

McDonaldization of Education in Pakistan: A Step Towards Dehumanization

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‘McDonaldization’ in society is a concept originated by George Ritzer within the last decade of the twentieth century (1992). This concept was applied to higher education by Dennis Hayes and Robin Wynward (2002, 2017). This analytical study focusses on the McDonaldization of education in Pakistan. The effects of McDonaldization upon Pakistan’s education system are analyzed in terms of the four characteristics suggested by Ritzer: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. The analysis is based on observation, experiences, and opinion of the educationists, including the researcher. It is observed that ‘efficiency’ is increased by mechanical teaching, ‘calculability’ is ensured through good profit making, ‘predictability’ is maintained through standardized testing, and franchising and ‘control’ is exercised through online activities.

Keywords: *McDonaldization, Efficiency, Calculability, Predictability, Control, Franchising, Pakistan’s education, Standardized testing, Online interaction.*

Introduction and Literature Review

George Ritzer defined ‘McDonaldization’ as a “process by which the principles of fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world” (1993). Ritzer defined McDonaldization in terms of four distinctive features or characteristics: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Ritzer (2011) improved upon the ‘theory of instrumental rationalization’ presented by Max Weber. Ritzer (2011) connected Weber’s postulates for human labor, which were based on water-tight divisions and

distinctions in the hierarchical structures within organizations and institutions. This kind of system is described in the metaphorical term, 'iron cage' (Quinn, 2000). Many researchers and social scientists have observed, evaluated, and proven the existence of the dimensions of this concept in almost all walks of social life. Many educational researchers have observed and discussed the application of the concept of McDonaldization, as detailed by Ritzer and Weber, in the educational spheres. It is specially analyzed in a higher education context to evaluate how it works in educational settings and what effects it creates upon educational outcomes. The first researchers in this field were Hartley (1995), and Ritzer (1996; 2002).

They explored general issues, but their work established the field for others to contribute and further refine the criterion of evaluating and analyzing the proposed four dimensions of McDonaldization. Hayes and Wynyard (2002) declared the effect of McDonaldization as being 'negative' in their book, *McDonaldization of Higher Education*. They declare that after this McDonaldization of education, the academic degrees lost their connection with knowledge and education. It only promoted the credentials needed to win a good job. Thus, making degrees the 'product', and students the 'customers', it was able to increase the number of graduates but resulted in abandoning the academic standards. The educational researchers followed the framework set and suggested refinements according to their own context. Garland (2008) applied it to United Kingdom (UK) higher education and found that creative and critical thinking is undermined because of these mechanized processes. Lorenz (2012) declared that the principles are 'changing the very meaning of education' in the modern world. Courtois, O'Keefe, Muñoz, Hawel, and Kalmring (2015) are of the same opinion, that the principles of McDonaldization are doing more harm than benefitting the higher education. The McDonaldization thesis cannot be applied to the universities without modifications and further empirical research (Nadolny & Ryan, 2015).

In the most recently published book, *Beyond McDonaldization: visions of Higher Education*, Hayes (2017) continued to criticize but also proposed to slow down or stop this McDonaldization. The collection of essays in this book were authored by different eminent scholars related to higher education and education ministries. They all agreed on the ironic effects of rationalization, which are irrational in the instances of higher education in particular, and education in general. They all agreed that this McDonaldization has detracted education from its prime goal, which is 'pursuit of knowledge'. The book is of the view that the concept of the skilled worker has destroyed the very fabric of the economic world and it has stagnated the economies of its proponents, such as the United States (US), and UK. It was stated that a utilitarian approach towards education has left the learners with no creativity; they only possess a mechanical skill set of limited value. This encourages cheating and corrupt practices, as moral or ethical education or education for education sake is missing in this model of education. They asked the authorities through this book to return to the more traditional mode of education, encouraging subjects such as theology, philosophy, and literature, etc. Holms and Lindsay (2018), and Perran and Rudge (2016) criticize the purely technical instrumental curriculum,

which is the product of McDonaldization. This kind of curriculum should encourage critical thinking, creativity, and insightfulness. Hu, X., Leung, F. K., and Chen, G. (2018) considered the factors related to the attitudes towards science study and found that family related factors are more important than the school related factors. This showed that dehumanization of education is not going to help the future learners. Pakistan's education system, like the rest of the developing countries, is suffering from effectively planned and student-oriented learning (Azim et al., 2018, 2020; Azim & Garcia, 2020). This leads to a lack of understanding of the world and media discourses, which has a major role to play in the development of the country (Azim et al., 2017). The commercialization is visible in the adaptation of the classical literature too (Azim et al., 2019). As mentioned above, this McDonaldization is affecting every walk of life. This article will analyze Pakistan's education system against the four characteristics mentioned above, and the sub-factors mentioned in the existing body of research. The factors are components of a larger umbrella of the four major factors. These characteristics are briefly explained, which will serve as a criterion to analyze the different aspects of Pakistan's education system.

'Efficiency' is an important feature of McDonaldization, which means 'to get customers in and out as quickly as possible'. It is the best way of accomplishing a goal or economically the best process of producing the desired product. There is no room for individuality. Here, the effort is to develop an efficiency-based system. This system has strongly established routines which cannot be altered, thus producing robotic or mechanical followers. The task is divided into sub-tasks to the smallest possible units, and employees need to perform their assigned task that needs minimum skill and knowledge. There is no need of creativity, critical thinking, and individuality. The workers are low paid and easily replaceable. As discussed above, this system or model has numerous negative impacts on individual skills, creativity, and customization. This can work in industries, but education is for human beings who are inherently different and unique. Taking creativity, critical thinking, and individuality out of education can really hurt the very purpose of education. We are not talking about making robots here, we are talking about the development of human beings, who must be effective members of society, not just professionals in carrying out limited assigned tasks successfully. They need to be good world citizens with a deep understanding of human values. This education system has given birth to 'intolerance', 'extremism', 'terrorism', 'heartless professionalism', and other negative qualities. The continuation and adoption of this system for a developing country, such as Pakistan, can be hazardous.

'Calculability' in McDonaldization refers to "an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products sold (portion size, cost) and service offered (the time it takes to get the product)", as explained by Ritzer. In this concept, 'more' is not always 'better', and a larger quantity will be valued if it is good and reliable. We 'super-size', 'double' or add 'extra' to our value meals. However, when it comes to education, then quality should rule over the quantity. The production of degree holders without necessary skills and knowledge will be fatal for the



country's economy and overall texture of the society. This will increase the number of incompetent professionals in every field. Moreover, this will result in a general increase in the frustration and anxiety of the nation. It necessarily requires the lowering of educational standards and limiting the essential skill set. Educational institutions focus on large intakes of students and the enormous production of graduates speaks about their business objectives of making profits. Quality measures, such as intake and graduation ratio, in educational institutions are also contributing to the same ends.

According to Ritzer (2002), McDonaldized society's 'predictability' "emphasizes such things as discipline, order, systemization, formalization, routine, consistency, and methodical operation. In such a society, people prefer to know what to expect in most settings and at most times". The work routine of the workers is also the same and is well defined. The taste of a McDonald's burger in New York will not be different from its taste in Lahore. The menu, employees' uniform, their greetings, and the interior and exterior of the building will be predictable and similar throughout the world. This has killed the local taste, as well as the local business. This has made the local entrepreneur an employee resulted in the accumulation of money within limited hands. On the other hand, it is making the choices limited. Freewill and choice are no more there; people have to choose from what is offered. This concept in education is destroying customized teaching and local schooling. Quality assurance systems — such as ISO, University Ranking, and others — are pushing institutions to follow the given guidelines by not considering their actual learners, their learning styles, their culture, their economic background or their parenting, etc.

'Control' is the final aspect of McDonaldization. There is a need to have control over the entire process of production and all the elements of process, humans, and material. This is because "[people and materials are] the great source of uncertainty, unpredictability and inefficiency in any rational system", as explained by Ritzer (2002). This is achieved through non-human technology. Through the method of control, it is guaranteed that customers always receive what they expect and will repeat the assigned task over and over again mechanically. This aspect is most discussed in the context of education, as researchers categorize e-learning into it. Webinars, Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), Learning Management System (LMS), self-learning software, blogs, and so on, are promoting virtual relationships, which is a real step towards dehumanization. Fischer and Hänze (2019), in their article, find that the teacher-led method is better than the student-activated method in producing cognitive involvement and learning outcomes rather student-activating methods have negative effects. This new model of virtual learning can be effective for few, but for general masses, it would be toxic. At the moment, the academic world does give equal respect to online or distance learning degrees as it gives to on-campus or face-to-face learning.

The aspects discussed above provide a criterion to analyze the McDonaldization of the Pakistani education system. The criterion is quite clear, but there are some overlaps, as they discuss the aspects of the same process.

Methodology

The methodology of this article is simple. It is an analytical study utilizing the criterion proposed by Ritzer in the concept of McDonaldization, which is further explained by a plethora of researchers, as mentioned in the previous discussion. The criteria of these researchers were used to analyze and identify the different elements of McDonaldization to determine how much Pakistan's education system was affected by it. In addition, how can be this process of McDonaldization be slowed down, if not stopped. For this purpose, the researchers have used their own observations and discussions with colleagues and other educationists to generate this analysis. One hundred and five educationists were consulted. Six special focus groups were arranged to discuss different aspects of McDonaldization. The questions focused were:

1. What are the different aspects of McDonaldization as a concept?
2. Which aspects of 'efficiency' are found in Pakistan's education system?
3. Which aspects of 'calculability' are found in Pakistan's education system?
4. Which aspects of 'predictability' are found in Pakistan's education system?
5. Which aspects of 'control' are found in Pakistan's education system?
6. What kinds of effects do these principles have on Pakistan's education system?
7. What suggestions can be made to minimize the harmful effects (if any)?

Each focus group consisted of 15 to 20 educationists belonging to major universities, colleges, and schools. A general representation of the educationists in the focus group is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: General Representation of the Educationists in the Focus Group

Sr. No.	College/University Department	No. of Participants
1	University (Education Department)	5–6
2	University (Management)	3–4
3	University (Other Departments)	3–4
5	College (All Departments)	3–4
6	School (All Subjects)	3–4

All these educationists were considered based on their experience (more than eight years of teaching, training or management) and qualification (Masters and preferred with some



educational qualification). The participants with an active role in research within the field of education, teaching, and learning were preferred.

Their analysis was recorded and reviewed. The researchers have served within different institutions in Pakistan within the last 17 years, so their own understanding and analysis regarding Pakistan's education system is critical. In addition, houses and workplaces of the researchers were also the discussion points of the different aspects of McDonaldization of education in Pakistan in the last 12 months. Prominent researchers in the field of educational models, curriculum, and educational quality assurance shared their views on the topic. These scholars were also asked to respond to questions given to the focus groups. Their discussion was also recorded and analyzed.

Analysis

According to all the participants of the research, the McDonaldization of education in Pakistan began long ago, but in the last five years, the pace of this McDonaldization has increased alarmingly. According to Robert Slater (1999), the effects of McDonaldization were negative and detrimental to the American education system. It is no different in the case of Pakistan. The aspects of Pakistan's education system that are affected by McDonaldization, in light of the focus group discussions and discussions with different scholars, are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The concept of 'efficiency' within education in Pakistan is not very positive. The teaching content is reduced to ensure the quick exit of the learners and that content is repeatedly taught to make sure that the learners know the specified content. There is no work on the real understanding of the learners because that is not the requirement of the assessment system. The learners were given prepared materials, notes, and key books with the answers to all the questions expected in the exams, which they need to rote-learn in most cases. A learner who can reproduce the learnt materials in the exam situation in a perfect way will usually receive the highest reward.

Teachers are provided with the textbooks to teach, and with those textbooks are detailed minute-to-minute lesson plans which are needed to follow in true letter and spirit. No deviation from the given 'scheme of study' is possible. If the teacher is absent, then any substitute teacher can take the lesson plan and execute it because it does not need any specialized training, knowledge or skill. The steps are given in the lesson plan and the teacher needs to follow them mechanically. This makes the hiring process easier and cheaper. Employers do not need highly skilled and highly paid teachers. Ordinary and less qualified teachers can be hired because they do not need to plan; they just need to execute what is already planned. Therefore, it saves money or becomes cost efficient, as the teachers are not trusted for important aspects (such as needs analysis and planning), so they are easy to replace, just like McDonald's workers.

The inclusion of pair and group work, where the teacher is mostly a facilitator, is an efficient method, just like picking your own order and clearing your own table in McDonald's. The effectiveness of these techniques is raising a question mark on them because when the teachers and learners do their job, just by going through the motions without any real ownership of the task and activities, then their effectiveness cannot be ensured.

The concept of 'calculability', which is an important feature of Ritzer's McDonaldization, is also very clearly observable in Pakistan's education system. Earlier education was not a business, and all schools, colleges, universities, and other technical institutes were owned by the State, and teachers were free to assess and evaluate a student for a promotion to the next level. Moreover, they had standards of quality and believed in the quality of learners more than the quantity of graduating students. However, 'privately owned' or 'for profit' institutions grew as a mafia or pressure group and deliberately defamed the State-owned institutions by using media and with the corrupted help of important State actors. The result was a popularity of privately-owned institutions. If we go back 15 years, the students who used to fail to gain admission in the State-owned institutions felt embarrassed. The students used to hide if they were studying in 'private' or 'for profit' institutions because those were considered inferior. However, now, the situation has totally reversed; either the students who did not gain admission in private institutions have join State-owned institutions or the students cannot afford the private institutions.

The focus of these private institutes is upon quantity and not quality. They provide admission to brilliant boys and girls by offering them lavish scholarships and other benefits and use their achievements as a marketing tool to attract a significant number of students, who join based on the brilliant results of the college. They teach the students through less qualified, untrained, and visiting faculty members in large classes comprised of 60 to 100 students. During exam periods, they deliberately fail and cancel the admission of weaker students and send their admission to the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) examination as private candidates, so that their college result is not affected. Then they claim to have a hundred per cent result and other greater achievements of the institution, which is only a half-truth. They never show the complete enrolment of students and the result according to that enrolment.

Internal exams are not a problem; they pass all their candidates because fees can only flow in if students are progressing. Therefore, they pass students without considering the quality of the students, and once the students are sitting external examinations, the institutes disown the weaker students and present only the brilliant students as their own academic product.

The recent action of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in visiting different university campuses and closing a substantial number of campuses and their programs, testifies that these 'for profit' institutes are not focusing upon quality, but focus solely business, which is generated through the quantity of students. Many private institutes lack basic facilities, including a library, laboratories, faculty members, a canteen, playground, etc.

The third important element is ‘predictability’ or standardization. In the name of standardization or predictability, a majority of business is done in Pakistan’s education system. Almost all universities, which were city specific previously, are now opening campuses in the major cities of Pakistan. However, the central campus or the parent campus has little or no control over these franchised campuses. The students seek admission considering the standard of the parent institute, however, the expectations are never met due to the closure of many sub-campus by the HEC, prohibiting universities from giving affiliations, etc. This aspect of McDonaldization is financially extremely dangerous, as the money is concentrated in few hands. The Punjab group of colleges (for profit institutes) claim to have the largest student body in the college section. They have campuses in almost all of the major cities of Pakistan. They are specialized in college teaching, but they have also established a couple of universities, including the University of Central Punjab (UCP) in Lahore, and Jinnah University in Karachi. They are an opening or franchising chain of school with the name of Allied Schools for middle and upper classes. For lower classes, they are franchising Education for All (EFA) Schools. Thus, they are trying to become the McDonald’s of the education business. However, they are not alone in this race, as the Beaconhouse School System has established itself as a big school system with campuses all over Pakistan and a large number of students. In fact, they are vanguard of franchising schools with the name of ‘The Educators’. They have established a university, the Beaconhouse National University (BNU). Moreover, they are establishing colleges with the name, ‘Concordia Colleges’. The City School, University of Management and Technology, Knowledge Inn Preparatory School (KIPS), and some other institutions are also competing to get their share of business. Thus, the established institutes are trying to monopolize the whole educational market, including schools, colleges, and universities.

These institutes develop curriculum, prescribe textbooks, and prepare lesson plans for their franchisees, obtaining a substantial amount of annual share from them. They do not consider their students, teachers or learning situations, rather only providing the prepared materials and ensure standardization. This is one of the major causes of the downfall of education in Pakistan. This way, the individuality of students and teachers is lost, and they become part of the dehumanized world. As Pink Floyd (1979) suggested, the students are made into another ‘brick in the wall’. This is a perfect example of predictability, that if you taste a McDonald’s burger anywhere in the world, you will find it tastes the same. The local taste, local spices, and local foods do not affect the standards of McDonald’s.

In addition, there are many agencies that are ‘trying’ to make ‘standardize’ an institution, including ISO certification, university rankings, BISE recognition, HEC ranking, Council’s recognition (engineering, medical, vocational, etc.), hybrid degrees, benchmarking of international universities, memorandums of understanding with international universities, and many others.



Then there are ‘standardized’ tests because many institutions do not trust the degrees and certificates given by several other institutes. Standard tests, such as: International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL), Graduate Assessment Test (GAT), Graduate Management Assessment Test (GMAT), National Aptitude Test (NAT), Medical Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT), and Engineering Colleges Admission Test ECAT, etc., are claiming to create the required standardization.

Furthermore, there are local and international funding agencies which want to ‘impose standardization’ because of their vested interests. They want Pakistan’s education system to ‘improve’ so they give suggestions and ‘funds’ if their suggestions are met. Their suggestions may include: gender balance in all textbooks, exclusion of the concept of Jihad, exclusion of certain topics from the history books, exclusion of subjects of humanities, promotion of science education, promotion of English language and foreign culture, inclusion of chapters on tolerance and religious harmony, and inclusion of skill-based education, and so on.

In all this standardization or predictability of Pakistan’s education system, neither the real agents (the principal, head teachers, and teacher) or the recipients (students) are involved. The planners are trying to delete Pakistan’s native individuality and upload the software that will benefit the specific interests of several national and international players, suggesting our tastes should develop according to the flavors offered by McDonald’s.

The last feature, but not the least important, is ‘control’. All the participants agree that control is exercised by using non-human technology. It is perfectly used in Pakistan’s education system. Through e-learning, the McDonaldization of education is facilitated, as also suggested by Carol (2013), Friedman (2006), and Young (1990). Education is a form of socializing and is not an experience in isolation, however, this is exactly what is happening. The importance of socializing in education was emphasized in the study of “Socially shared regulation of learning and participation in social interaction in collaborative learning” by Isohätälä, Järvenoja, & Järvelä, (2017). Socially-shared learning is better than task-focused learning. The importance of human contact is essential for all sorts of learning. Human contact is reduced to the bare minimum for both teachers and students and the rest is delivered ‘online’. This was also confirmed in the study, “One Laptop one child Program”, which was conducted by Mora, Escardíbul, & Di Pietro (2018). The study highlighted that there was a negative impact of this program and learners’ grades considerably fell in different subjects. The negative impact of the program was greater on boys than it was on girls. This was one of the factors of dehumanization. This degradation continued as senior teachers used to act as ‘mentors’ for the novice teachers, but now the teacher’s guidebook, teaching manual, and other important documents are uploaded on the website and are available online. The teachers need to download and study these documents, but there is no need for discussion and guidance. Furthermore, a ready-made scheme of studies, syllabus breakdowns, and lesson plans are available online, so again, there is no need to discuss them either. The teachers go to the classes and execute the planned lessons and then leave the class. The assignments are uploaded on a ‘Learning



Management System' (LMS) for the students to access them online. The lectures are also made available online, along with other helping material. Thus, there is no necessity to have contact with students.

The students experience face-to-face interactions with the teacher only in the classroom. If they miss any classes, they do not need to go to the teacher or class fellows, simply download the lecture and materials from the LMS, as well as download the assignment, complete it, and upload again to the same place for evaluation. Grades and other assessments will be available online, so there is no need for students to go to any office or teacher directly. Instead of discussion and exploration, students now-a-days 'google' to obtain the required information. The courses are registered, dropped, and added online, and fees are also submitted online. Blogs and discussion boards are created to discuss academic issues. Moreover, there is a complete range of online courses, such as webinars, MOOCs, live streaming, and so on, which have nothing to do with face-to-face human contact.

Suggestion and Conclusion

In the ways outlined above, the education system of Pakistan is heading rapidly towards dehumanization under the influence of McDonaldisation. The standards of education are also declining. Moreover, it has become difficult to find good professionals within all fields. Extremism and intolerance are on the rise, with moral, ethical, and religious values becoming extinct. Subsequently, the people of Pakistan are losing their identity and their rich cultural heritage.

We cannot stop it, but we can slow it down by making our fellows realize the hazards. This can be achieved in numerous ways:

- We need to develop our curriculum to make it more 'localized' rather than 'globalized'.
- We need to promote the study of theology, philosophy, and literature.
- We need to promote and preserve local languages, local crafts, cultural heritage, local foods, and local dresses, etc., by including them in the general syllabus of all degrees.
- Subjects such as professional ethics, responsible citizenship, multiculturalism, and others like them, should be compulsory elements of any degree that is offered by any university.
- Volunteerism should be promoted. Degree in any discipline should be awarded by the planning and execution of a community service project by the individual students. These projects should be three to six months long.
- Practical steps should be taken to stop making Education a business. There should be community supported colleges with a diverse membership in the board of governors. They should all be 'not for profit' institutes. Any revenues generated should be used in the research and development of the institutes.
- The exams should be based on creative and critical thinking skills.



- The syllabuses should be revised every three years so that new research studies and developments in a particular subject can be incorporated.
- The teachers of all subjects should be trained to teach their specific subjects in an effective manner.
- Teaching degrees should be offered in language education, medical education, early childhood education, engineering education, science education, special education, adult education, and professional education. There should be further subject-related specializations. These specializations could include the teaching of physics, teaching community service, teaching project management, teaching company law, teaching history, etc.
- It should be made compulsory for all the institutes to engage qualified specialists for the teaching of specific subjects.

We need to create counter narratives to stop the process of McDonaldization of education and try to promote them through social media. It is an uphill task but one that is worth venturing.

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