Linguistic and cultural diversity: the missing link in education policies in Pakistan

By Zubair Torwali

The making of education policies in Pakistan has mostly overlooked the linguistic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of Pakistani society.

Well-known educationist and scientist Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, has described the current educational policies in Pakistan stating that, they do ‘not ask for creating a mindset that can readily accept Pakistan’s diversity of religions, languages and cultures.’

Looking at the paranoiac and sometimes myopic mindset focused on denying equal room for the over 65 mother tongues in Pakistan, Hoodbhoy’s critique is correct.

Since its inception in 1947 Pakistan has been in search of a ‘nation state’ at the cost of the rich linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity the country has been home to for centuries. Although there came a small shift in policies in the year 2010 on the part of the state with the passing of the famous 18th amendment to the country’s constitution, which devolved education to the provinces, yet successive governments in the provinces couldn't design or implement education policies which catered to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country.

The creation of homogeneity has further alienated the already disadvantaged linguistic communities in Pakistan in addition to posing threats to the diverse languages and cultures.

The paper is an overview of the various educational policies tried in Pakistan from 1947 to 2014. At the end I give recommendations on how to improve education in Pakistan by including the learners’ mother tongues in the state-run education system.