



UNLEARNING

Pilot Report

Piloting the *Unlearning*
Intervention in the Pakistan
School System

January 2024



IC thinking



INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum's 2024 Gender Gap Report ranked Pakistan as the second-worst country in the world for gender parity. Gender equality remains a distant dream in Pakistan and at the heart of the challenge lies regressive gender norms and cognitive biases.

Unlearning is a mission-led social enterprise based in Cambridge, UK, whose mission is to mitigate gender bias and gender-based violence through its *Unlearning* Intervention.

Developed at the University of Cambridge, our empirically evidenced intervention merges three critical thinking frameworks and aims to address gender biases and misconceptions. By disentangling cognitive heuristics, we hope to positively impact women, men, children, society productivity, and economies worldwide.

Initially, Unlearning is focusing its efforts on Pakistan, firstly because it is the country Unlearning's Founder, Maryam Tanwir, hails from, but more importantly, it is a country suffering from deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and gender norms.

Following consultation with the Chief Minister's Office Pakistan, Unlearning carried out a pilot in three government institutions. This report, shares learnings, results & next steps from this pilot.

"Pakistan's performance in the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 highlights the urgent need for more effective and impactful gender empowerment initiatives. While efforts have been made, the overall impact on gender parity remains limited."

Amir Jahangir, Chief Executive Officer of Mishal Pakistan, the Country Partner
Institute of the World Economic Forum

The Unlearning | Method

The Unlearning Intervention is designed to help participants break free from negative gender-based cognitive shortcuts that influence individual and collective behaviour. Three critical-thinking frameworks combine to produce a contextualised, engaging intervention that is precise, measurable, and predictive of sustained behaviour change.

Cognitive shortcuts and biases simplify our perception of the social world. These biases are reinforced by familial, social media, political, and ideological influences. To avoid cognitive overload, humans naturally take and develop mental shortcuts.

These 'heuristics' are deeply ingrained, making them hard to recognise and even harder to change, especially when challenged directly, which can lead to strong resistance against new or contradicting information.

To address the resistance to changing gender assumptions, we have developed a multi-pronged approach employing three frameworks: the empirically-based Integrative Complexity method, behavioural interventions, and the Theatre of the Oppressed. This change will be facilitated through multi-media and multi-sensory meta-cognitive strategies to encourage awareness of 'how' they are thinking, rather than 'what' they are thinking.

The Intervention is delivered in a workshop format over two days. The effectiveness of the intervention is measured through a predictive and non-fakeable coding method, that analyses the participant's heuristics pre-and-post delivery.



The Pilot | Objectives

The pilot was carried out over the span of one month in three government colleges in Punjab. In total 63 participants, ranging from 18 - 24 participated in three workshops. The workshops lasted two days; ensuring overnight memory consolidation.



01

Evaluate Intervention Effectiveness

To measure the impact of the intervention on reducing gender biases and cognitive heuristics among participants.

02

Assess Behavioural Change

To observe and document changes in attitudes towards gender equality and reductions in the normalisation of gender-based violence.

03

Validate Methodologies

To test and confirm the efficacy of the combined critical thinking frameworks in catalysing sustained behavioural change.

04

Enhance Scalability

To refine and develop a scalable syllabus and workshop model that can be effectively implemented in diverse educational, organisational, and community settings.

Collaborators

The pilot was conducted in collaboration with two charities and the Chief Minister's Office, Punjab, Pakistan. Before engaging with participants, Unlearning contextualised and trained a support team within the Strategic Management Unit.



Funder | Centre for Global Equality

Centre for Global Equality (CGE) is a charity based in Cambridge, UK. Their mission is to support the development and diffusion of Inclusive Innovation. They do this by running collaborative and participatory programmes covering the full breadth of the innovation cycle; from research & ideation, to solution scaling and impact.



In Kind Support | Chief Minister's Office, Pakistan

The Chief Minister's Secretariat along with the Strategic Management Unit in Pakistan is responsible for formulating, coordinating, and implementing strategic initiatives and policies to support national development and governance objectives.



In Kind Support | Salman Sufi Foundation

The Salman Sufi Foundation is an independently run social welfare organisation dedicated to women's empowerment, equality of access to all, and social justice in Pakistan.



Theory of Change | Impact

Unlearning's Theory of Change highlights the key indicators used to assess the pilot's success in reshaping gender norms. It defines each indicator, along with the expected outcomes and long-term impacts.

Key Indicator	Definition	Outcomes	Impact
Percentage of Participants Relinquishing Gender Stereotypes	The proportion of participants who, post-intervention, no longer hold or express traditional gender stereotypes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-Term: Immediate recognition and questioning of gender biases • Medium-Term: Sustained change in perceptions, leading to more gender-equitable behavior. • Long-Term: Cultural shift towards gender equality in educational institutions and broader society. 	Contributes to reducing gender bias, promoting gender parity, and reducing gender-based violence.
Reduction in Gender Stereotypes	The extent to which participants' endorsement of gender stereotypes decreases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-Term: Decrease in specific gender-biased beliefs. • Medium-Term: Adoption of more egalitarian views on gender roles. • Long-Term: Pervasive reduction in gender stereotyping across the community. 	Supports broader gender equality, influencing social norms and reducing gender disparities.
Increase in Positive Gender Norms	The rise in acceptance and endorsement of equitable gender norms and behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-Term: Participants adopt positive views on gender equality. • Medium-Term: Enhanced respect and opportunities for women in various spheres. • Long-Term: Institutional and societal changes promoting gender equality. 	Encourages a more inclusive and equitable environment, fostering gender awareness and parity.
Reduction in Normalisation of Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Harassment	Decrease in acceptance and justification of gender-based violence and harassment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-Term: Immediate change in attitudes towards gender-based violence. • Medium-Term: Increased reporting and decreased incidents of gender-based violence. • Long-Term: Lower rates of gender-based violence and a safer environment for women. 	Directly contributes to the reduction of gender-based violence, improving overall safety and equality for women.

The Pilot | Results & Learnings

The pilot results demonstrated a significant impact of the intervention across all three participating institutions. Notably, the intervention was most effective among participants who exhibited the strongest gender biases in pre-testing.

100%

Participants Relinquishing Gender Stereotypes

The proportion of participants who, post-intervention, no longer hold or express traditional gender stereotypes. All participants in the pilot intervention evidenced relinquishing gender stereotypes and biases.

-9%

Reduction in Gender Stereotypes

The extent to which participants' endorsement of gender stereotypes decreases. Female endorsement of gender stereotypes dropped by 33% to 24%, while the male endorsement dropped from 36% to 27%

+12%

Increase in Positive Gender Norms

The rise in acceptance and endorsement of equitable gender norms and behaviours. Male overall change in perception of positive gender norms was 47% to 59%, while female perception increased from 45% to 57%.

“I actually never realised the amount of fear women go through on a daily basis. I learnt about their subjective experience in a more vivid manner. I will be much more careful now to not make them feel scared in any way and make sure they always, feel totally safe around me”

Male Participant, Post Intervention.

Relinquishing Gender Stereotypes

The analysis, based on pre- and post-assessment responses, evaluated the suitability of both genders for traits such as leadership, assertiveness, and technical skills, showed that all 63 participants (33 male, 30 female) significantly changed their perceptions of men and women in society, effectively overcoming gender biases.

Figure 1 shows the steady improvement in perceptions of traits initially seen as predominantly male but now recognised as equally applicable to both genders after the intervention. While Figure 2 shows the overall change in relinquishing of embedded gender stereotypes.

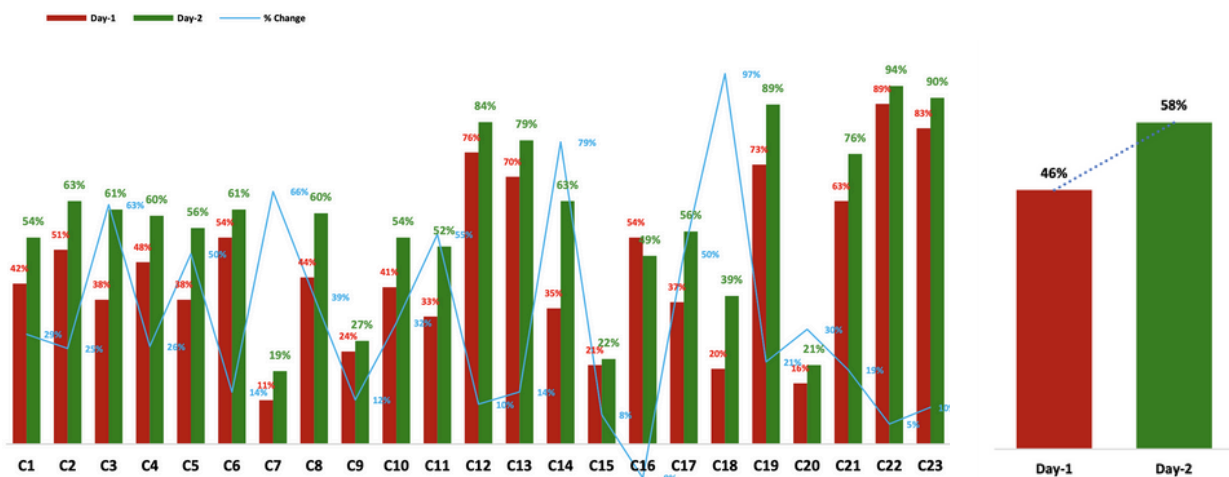


Figure 1: The blue line is indicating the consistent improvement in perception regarding gender equality of traits

Figure 2: Overall Change



Participant Testimonials

“I’m truly happy that more people are talking about these issues. This is the first time in a while I’ve felt that a true change in our society is possible. And the first time I felt like I’ve been heard in a public space. Thank you for this. I will be incorporating some of the exercises we did in further discussions with people in my daily life.”

Female Participant, Post Intervention.

“Men & women both are equals. They have no difference between men & women. If women have better opportunities they can do everything that men can do”

Male Participant, Post Intervention.

“There is nothing that women can’t do. Before this workshop, I thought that women always face suppression. The pressure of society plays a crucial role in dominating women. On the other hand, now, I think that women have some power of mind. Though they are not the same physique of men. But they have the power of mind. They should speak for their rights. They should be honoured.”

Male Participant, Post Intervention.

“Thank you! It doesn’t always have to be what it is. You can change it or you can ask for help. There is no shame in asking for help”

Female, Post Intervention.

“Women play a very important role in our society. According to the law of our society, we give their rights. Women are not inferior than men.”

Male Participant, Post Intervention.

The Team

The Pilot was supported by a collaborative network of advocates who have been instrumental in the development of Unlearning



Dr. Maryam Tanwir | Founder & CEO of Unlearning

Maryam holds an MPhil, PhD, and post-doctorate in International Development with a focus on gender, and has over eight years of lecturing experience at Cambridge. She has worked as a gender consultant for the World Bank and the United Nations and currently serves as a Gender Advisor for the South African government.



Dr. Sara Savage | Technical Advisor

Dr Sara Savage is a Social Psychologist based at the University of Cambridge. Sara continues to develop empirically based interventions to prevent extremism and inter-group violence through programmes that operationalise and measure the construct of Integrative Complexity



Sumair Syed | Advisor

Sumair Syed was the principal secretary to the Chief Minister's Office and is a seasoned bureaucrat with more than 20 years of experience. He is currently the principal staff officer to the Prime Minister, Mr Shebaz Sharif. He was pivotal in aligning and collaborating with Unlearning and ensuring its exponential impact



Mr Salman Sufi | Technical Advisor

Salman Sufi, a public policy expert and head of the Prime Minister's Strategic Reforms, is a Mother Teresa Award winner and founder of the SSF, known for pioneering over 30 historic reforms in Pakistan, including the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016.



Barbara Santos | Technical Advisor

Barbara Santos is an influential director, facilitator, and leader of Theater of the Oppressed. Kuringa has more than 30 years of experience working in feminist theatre and is an expert on its methodology and praxis worldwide.



Dr. Nitya Khemka | Academic Advisor

Dr Nitya Mohan Khemka is Director of Strategic Initiatives at PATH, focusing on health equity, & previously established the UK Liaison Office for the UNOPS. She is a visiting Fellow at Cambridge's Judge Business School, researching gender inequality & sustainable development, & advises Clare Hall College on academic programs & fundraising.

Next Steps | Scale Up

Following the successful pilot in three government institutions in Pakistan, Unlearning has secured a Letter of Intent from the Strategic Reforms Unit, Prime Minister Secretariat, to scale the intervention across the Pakistan school system (excerpt below).

“The project will have a significant impact in promoting gender quality in Pakistan, and we are keen to collaborate in its execution. And after the successful piloting of the project, we look forward to scaling it to all institutions in Pakistan.”

Prime Ministers Secretariat, Pakistan.

Next Steps

01

Intervention Development & Finalisation

The Unlearning team are working hard to assimilate the feedback & learning from the workshop to finesse & finalise the scalable intervention

02

Fund Raising

A coalition of partners led by the Salman Sufi Foundation are seeking funding to deliver a scaled programme within Pakistan.

03

Letter of Intent Delivery & Growth

In partnerships with the Pakistan Government Unlearning will focus on delivering a significant programme in Pakistan, as requested in the Letter of Intent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and partners have been instrumental in bringing Unlearning to life and making our pilot a reality. Together, we are committed to driving meaningful and lasting progress toward gender equality in Pakistan.



Unlearning is grateful for the excellent and professional team at the Strategic Reform Unit whose efforts were instrumental for the pilot's success. Specifically, Unlearning would like to thank, Mr Sumair Syed, Dr Tanvir ul Zaman, Ms Maryam Ayub & Dr Safia Sultana

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