



Education in Pakistan: The Key Issues, Problems and The New Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research article is to investigate the key issues, problems and the new challenges in Pakistan. Education plays the role of leadership in the society. The functions of the educational institutions are to develop the people physically, mentally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. It improves and promotes the economic, social, political and cultural life of the nation. Until now the role of secondary and college education in Pakistan has been simply preparation for tertiary education, which in the minds of most people means strictly a university education. All over the world universities are guiding and co-operating with the industrial and agricultural development organizations and they are developing their economics rapidly and meaningfully. There is a close link between education and development. In Pakistan, after more than five decades, the developmental indicators are not showing positive results. The participation rate at higher education is low comparatively to other countries of the region. There are problems of quality of staff, students, library and laboratory. Relevance with society needs, research facilities, financial crisis, arts students more than science students, weaknesses of examination, ineffective governance and academic results are not at par with international standards. Considering the gigantic problems of education in Pakistan, the researcher selected this topic for research.

JEL Classification : I10; I12; O1

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in human capital formation. It raises the productivity and efficiency of individuals and thus produces skilled manpower that is capable of leading the economy towards the path of sustainable economic development. Like many other developing countries, the situation of the education sector in Pakistan is not very encouraging. The low enrolment rates at the primary level, wide disparities between regions and gender, lack of trained teachers, deficiency of proper teaching materials and poor physical infrastructure of schools indicate the poor performance of this sector.

* The material presented by the author does not necessarily portray the viewpoint of the editors and the management of the Institute of Business & Technology (BIZTEK) or University of Karachi.

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The extremely low level of public investment is the major cause of the poor performance of Pakistan's education sector. Public expenditure on education remained less than 2 percent of GNP before 1984-85. In recent years it has increased to 2.2 percent. In addition, the allocation of government funds is skewed towards higher education so that the benefits of public subsidy on education are largely reaped by the upper income class. Many of the highly educated go abroad either for higher education or in search of better job opportunities. Most of them do not return and cause a large public loss.

In Pakistan, the quality of primary and secondary education has a declining trend. It is realized that science education in particular is reaching lowest ebb and needs to be improved urgently. At the time of independence and thereafter there remained acute shortage of teachers, laboratories were poor and ill equipped and curriculum had little relevance to present day needs (Behrman, 1976).

The results suggest that certain minimum levels of enrolment at primary and secondary level represent a necessary condition for the development of functioning higher education. For relevant participation rates at university level, a net primary enrolment rate of 80 percent seems to be the minimum required. Similarly, about 80 percent of secondary net enrolment typically seems to be the minimum to develop higher education institutions with the potential to be listed in international university rankings, to employ the considerable number of researchers and to develop significant new ideas. Another relevant result of analysis is that the strong differences between educational institutions at secondary level may be detrimental for tertiary education quality (Katharina, 2006).

The Education Sector in Pakistan suffers from insufficient financial input, low levels of efficiency for implementation of programs, and poor quality of management, monitoring, supervision and teaching. As a result, Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of literacy in the world, and the lowest among countries of comparative resources and social/economic situations. With a per capita income of over \$450 Pakistan has an adult literacy rate of 49%, while both Vietnam and India with less per capita income have literacy rates of 94% and 52%, respectively (Human Development Centre, 1998). Literacy is higher in urban areas and in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, among the higher income group, and in males.

2. EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Qualitative Dimension

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. In Pakistan, the quality of education has a declining trend. It is realized that science education in particular is reaching lowest ebb and needs to be improved urgently. There is acute shortage of teachers. Laboratories are poor and ill equipped and curriculum has little relevance to present day needs. The schools generally are not doing well. Tracing causative factors responsible for the present state is a critical need. These include defective curricula, dual medium of instruction at secondary level, poor quality of teachers, cheating in the examinations and overcrowded classrooms (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2002).

In Pakistan efforts have been made to mould the curriculum in accordance with our ideological, moral and cultural values as well as our national requirements in the fields of science, technology, medicine, engineering and agriculture, etc. The rise in supply of educational infrastructure or removal of the supply side constraints can play an important role in raising literacy and education of the population. Development budget allocation for the social sector has been very low throughout and is evident from the budgetary allocation for education.

Table-1
Finance Act 1995-96 to 2002-03

(Rs in Billion)

Year	Recurring Budget	Development Budget	Total Education Budget	% Of GDP
1995-96	39.610	2.585	42.195	2.00
1996-97	40.536	1.968	42.504	2.62
1997-98	46.100	2.984	49.084	2.34
1998-99	46.979	2.427	49.406	2.40
1999-2000	51.572	2.430	54.002	1.7
2000-2001	54.396	1.966	56.362	1.6
2001-2002	64.975	2.500	67.475	1.9
2002-03	67.270	2.604	69.874	1.7

(Source: Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan)

From the tabular data it can easily be concluded that government is not able to invest the requisite amount on education in accordance with the population growth. Allocations lag behind the developing countries in the region.

The Role and Appointment of Teachers

The quality of teachers, which is a key factor in any education system, is poor in Pakistan. The main reason is the low level of educational qualifications required to become a primary school teacher; which includes ten years of schooling and an eleven-month certificate program. It has been established through various studies that pupil achievement is closely related to the number of years of formal schooling of teachers. Thus, students of teachers with 12 years of schooling perform better than students of matriculate (10 years education) teachers, who in turn perform better than students of teachers with only grade eight qualifications.

The second factor relates to the quality of teacher certification programs, which suffers from the lack of adequately trained master trainers, little emphasis on teaching practice and non-existence of a proper support/monitoring system for teachers. In the absence of any accredited body to certify teachers, the mere acquisition of a certificate/diploma is considered sufficient to apply for a teaching position.

In addition, teacher appointment in schools is subject to interference from local interest groups seeking to place teachers of their choice within their constituency. This has opened the system to graft and rent seeking leading to high levels of teacher absenteeism accentuated by the absence of an effective supervision system. The appointment of teachers especially in primary schools is subject to the political influence or paying huge money.

Training for Government Teachers

The administration of teacher training in Pakistan is a provincial responsibility. However, the curriculum wing at the federal level is also responsible for teacher education institutions. Government primary school teachers are trained through Government Colleges for Elementary Teachers (GCETs), the distance education program of the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU), and teacher training courses run in secondary schools known as Normal

Schools or PTC units. Graduates of these institutions are taught a similar curriculum, and receive the Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) or Certificate in Teaching (CT) at the end of one year. Generally, the number of applicants is far greater than the number of places available. There is also an acute shortage of teacher training facilities, particularly for female teachers in certain regions and especially in the province of Balochistan.

In-service training is the responsibility of the Curriculum Boards and Extension Centers. In addition, the provinces have assigned in-service responsibilities to one or more GCETs. There are three different types of in-service education possibilities for the teachers:

- In-service training of untrained staff through full-time crash programs of three months duration provided by the government
- Short term refresher courses for those already teaching provided by the government
- Limited private sector initiatives (short as well as medium term)
- Varied donor-funded projects directed towards in-service training of government teachers

Each province has an Education Extension Center and/or Directorate of Staff Development responsible for in-service education. The intention is to provide one in-service training program to each teacher at least once every five years. A recent study of in-service refresher courses in the province of Punjab found that these INSET (In-Service Education and Training) courses reach an insignificant proportion of teachers. There are scores of teachers who are at the end of their career and have not had any in-service training.

Private School Teachers

The quality of education imparted by the majority of private schools is questionable owing to an acute dearth of properly trained and qualified teachers, and any kind of support mechanism for these teachers. Except for large school systems like Beaconhouse, City, Lahore Grammar, and others, which constitute a small percentage of the existing private schools the majority of others have appointed teachers who are qualified up to intermediate (12 years of schooling) or BA level (14 years of education), and are paid much lower salaries compared to their counterparts in the government sector in addition to no job security. The large schools and school systems have instituted their own teacher training programs or access specialized private institutions. There is less inclination in these schools to hiring teachers who have previously been trained by government institutions and hold degrees in B. Ed or M. Ed; their preference is for those fluent in English language. Thus, very few teachers hired by the private schools have had any pre-service training. There is a felt need to enhance the professional skills of those who are currently working through various inset programs.

Quantitative Dimension

Different data indicate that that education system in Pakistan generally is not doing well. Tracing causative factors responsible for the present state is a critical need. These include defective curricula, dual medium of instruction, poor quality of teachers, cheating in the examinations and overcrowded classrooms. However, efforts are on the way of moulding the curriculum in accordance with our ideological, moral and cultural values as well as our national requirements in the fields of science, technology, medicine, engineering and agriculture, etc. In the following table the enrolment of the students has been indicated in various schools.

Table-2
Enrolment in Educational Institutions by Kind, Level and Sex

Year	Primary Total	Schools Female	Middle Total	Schools Female	Secondary Total	Schools Female
1992-93	130596	38080	11808	5055	9326	3029
1993-94	134050	39987	12126	5194	9655	3142
1994-95	139634	41967	12571	5562	13335	3323
1995-96	143130	43434	13330	5719	10119	3329
1996-97	149661	42042	14487	5760	10436	3394
1997-98	156318	51204	17354	7168	11685	4019
1998-99	159330	56515	18072	7985	12931	4710
99-2000	162521	58748	18435	8146	13211	4805
2000-01	147736	42870	25472	5875	15416	3009
2001-02	149085	37165	26790	18837	15658	8554

Source: Pakistan Statistical Year Book 2004, Federal Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan

Literacy levels continue to be low with male literacy being higher at 61.3% and female literacy considerably below the average at 36.8%. According to the 1998 provincial population census reports, the school age population of the age group 5-9 years is more than 20 million. Of this about 11 million (57%) have never attended school. The nexus between poverty and education is reflected in the data which shows that 42% of the population living in households with illiterate heads is poor, compared to 21% of those in households with literate heads. Net primary enrolment rate is 59% for the non-poor, and 37% for the poor, and is particularly low among poor female children in rural areas (SPDC, 2002). On the other hand, Pakistan reportedly has the highest number of private schools in the region with candidates for foreign held examinations at the secondary and higher secondary levels also being the highest. This situation is reflective of widespread discrimination in access and opportunity, which has serious social implications.

Compared to other countries in the region Pakistan is lagging behind in all the important indicators as indicated by the table below.

Table-3
Key Education Indicators

Key Education Indicators	Pakistan	India	Sri Lanka
Adult literacy rate % (1999)	45	56.5	91.4
Female literacy rate % (1999)	30	44.5	88.6
Primary enrolment (% gross (1997))	74	100	109
Secondary enrolment (gross) % (1997)	26	49	75
Percentage of children dropping out before grade 5 (1995-1999)	50	48	3
Public expenditure on education (as % of GNP) 1995-97	2.7	3.2	3.4

Source: Human Development Center, 1999.

In addition to the public sector, the private sector is emerging as a major contender in providing access to education at all levels and in all fields including professional and technical. There are 36, 096 private schools in the country. Of the total the majority are in the Punjab 66. 4%, while Sindh accounts for 17. 9%, NWFP 12. 3%, Balochistan 1.5%, FATA 0. 9% and Islamabad Capital Territory 1%. Urban areas account for 61% and rural areas 39% of private schools (FBS Survey, 2001).

Under Pakistan’s Social Action Programme billions of rupees were allocated to the four social sectors with education as a priority area. Yet, there was an actual decline in the gross enrollment rate for primary education. Thus, between 1991 and 1996/97 while girls’ participation increased from 59% to 64%, boys’ participation rate went down from 86% to 80% (FBS, 1998).

To address the malaise of the system, the Education Sector Reforms were initiated in 2001 by the government which aimed at targets for each sub-sector from 2001-2004 as indicated in the following lines:

• Literacy	from 47%.....to.....60 %
• GER	from 89%.....to.....100 %
• NER	from 65%.....to.....75%
• Middle School Enrolment	from 47. 5%.....to.....55%
• Secondary School Enrolment	from 29. 5%.....to.....40%
• Higher Education	from 2. 6%.....to.....5%

Source: Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2004, Ministry of Education, Islamabad.

The reforms identified eight areas for interventions aimed at addressing issues of access and quality. These include (i) National Literacy Campaign (ii) Madrassa Education (iii) Universal Primary/ Elementary Education (iv) Quality Assurance (v) Technical Education at Secondary Level (vi) Higher Education (vii) Public Private Partnership (viii) Innovative Programs.

The quality assurance component of the Education Sector Reforms is directed towards reforms in teacher education & training together with changes in the curriculum and assessment systems.

Economic survey of 2006-2007 indicates that in the recent years the literacy levels in Pakistan have improved over time at a modern pace. The overall literacy rate (10 years & above) was 45 percent in 2001 which has increased to 54 percent in 2005-06, indicating at 9.0 percentage points increase over a period of only 5 years. Males literacy rate (10 years & above) increased from 58 percent in 2001 to 65 percent in 2005-06 while it increased from 32 to 42 percent for females during the same period highlighting the gender gaps that still persist in access to education. The percentage of children aged 10- 18 that left before completing primary level has increased from 15 percent in 2001 to 10 percent in 2005.

According to the Education Census 2005, there are currently 227791 institutions in the country. The overall enrolment is recorded at 33.38 millions with teaching staff of 1.357 million. Out of the total institutions 151,744 (67 percent) are in public sector catering to 22 million (64 percent) of enrolled students and 0.723 million (53 percent) of the teaching staff. In the case of private sector, there are 76047 institutions (33 percent) catering to 12 million student and 0.632 (47 percent) of teaching staff. In terms of physical infrastructure

out of the total covered institutions 12737 (5 percent) have been found non-functional. From the covered institutions 12737 (11589 schools and 1148 others) almost all in the public sector have been reported as non-functional (Economic survey, 2006-2007).

Gender Differences

Education is important especially for women because it provides important means for their empowerment. Apart from the acquisition of knowledge and values conducive to social evolution, education provides many other benefits. The development of the mind, training in logical and analytical thinking, organizational, administrative and management skills accrue through education. Enhanced self-esteem and improved financial and social status within the community is a direct outcome of education. Education, therefore, be made available to all. For better parenting and healthier living also, education is an important factor. It is beyond doubt that educating girls can yield a higher rate of return than any other investment.

There is great difference in the rates of enrollment of boys, as compared to girls in Pakistan. According to UNESCO figures (Dawn, 23 Feb 2004, editorial), primary school enrolment for girls stands at 60 per cent as compared to 84 per cent for boys. The secondary school enrolment ratio is even more discouraging, 32 per cent for females and 46 per cent males. Regular school attendance for female students is estimated at 41 per cent while that for male students is 50 per cent.

According to the Population Census of 1998, the overall literacy rate in Pakistan was 45 percent. The number of literate females increased from 0.8 million in 1961 to 11.4 million in 1998 -97. The growth rate for males' literacy was 5.1 percent per annum. It may be noted that the overall literacy rate in Pakistan is lower when compared to other countries in the region. The reasons could be limited number of educational institutions in the country and accessibility to those. The situation in rural areas, where the majority of population resides, is even more serious. The people in those areas avoid sending their children to schools especially females because schools are in far flung areas.

3, NEW CHALLENGES

Although Pakistan experienced massive growth in enrollment soon after independence, such exponential growth has been accompanied by manifold challenges and dilemmas. This section discusses some of the issues surrounding the challenges and dilemmas to the initiatives at getting everybody in school and provides them with quality education.

Efficiency and Quality

Teachers are perhaps the most critical component of any system of education. How well they teach depends on motivation, qualification, experience, training, aptitude and a host of other factors, not the least of these being the environment and management structures within which they perform their role.

Schwille et al. (1991) presented a detailed causal model to explain grade repetition. They hypothesized that student characteristics such as gender, family influence, place of residence, age, prior repetition, national policies regarding language, school entrance, quality of instruction, and school characteristics such as management policies, coverage of syllabus, etc. act to influence repetition. They observed that these in turn affect student learning, student motivation, and self-esteem, the examination success rate, the enrolment rate, the dropout rate and the mean time required to produce a graduate.

Relevance of Education

Policy makers in Pakistan have been preoccupied in seeking ways of making the content

of education more meaningful and the methods of delivery more cost-effective within the context of nation building and economic development. The attention has been on the role of education in preparing children to participate actively and productively in national building. The literature is full of such attempts at making education more relevant.

The lack of social demand for education is related to the fact that families and communities do not value or are ambivalent about formal education. Serpell (1993) pointed to the parental disillusionment with the present education systems and expressed support for more relevant curricula; more closely related to the daily lives of students and providing practical skills for students. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) contended that the problem is even more acute with girls where gender bias in subject choices together with cultural factors limits girls' chances of progress.

Inadequate Research Activities

Research gives rise to curiosity and a desire to look for, and find, better solutions to our everyday problems or better explanations for whatever happens. Over the years, numerous manuscripts have written about a lack of research in Pakistan. The issue is discussed frequently in academic institutions too. In nearly all such discussions, lack of funding and of adequate facilities are presented as the major reasons that research has not been conducted. Perhaps the single most significant impediment in Pakistan to research, and also quality higher education, is the near-zero tolerance for dissent in educational institutions. We have in place a hierarchical system, which operates at every level of society — at the home, school, college, university and workplace. Research thrives best where there is a group with which one can interact — a 'critical mass' of critical thinkers. Ideally, the group should not comprise people from the same narrow field but from different areas. This promotes cross-fertilization of ideas. This is where universities have an edge over single-discipline institutes. Now that the government is providing substantial research funds to public-sector universities, a major hurdle has been removed. The step is long overdue and thus commendable. It is now up to the universities to produce the desired results.

4. CONCLUSION

Education provides the base for socio-economic development. An educational system of poor quality may be one of the most important reasons why poor countries do not grow. In Pakistan, the quality of education is on the decline in spite of the fact that the present government has initiated drastic measures in uplifting the quality and quantity of education. Quality of teachers especially at primary level is still questionable. It is evident that that without teachers' transformation we cannot transform the education system for improving the quality of education. In this regard, a series of education reforms in the area of teacher education were introduced in the public sector but their vision seemed to be narrow, hence, they failed to make any substantial impact on the quality of teachers and teaching process. Eventually, it further affected the quality of education being offered in schools. Education system of Pakistan is facing new challenges. It has yet to be developed at par with other developing countries in the region.

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