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Education and Development of Pakistan: A Study of Current Situation of Education and Literacy in Pakistan

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This paper aimed to look at past educational developments in Pakistan through case study and its analysis with the present world. It primarily addressed the causes of illiteracy in Pakistan, and overcame the flaws of earlier works. Pakistani government claims that they have accomplished significantly in the educational development. Pakistani law requests government to provide free basic education system to every citizen of Pakistan. However, the enrollment rate has remained below 60%. Similarly, literacy rate has also remained below 60%. Therefore, the government and other stakeholders in education sector could not perform well enough to provide the impressive results so far.

Keywords: education, literacy, Pakistan, development

Introduction

The key to success for any nation lies in their concern and development of education sector. As the education is promoted in the nation, this reduces the illiteracy rate that ultimately reduces the unemployment, which is one of the biggest curses on any nation (Ahmad, Arshad, & Ahmad, 1991). The education sector in Pakistan is overlooked by the government ministry of education and the provincial government, whereas the development of curriculum and financing is done with the assistance of federal government. In the past few decades, Pakistan's education has been developing continuously, which eventually helps the development of the entire nation.

Pakistan is a country of approximately 180.1 million people (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2011) and is bordered by India on the east, the Arabian Sea on the south, Iran on the southwest, Afghanistan on the west and north, and China on the northeast. Pakistan has one of the world's most rapidly growing populations and is the sixth most populous country in the world. The constitution of Pakistan requires the state to provide free primary and secondary education. Article 25-A of Constitution of Pakistan obligates the state to provide free and compulsory quality education to children of the age of 5 to 16 years old.

The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 5 to 16 years old in such a manner as may be determined by law. (Malik, 2011)

Article 37-B of Constitution of Pakistan forces the state to remove illiteracy from country and provide free compulsory education.

The state shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period. (Malik, 2011)

The real situation of education in Pakistan is very different in context to the laws in Constitution of Pakistan. The education system in Pakistan is generally divided into five levels: primary (Grades 1 through 5), middle (Grades 6 through 8), high (Grades 9 and 10, leading to the secondary school certificate [SSC]), intermediate (Grades 11 and 12, leading to a higher secondary (school) certificate [HSC]), and university programs (leading to undergraduate and graduate degrees). The government launched a nationwide initiative in National Education Policy (NEP) 1998-2010, with the aim of eradicating illiteracy and providing a basic education to all children. A new NEP 2009 has been launched one year before finishing the last NEP. Through various educational reforms, by 2015, the ministry of education expects to attain 100% enrollment levels among children of primary school age and a literacy rate of 86% among people aged over 10.

In Pakistan, most of the nationally representative household surveys do not contain information on variables, such as completed years of schooling, age of starting school, literacy and numeracy skills, quality of schooling, and technical training. Due to the unavailability of data, one can neither compute the potential experience, nor observe the effect of primary education on literacy rate. Therefore, the available literature in Pakistan is lacking for estimating the real difference among male and female, rural and urban, and rich and poor.

A number of foreign and local agencies (including the UNDP) carried out several studies to assist the government of Pakistan in improving the performance of primary education system to remove illiteracy. However, so far, not much has been achieved to show any significant improvement in the number of primary schools and quality of primary education offered by these institutions. Keeping in view, the findings of so far available studies on the subject of illiteracy and educational development, this paper attempted to survey all those indicators with which Pakistan satisfactorily delivered all that was required to achieve primary education for all (PEFA) and literate nation.

This paper will look into the case study of educational developments in Pakistan in the past and its analysis with the present world. This study primarily initiated to address the causes of the illiteracy in Pakistan with a view to overcome the weaknesses of the findings of previous works done in this field. It was considered essential to analyze and propose suitable measures, which are effective enough to bring necessary change to improve the performance of educational system, so that PEFA in Pakistan would be realized in the shortest possible time and illiteracy would be removed as it is stated in Constitution and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Design of the Paper

This study was designed to make a comprehensive survey of the causes of failure of Pakistan in achieving 100% literacy rate and its association with the primary school education. In this context, the national education policy documents issued by the government of Pakistan were taken as the base reports, and the results of various studies and evaluation reports carried out by the local and foreign agencies were examined to suggest a more effective solution for illiteracy and improving the performance of public sector primary education system.

To make the study more effective in providing viable solutions to the problem, the split between higher education and basic education was also made in crucial part of the study. This is an approach, which seems to have the major cause of neglecting the public primary education system, and it has not been debated seriously so far.

Existing Problems and Approaches

By the day of independence from British colonial rule on August 14, 1947, 85% of the Pakistan population was illiterate, and the condition of women and backward areas was even worse. One of the first steps towards education development in Pakistan was the National Education Conference in 1947. In 1951, a conference for educational development was held to adopt six-year plan for the period 1951-1957. Then, First Five Year Plan (1955-1960), Second Five Year Plan (1960-1965), Third Five Year Plan (1965-1970), 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, Social Action Program (1993-1996), and NEP (1998-2010) were launched. In every development plan, the government of Pakistan made commitments to increase literacy and ensure compulsory education at the grass root level, but so far, not all those commitments ever materialized. The major causes of neglect and poor performance of primary education programs were as follows.

Inappropriate Importance

Every year, government provides large sums to finance scholarship programs and grants to higher learning institutions, while the running of primary education is left to the local districts, provinces, and federal government authorities. Due to scarcity of funds, public sector primary schools are far less than the requirement and become non-functioning, and there is a wide spread corruption in the administration of public sector schools.

Higher education has received greater attention, while primary education has been left unattended. There is Higher Education Commission (HEC) to plan and execute policies to enlarge preferably foreign qualified Ph.D. in Pakistan, whereas for education at grass root level, no serious effort has been made to execute policies to ensure quality primary education.

Due to lack of management and competence to run public primary school network, the quality of education and course curricula is poor. Students' dropout rate is very high (in the range of 30%-45%). The non-availability of adequate number of teachers and their unsatisfactory qualification and training made it difficult for primary school to qualify students to get admission in good secondary schools or jobs.

Poor Monitoring

There is a serious contradiction between the policies declared on paper by the government and the actual steps taken to achieve the objectives of the commitments made in those policies. In the education policy of the government, the importance of giving full attention to compulsory primary education to all at no charge is strongly emphasized and targets of achieving literacy and 100% enrollment of students at primary school level are prescribed, but no appreciable results are achieved. Whereas, all the attention is devoted to speed up higher education and all those programs are highly subsidized. The higher education program is largely for the rich and those who can afford, while the primary education program is largely for the welfare of the common person. This is a case of misallocation of resources and the poor man is the victim.

Cause and Effect of Poverty

Poverty certainly affects children and their ability to gain knowledge. Children in a poor family are at a

disadvantage position, because of their home environment and unfriendly attitude of the family towards education. Their body resistance to various diseases is much lower than that of the children of rich families. This is why these children from poor families are much more likely to suffer from illnesses, such as fatigue, headaches, flu, and cold. These diseases often restrict a child's ability to concentrate.

Expensive Private Institutions

The private sector enrollment at primary schools is estimated to be close to 40% of the total enrollment under primary schools. Due to shortage of public sector primary schools, and because many existing public sector primary schools are non-functional, on account of shortage of primary school teachers and/or lack of funds to pay for running the school expenses, some parents are forced to send their children to private schools. Private primary schools are expensive but offer better knowledge to children. With the technical cooperation of the private sector, the government has introduced public-private partnership programs, but due to piecemeal attempt, not much has been achieved so far.

Uncoordinated External Help

Looking at the state of affairs in Pakistan, a large number of donors are funding primary school education through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most donor agencies operate in isolation. Therefore, their efforts in improving the course curricula and quality of education at primary school level have not contributed much in helping the children of the poor families a better life.

Facts and Present Conditions

Education provides the bedrock for reducing poverty and enhancing social development. An educational system of poor quality may be one of the most important reasons why poor countries do not grow (Memon, 2007). Pakistan needs to educate its masses up to a level where they can understand their own responsibilities, as well as that of the governing bodies. They must be able to earn their own living and contribute to promoting the welfare of the society. This is most urgent and must be accomplished without further delay, and calls for a sincere and dedicated effort to implement a carefully designed course curricula of compulsory education for all.

All education policies of Pakistan since 1947s laid exclusive emphasis on achieving high literacy and compulsory primary education for all. The NEP 2009 prescription included the following:

1. Education for all (EFA) goals and millennium development goals relating to education enrollment at the primary level will be enhanced to 100% by 2015;
2. The literacy rate will be enhanced to 86% by 2015;
3. The allocation for education would be 7% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) by 2015;
4. A bachelor degree in education shall be the minimum requirement for teaching at the elementary level. A Master degree with a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) for the secondary and higher secondary shall be ensured by 2018;
5. A common curricular framework in general as well as professional education shall be applied to educational institutions in both the public and private sector. Governments shall take steps to bring the public and private sectors in harmony through common standards, quality, and regulatory regimes.

The actual performance to achieve the desired goals so far, reiterated in the NEP of Pakistan 2009, reveals the following performances.

Primary School Enrollment

Net primary enrollment ratio (NPER) (see Table 1) was 57%, while the target was 77% in 2008-2009 at the implementation of new NEP. According to UNDP (2013), NPER was 57% in years of 2011-2012, which shows no progress in enrollment rate in two to three years. This data shows Pakistan's poor performance in achieving the goals set by country and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Completion or survival of students in primary schools is another big issue that makes the scenario even worse.

Table 1

NPER and Completion Rate (%) Progress in Pakistan (Target was 100%)

	1990-1991	2001-2002	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2010-2011	2011-2012
NPER (%)	46	42	52	53	56	55	57	56	57
Completion (Grades 1-5)	50	57	44	43	46	47	49	49	50

Source: Country Report 2013 by Ministry of Education and Training.

Literacy Rate

Pakistan has been able to make only minor progress in improving its literacy rate since 2004-2005. From 1990-1991 to 2004-2005, the literacy rate for the population aged 10 years and above increased from 35% to 53%. Since then, the rate of progress has stagnated, and by 2011-2012, the literacy rate had reached only 58%. This means 42% population is still illiterate, which is unacceptable in modern world. There are significant gender disparities in the literacy rate in Pakistan. Forty-eight percent male and 21% female in 1990-1991 increased to 70% male and 47% female in 2011-2012, which shows similar gender disparities.

Education Finance

Pakistan's education expenditure as percentage of GDP (see Table 2) has varied between 1.7% and 2.5%. Even with these small amounts, the utilization rates have remained at an average of 90%.

Table 2

Education Expenditure as Percentage (%) of GDP

1984-1985	2003-2004	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
1.7	2.2	2.4	2.42	2.49	2.1	2.05	1.8	2.0*

Note. *Estimated.

Source: Country Report 2013 by Ministry of Education and Training.

Table 3

Distribution of Preschool & Primary Education Expenditures (Actual) by Current and Development Heads (2011-2012)

	Current (%)	Development (%)
Pakistan	95	5
Federal	98	2
Punjab	99	1
Sindh	84	16
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	93	7
Baluchistan	94	6

Source: Country Report 2013 by Ministry of Education and Training.

In 2011-2012, national statistics show that preschool and primary education spent the highest share (39%) in education expenditure, followed by secondary (34%) and tertiary (21%) sectors. On average, at the national level, 95% of education expenditures comprise current expenses, such as teachers' salaries. However, only 5% comprises development expenditures, which is not sufficient to raise quality of education (see Table 3).

Teachers Qualification

Under the existing system, a primary school teacher in Pakistan requires only 10 years of schooling plus an 11-month teacher-training certificate to be employed in a public sector school. There are less than 300 teachers education/training institutions in Pakistan, out of which nearly 80% of these institutions are owned and run by the government. In addition, a large number of donors have made arrangement to train the teachers through NGOs. However, in spite of all these efforts, the quality of teachers employed in the public sector schools is very low.

All this seems to result in high levels of grade repetition and the increase in dropout rates from schools (about 50%). The success to achieve targets as given in NEP 2009 cannot be made, even in the years to come.

Public and Private Schools

Private schools have grown very fast in past two decades, which share about 40% of all institutions in Pakistan. At primary level, 34% children (of the age of 5-9 years old) of total net enrollment are enrolled in private schools, among whom 34% are boys and 33% are girls. Private sector enrollment is increasing because of overall better quality of education, as compared to public sector. Public schools are lacking far behind the quality of education, and it is one of the reasons of low survival rate in primary school. Despite of better quality, private education is expensive and it is beyond the reach of many people because of unavailability of resources. The old expired curriculum has also decreased the quality of education, as there is shortage of teachers, and poorly equipped laboratories are the result of less concentration shown by the government by lesser resources allocation.

Most of the public schools are currently dysfunctional and of very poor quality across the country. It is underfunded and mismanaged, and has poor standards, have neither proper monitoring and evaluation systems, nor proper human resource systems. The teachers working the system have low morale, provision of infrastructure is patchy and on average poor, provision of software (books, furniture, and so on) is also poor, and there is a general lack of direction and motivation in the education departments at all levels. It is no wonder that any comparison with the private schools shows that private schools are better, and that, given the choice and resources, people choose to send their children to private schools.

Holes in Education

Education plays a pivotal role in the growth and progress of countries in an increasingly competitive, interconnected, and globalizing world, where the creation of skills and human capital is key component of any development strategy. It helps to improve living standards and enhance the quality of life, and can provide essential opportunities for all. While education's contribution in the growth and development prospects of a country has been widely recognized and increasingly crucial, education, in itself, is recognized as a fundamental basic right for citizens in many countries.

No mechanism exists to monitor the allocation in NPER goals at the provincial level, and the importance of these goals commitment is not well understood, particularly in the smaller provinces. The recent budgets

indicate allocation in terms of amount, but not in terms of proportion to GDP. Mechanism of monitoring and capacity building of the goals is the most important task for the country. The government needs to show far more commitment towards achieving the education indicators of NEP 2009 than has been demonstrated in the past. At present, the budgetary allocations are not sufficient to successfully implement these projects and accomplish the goals of achieving the universal primary education by 2015. In spite of commitment shown by the government, the budget for education remains at less than 2% of GDP, out of which the major amount is spent on administrative issues, like salaries and other requirements, leaving only minimal amount for the new initiatives. There seems to have no suitable mechanism of gathering information at the federal level of the programs and large scale successful interventions are going on in the provinces. Provinces are independent in running their own projects and programs and don not need to work with the federal government. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation of these programs at the federal level is difficult, making the analysis of such interventions more complicated for researchers and policy makers.

Following the 18th amendment in the Constitution, which does away with the concurrent list, it is likely that resources and power will be further devolved to the provinces. The national finance commission award should also allow some of the smaller and less developed provinces to have greater funds for development. Clearly, at this stage of planning, far greater emphasis will have to be given to how provinces deal with these new powers and how implementation takes place. For this reason, coordination and sharing between provinces also needs to be strengthened in all social sector delivery programs.

One of the causes for children not attending school is lack of quality in education, particularly at the primary level and lack of competent teaching staff. In many places, parental attitudes towards girls are very conservative, as they set lower priority for female education and hence sending them to schools is not appreciated. Moreover, girls schooling requires extra effort to be made and schools need to be located closer to their residences compared to schools for boys. The cost of education is also very high in Pakistan and increases as inflation increases. Due to poor delivery by government schools, the private schools has emerged as an important partner in education, but cost of private schooling has been increasing and is greater than that of government schools, making it impossible for even lower middle class families to utilize this options for their children.

Conclusions

According to the data available, the net enrollment at primary level has remained below 60% until 2011-2012, although it has improved marginally over time. The target of achieving literacy by 2015 required an increase of almost 40% in the next four years (2011 to 2015, as data is only available until year 2011) compared to the 22% achieved in the last 10 years. The performance of the provinces in achieving the NPER target is not surprisingly, in line with their ranking in terms of resource and endowment and population size. The completion/survival rate seems to have declined rapidly in the recent years. This implies that about half students enrolled in primary school do not complete their education. The interim target for 2010 was set to 80%, but could not be achieved. The reasons for high dropout rate lies within both the education system and the economic conditions of the households of the students. Intensive research is needed to bring out the factors that account for such high dropout rates, and measures should be taken to increase the attractiveness of schools and reduce the need for households to keep their children at home or at work. Furthermore, surveys on the extent and quality of private school education need to be carried out. There is a need to offer incentives to girls and disadvantaged groups, like income incentive, provision of books, uniforms and mid-day meals, etc.. There is a

need to invest in proper infrastructure and strengthen teacher's training. Other obstacles identified by various studies include the non-availability of teachers, non-availability of schools, especially for girls in the vicinity, insecurity (to and from schools, as well as within schools), lack of female teachers in rural areas, lack of gender-sensitive and clean learning environment, lack of secondary level education in the communities, and early marriages.

Private education is surely here to stay, and it should be allowed to flourish and expand. However, private education should not be seen as a solution for the education sector problems that Pakistan is facing now. Moreover, the fact that private education is better than the current public sector education should not be taken as a reason for abandoning public sector. Rather, it should be seen as a challenge for the public sector. Federal and provincial, both governments have to get the public sector in order. If we are to address the problems of the education system in Pakistan, there seems to be a need of advocacy for creating a movement to demand quality from the public sector education system.

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