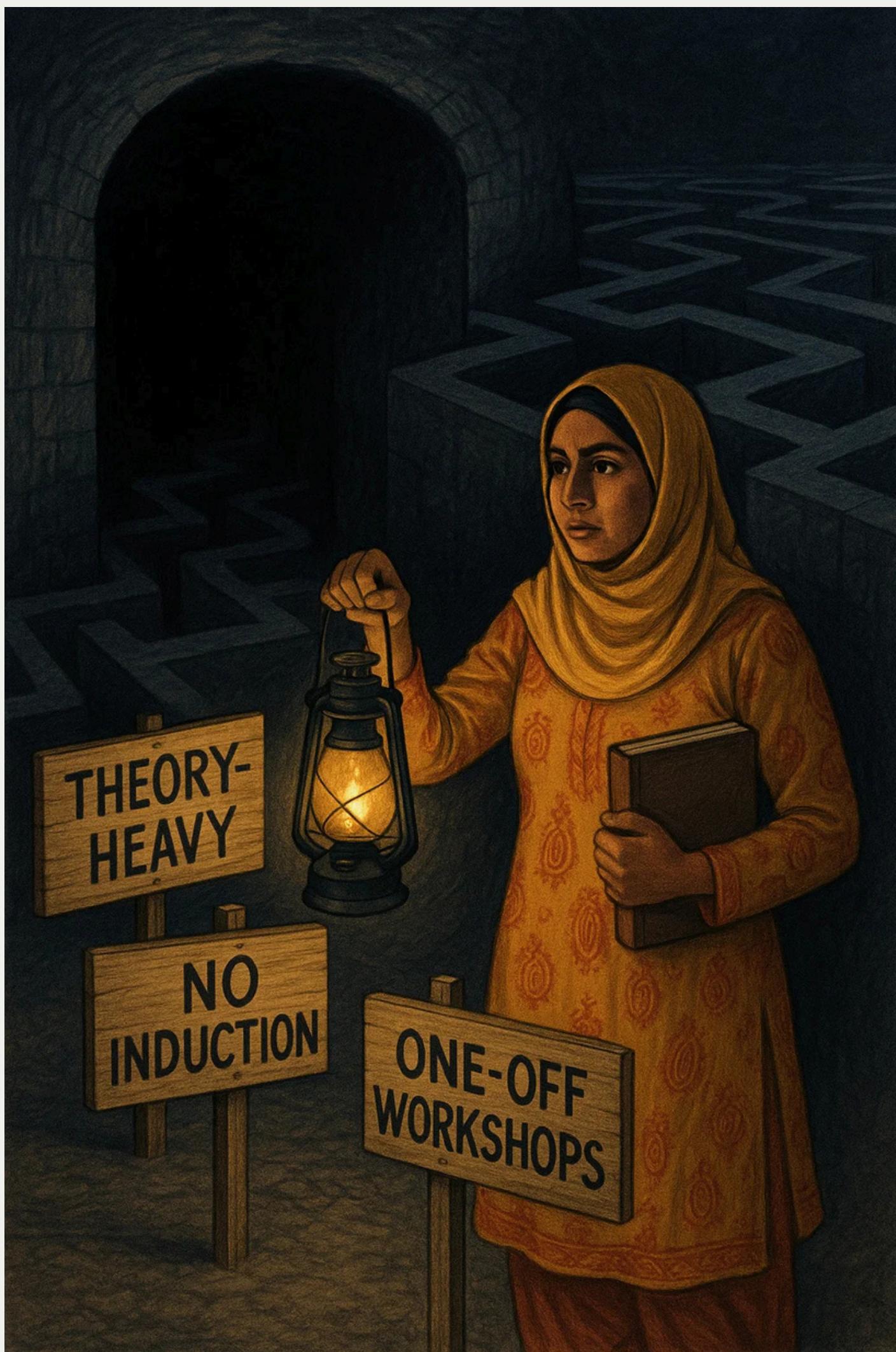


TEACHER TRAINING

CRISIS



Pakistan's education reform is hindered by a fragmented, outdated, and often ineffective teacher education system. Despite policy shifts and promising initiatives, the country lacks a coherent, career-long pathway for training teachers — from pre-service to in-service.

Pakistan Teacher Education is a Labyrinth

The quality of Education hinges on the proficiency of its educators. About 64 percent of Pakistan's population is younger than 30, and 29 percent is between the ages of 15 and 29. The country needs good educators to help its youth-rich demographic attain a good education, driving present and future development, innovation, governance, and overall human capital. The education system needs a serious overhaul. The country can take steps such as sustained political will, proficiency of educators, good learning output, not input, an inclusive and equitable education system, policy coherence, stakeholder (Teachers/Students) input, and evidence-based decision making. Each step can be and should be explored separately in-depth.

While education reform involves many moving parts, funding, equity, and accountability, the hinge point remains the teacher. And in Pakistan, teacher preparation is a maze of broken promises, outdated models, and missed opportunities.

Nothing paints the picture better than a statistical note. For example, 75 percent of Pakistani 10-year-olds are in “learning poverty,” meaning they cannot read and understand a simple story despite being in school.

This time, my emphasis will be on teacher education in Pakistan. A fragmented system where pre-service programs, induction, and in-service support are lackluster, compared to other regional systems. However, before I do a deep dive. I need to mention the changes in the education system in the last decade, to reference a few:

Recent times have seen several changes in the education department, especially the devolution of the Federal Education Ministry, through the passage of the 18th Amendment, which touted to improve the quality of education, better learning outcomes through increased efficacy and accountability. The purpose is to allow provinces to tailor curricula, planning, and resource allocation, which were dictated nationally (centralized model) before the amendment, creating further gaps. Before 2010, providing free and basic primary education was the responsibility of the state, and all reforms and initiatives were with the federal government.

The National Education Policy, which lays out clear learning outcomes goals, teacher standards, and equity, mandates province-specific action plans, creating a shared agenda across Islamabad and the provinces.

The educational stipends program, originally launched as Waseela-e-Taleem, then rebranded to Benazir Taleemi Wazaif, and now known as Ehsaas School Stipends, provides targeted financial support to students at all levels: primary-level boys receive Rs 2,500 and girls Rs 3,000; secondary-level boys Rs 3,500 and girls Rs 4,000; and higher-secondary boys Rs 4,500 and girls Rs 5,000.

Building on these policy shifts, non-state actors have stepped up to bolster teacher capacity and learning at the grassroots. The Citizens Foundation (TCF) combines intensive pre-service training with ongoing coaching and community-driven literacy and leadership programs, while Idara-e Taleem-o Aagahi (ITA) uses citizen-led surveys to expose learning gaps and spur provincial action on reading proficiency. In Sindh, CARE's LEAPS project brings learner-centered methods and peer-learning circles into classrooms, turning policy ambitions into real improvements in teaching practice.

These are among the few policy shifts that have taken place in Pakistan to improve the literacy level of education. Problems persist, and understandably, these actions, which were to be taken decades ago, are only now being prioritized. For a nuclear nation to take refuge in the adage, "better late than never," is a testament to its poor governance systems.

The fragmented, overly brief, and largely theoretical teacher training method is one of many problems neglected from the beginning. The gravity of this neglect can be understood, as it took the nation 59 years after its independence to establish its first national accreditation body, the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE), and a full 77 years for Sindh to pilot its first major teacher-licensing exam. The results were abysmal; out of 4,000 teachers, 646 passed, roughly 16 percent.



Pre-service Training: The bedrock of any teacher's foundation

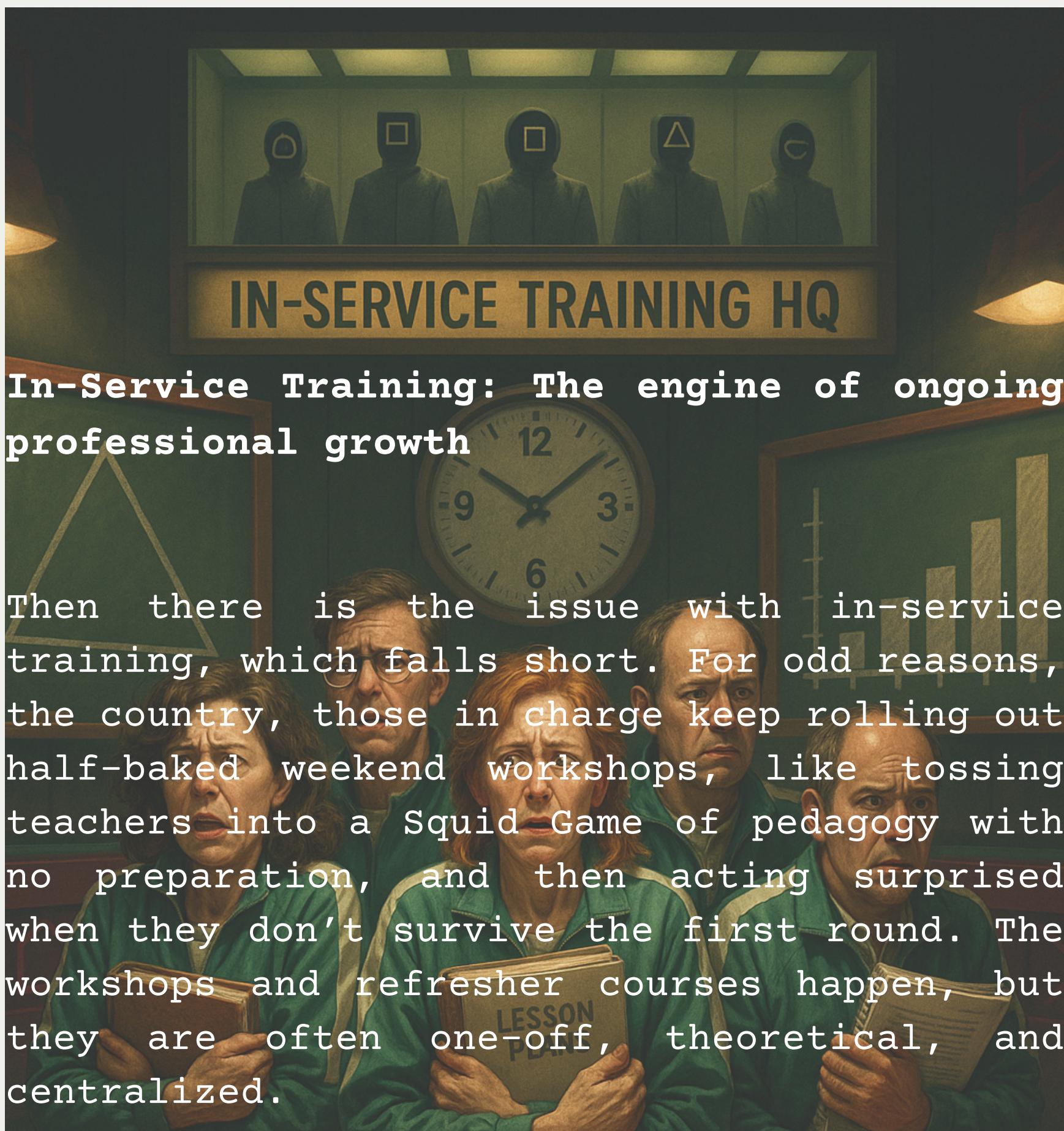
The problem lies in how Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training operates in pre-service training, which includes college education and certificates that new teachers earn. Many of these programs remain outdated. For example, one analysis notes that Pakistan's one-year certificate courses (like PTC and CT) cram in "too many subjects" and rely on old-fashioned lecture methods instead of inquiry-based pedagogy. There are still public-private exceptions that have begun modernizing pre-service training using inquiry-based, reflective, and practicum-heavy models, e.g., Durbeen, the Agha Khan University-Institute for Educational Development, and Ziauddin University.

Entrance requirements vary across provinces and are often as low as a secondary school diploma. Many teacher candidates start with shaky academic foundations, and outdated college curricula don't help, they graduate knowing theory, but not how to actually teach in a real classroom.



Induction Phase: Crucial bridge between theory and practice

Even when teachers graduate, the induction phase, meaning the support and mentorship they receive, is virtually non-existent. Ideally, new teachers should receive mentoring, observation, and guidance in their first year on the job or should be trained in a physical location prior to entering the classroom. The country lacks a uniform induction program. Some provinces have brief orientation courses, but these are not seen as substitutes for real training. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's 2017 Induction Policy was a valiant effort, but it lacked stakeholder participation, mentoring, review, and performance assessment. Hence, the program failed to address fundamental issues. New teachers reported low satisfaction: resources went unused, and training felt out of touch. In practice, outside of a few pilot projects, many provinces still treat induction as an afterthought, so teachers learn on the job with little support.



In-Service Training: The engine of ongoing professional growth

Then there is the issue with in-service training, which falls short. For odd reasons, the country, those in charge keep rolling out half-baked weekend workshops, like tossing teachers into a Squid Game of pedagogy with no preparation, and then acting surprised when they don't survive the first round. The workshops and refresher courses happen, but they are often one-off, theoretical, and centralized.

It is extremely essential for continuous student success to provide in-service teacher training to maintain high standards. The pandemic briefly jolted the system into action: over 600,000 teachers received tech training. But once the emergency passed, the momentum fizzled. Teachers were left without structured support, and the promise of modern pedagogy faded back into paper trails. There are promising initiatives (for example, some Public Private Partnership-run programs and teacher-learning networks), but sustained, school-based coaching is rare. In short, a teacher who has been on the job for a few years often has no formal pathway to improve her skills.

In the end, Pakistan's teachers deserve more than outdated certificates, one-off orientations, and weekend seminars; they deserve a genuine, career-long development pathway that begins well before they step into a classroom and never truly ends. Bridging this labyrinth won't happen by accident or goodwill alone; it requires political will, funding, and a unified vision that treats teacher education as the non-negotiable foundation of every other reform. Only then can Pakistan's vast youth dividend become a force for progress, rather than a generation labeled by its lost learning.