

## Should the current education system be improved in Pakistan?

The system of education includes all institutions that are involved in delivering formal education (public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, onsite or virtual instruction) and their faculties, students, physical infrastructure, resources and rules. In a broader definition the system also includes the institutions that are directly involved in financing, managing, operating or regulating such institutions (like government ministries and regulatory bodies, central testing organizations, textbook boards and accreditation boards). The rules and regulations that guide the individual and institutional interactions within the set up are also part of the education system.

*“The education system of Pakistan is comprised of 260,903 institutions and is facilitating 41,018,384 students with the help of 1,535,461 teachers. The system includes 180,846 public institutions and 80,057 private institutions. Hence 31% educational institutes are run by private sector while 69% are public institutes.”*

Pakistan has expressed its commitment to promote education and literacy in the country by education policies at domestic level and getting involved into international commitments on education. In this regard national education policies are the visions which suggest strategies to increase literacy rate, capacity building, and enhance facilities in the schools and educational institutes. MDGs and EFA programs are global commitments of Pakistan for the promotion of literacy.

The issues lead to the comprehension of the problems which are faced in the development of education system and promotion of literacy such as:

- 1) Lack of Proper Planning:** Pakistan is a signatory to MDGs and EFA goals. However it seems that it will not be able to achieve these international commitments because of financial management issues and constraints to achieve the MDGs and EFA goals.
- 2) Social constraints:** It is important to realize that the problems which hinder the provision of education are not just due to issues of management by government but some of them are deeply rooted in the social and cultural orientation of the people. Overcoming the latter is difficult and would require a change in attitude of the people, until then universal primary education is difficult to achieve.
- 3) Gender gap:** Major factors that hinder enrolment rates of girls include poverty, cultural constraints, illiteracy of parents and parental concerns about safety and mobility of their daughters. Society's emphasis on girl's modesty, protection and early marriages may limit family's willingness to send them to school. Enrolment of rural girls is 45% lower than that of urban girls; while for boys the difference is 10% only, showing that gender gap is an important factor.

**4) Cost of education:** The economic cost is higher in private schools, but these are located in richer settlements only. The paradox is that private schools are better but not everywhere and government schools ensure equitable access but do not provide quality education.

**5) War on Terror:** Pakistan's engagement in war against terrorism also affected the promotion of literacy campaign. The militants targeted schools and students; several educational institutions were blown up, teachers and students were killed in Balochistan, KPK and FATA. This may have to contribute not as much as other factors, but this remains an important factor.

**6) Funds for Education:** Pakistan spends 2.4% GDP on education. At national level, 89% education expenditure comprises of current expenses such as teachers' salaries, while only 11% comprises of development expenditure which is not sufficient to raise quality of education.

**7) Technical Education:** Sufficient attention has not been paid to the technical and vocational education in Pakistan. The number of technical and vocational training institutes is not sufficient and many are deprived of infrastructure, teachers and tools for training. The population of a state is one of the main elements of its national power. It can become an asset once it is skilled. Unskilled population means more jobless people in the country, which affects the national development negatively. Therefore, technical education needs priority handling by the government.

Poverty, law and order situation, natural disasters, budgetary constraints, lack of access, poor quality, equity, and governance have also contributed in less enrolments.

An analysis of the issues and problems suggest that:

The official data shows the allocation of funds for educational projects but there is no mechanism which ensures the proper expenditure of those funds on education.

- The existing infrastructure is not being properly utilized in several parts of the country.
- There are various challenges that include expertise, institutional and capacity issues, forging national cohesion, uniform standards for textbook development, and quality assurance.
- The faculty hiring process is historically known to be politicized. It is because of this that the quality of teaching suffers and even more so when low investments are made in teachers' training. As a result teachers are not regular and their time at school is not as productive as it would be with a well-trained teacher.
- Inside schools there are challenges which include shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism, missing basic facilities and lack of friendly environment.
- Out of school challenges include shortage of schools, distance – especially for females, insecurity, poverty, cultural norms, parents are reluctant or parents lack awareness.

Here are some solutions, since majority of Pakistani population resides in rural areas and the access to education is a major problem for them, it seems feasible that a balanced approach for

formal and informal education be adopted. Government as well as non-government sector should work together to promote education in rural areas. The government should take measures to get school buildings vacated which are occupied by feudal lords of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab. Efforts should be made to ensure that proper education is provided in those schools. The federal government is paying attention to the vocational and technical training, but it is important to make the already existing vocational and technical training centres more efficient so that skilled youth could be produced. Since education is a provincial subject, the provincial education secretariats need to be strengthened. Special policy planning units should be established in provinces' education departments for implementation of educational policies and formulation of new policies whenever needed. Pakistan is not the only country which is facing challenges regarding promotion of literacy and meeting EFA and MDGs commitments. Education remains a subject which is paid least attention in the whole South Asian region. Regional cooperation mechanism can also be developed to promote literacy in South Asian region. Sharing success stories, making country-specific modifications and their implementation can generate positive results.

## **Recommendations**

- Technical education should be made a part of secondary education. Classes for carpentry, electrical, and other technical education must be included in the curriculum.
- Providing economic incentives to the students may encourage the parents to send their children to school and may help in reducing the dropout ratio.
- Local government system is helpful in promoting education and literacy in the country. In local government system the funds for education would be spent on a need basis by the locality.
- Corruption in education departments is one of the factors for the poor literacy in the country. An effective monitoring system is needed in education departments.
- For any system to work it is imperative that relevant structures are developed. Legislation and structure should be framed to plan for the promotion of education in the country.
- Unemployment of educated men and women is a major concern for Pakistan. There should be career counselling of the pupils in schools so that they have an understanding of job market and they can develop their skills accordingly.
- Counselling of parents is required, so that they can choose a career for their child which is market friendly.
- There are two approaches to acquiring education: First, which is being followed by many in Pakistan is to get education to earn bread and butter. The second approach is to get education for the sake of personal development and learning. This approach is followed by affluent and economically stable people who send their children to private schools and abroad for education. The problem arises when non-affluent families send their children to private schools, and universities. This aspiration for sending children for higher education is wrong, because the country does not need managers and officers only. There are several other jobs where people are needed. Hence the mind-set of sending one's children to university only for becoming officers and managers needs to be changed.

At last I would conclude that the reforms required in the education system of Pakistan cannot be done by the government alone, public-private participation and a mix of formal as well as non-formal education can pull out majority of country's population from illiteracy. Similarly, to make the youth of the country an asset, attention should also be paid to vocational and technical training so that this current education system of Pakistan could be improved.