Brief Perspective of the Educational Problems in Pakistan and their Solution

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Abstract

The education system in Pakistan, despite numerous reforms and policies, remains impoverished. The standard of education is not up to the mark and there are multiple factors behind this problem. In general, on all levels, including primary, tertiary or higher education the objectives of the educational policies and the desired outcomes couldn't be achieved because of insufficient financial resources, poor implementation of policies, and administrative challenges. The main long standing issues on institutional level are of the access, quality and equal opportunity. In this paper it has been tried to review these issues and highlight their overall impact on the performance of education sector in Pakistan. The reformation of education system in Pakistan is imperative to place it as a competent and compatible education system on international level. A compact and flawless planning and an effective implementation of the policies can bring a tremendous change in the education system of Pakistan.

Keywords

Education System, Issues, Reforms, Infrastructure

Introduction

A worthwhile education system guarantees a flourishing present and a promising posterity. It is the education that leads to social, political and cultural change in a society (Rashid & Mukhtar, 2012). The education system in Pakistan comprises of public and private sector educational

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institutes from primary to university education (Hussain, 2015). A brief overview of educational reforms and policies establishes the fact that policies and plans have been there, yet a poor implementation could not yield the desired results. Despite some encouraging aspects like the involvement of private sector and the enhancement of higher education institutes, still the systemic reforms remain an incomplete agenda. An overall improvement in the system is conditioned with the solution of multiple issues which are there since long and recurrent in one form or the other (Rehman & Khan, 2011). "The central challenge of education reform in Pakistan is to improve education quality — measured by 'student learning outcomes', or what students are expected to know or be able to do - rapidly, affordably, and at large scale" (Jan, 2018). The four-tier education system is flaw-full, especially public sector education is of low quality due to lack of accountability and small budget. Peripheral areas are largely ignored and education lags behind because of deliberate negligence of parochial feudal.

The data for this research has been collected through secondary sources including reports, published articles and research papers. After the statement and analysis of the issues and their impact on education system, viable and practicable solutions have been stated and recommendations have been given.

Islamic Perspective of Education

In Islamic society education has a comprehensive perspective that encompasses spirituality, material world, science and religion. Islam is a religion which gives a high and immense source to spiritual obligation and mankind's material requirements. The importance of education in Islam is explicitly obvious from the holy Quran and Hadith. Seeking knowledge is contemplated as the direction towards tremendous closeness to Creator. Seeking and acquiring knowledge is obligatory for all Muslims and practicing and preaching this knowledge is also the most crucial obligation (Abuarqub, 2009). The first message from Allah Almighty revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was "*Iqra*" that indicates the importance of education and knowledge in Islam (Surah Al-'Alaq: 96). Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims, both men and women without any discrimination (Surah Al-'Alaq: 96). Similarly *Sura*- *al-Anbya*, *Sura-az-Zumar*, *Sura-adh-Dhariyat* emphasize on acquisition of knowledge.

Enrichment of wisdom and spiritual knowledge (a specified source from spiritual-revelation *'ilham'* and spiritual experience) are also aspects of education in Islam. Similarly obtaining intellectual knowledge and information through the implementation of reason and logic are of great importance (Yasin & Jani, 2013).

Golden Era of Muslims in Education

10th to 13th century is usually defined as an era of the golden age of the Muslim world, when Europe was intellectually backward in a stagnant condition. Islamic scholarship thrived rational science, art and literature with an effective openness. Islamic world made the tremendous contributions to the artistic and scientific world. The love for knowledge made possible that Muslims not only preserved the Greek knowledge but also analyzed it critically and built in several areas of chemistry, botany, mineralogy, mathematics, astronomy and physics (Morgan, 2008; Saliba 2007).

Saliba (2007) argues that contrary to the generally accepted view, the foundations of Islamic scientific thought were laid well before Greek sources were formally translated into Arabic in the ninth century. Drawing on an account by the tenth-century intellectual historian Ibn al-Naidm that is ignored by most modern scholars, Saliba suggests that early translations from mainly Persian and Greek sources outlining elementary scientific ideas for the use of government departments were the impetus for the development of the Islamic scientific tradition. He argues further that there was an organic relationship between the Islamic scientific thought that developed in the later centuries and the science that came into being in Europe during the Renaissance. The majority of Muslim thinkers accessing religious fact regarded scientific knowledge as an important tool.

Present Education System

Until 1800 the system of education for Muslims was much different from what was introduced during the colonial and post-colonial era.

Despite some shortcomings, it was versatile as it encompassed religion, science, philosophy, reading and writing skills. The inclusion of vocational and technical education was one of the most significant developments during the period of Muslim rule in India (Siwakot, 2015). In 1858 when British Crown came into full power by gaining control over Indian territories, some effort was made to form progressive educational policies which failed. The rulers were more interested in creating a divide amongst the masses on the basis of religion, ethnicity and language. Among various strategies applied by the British imperialists, one was to create disparity in the finance of education, which continued during the post-colonial era as well and still exists in the form of private public sector disparity (Boven, 2017).

The contemporary education system in Pakistan has the heritage impact of the pre-partitioned Indo-Pak subcontinent. It is primarily contrived by Lord Macaulay who was steered at forming a class physically Indian but English in intellectual approach, opinion and morals (Macaulay, 1835). The advent of 18th century dawned with multidimensional development for the Western world but the Islamic world couldn't create an equally respondent education system despite having a rich legacy of educational system. In the evolved European education system the emphasis was laid on human material progress. In this system state and religion had their defined and separate roles (Segal, 1996). When this system of education made its way into the Indo-Pak subcontinent, it couldn't create a compatibility with culture, religion and history. As a result a mixture of both an indigenous and foreign norms oriented system evolved which had partial compatibility with religion and partial affinity with secular education (Belmekki, 2007).

The initiation of Western colonization during the late 18th century and 19th century was one of the major events that led to the current state of education. On being encountered by the phenomena of "modernity" and "westernization" in the 19th century during the era of Euro-Colonial expansion, they rediscovered the significance of education. It was the period when Muslims were exposed to the Western military, political and economic growth. Thus the serious question faced by the Muslim intellectuals of this period was of backwardness and modernity. The interplay between various values led to shape the educational system of the era (Shah et al., 2015). This modified outlook not only redefined the educational approach for the later centuries but left indelible imprints on the educational system in subcontinent.

Brief Review of Educational Reforms

After the inception of Pakistan in 1947, education and educational reforms have been one of the most prioritised agenda. Reforms in policy have continued during 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and even today. The sub committees, which were formed after the first Educational Conference in 1947, were assigned the task of policy formulation. The committees which consisted of Scientific Research and Technical Education Committee, Adult Education Committee, University Education Committee, Primary and Secondary Education Committee and more, were very helpful in restructuring the educational policy. A commission on national education was established in 1959 which was supported by Ford Foundation and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Ramay, 2018).

Before 1972, a significant portion of basic education was handled by private sector but in 70s most of these private institutions were nationalised as a policy reform. The lack of funding and the change of governments led to the reversal of this policy (Jimenez & Tan, 1987). Thus with the lifting of restrictions in 1979, private sector resumed to fill the vacuum created by public sector (Aziz et al., 2014).

All the education reform policies from 1978 to 2010 have some common points like improving quality and access of education, the enhancement of teachers' competence and relevant teachers' training programs, elimination of disparity and promotion of equality, enhancement of community and parents' role in elementary education, modification in curriculum and the change of medium of instruction (Dildar et al., 2016).

Challenges and Issues in the Current Education System

According to the recommendations of First Educational conference held in Karachi from November 27 to December 1, 1947, "Education should be based on Islamic conception of universal brotherhood, social democracy and social justice." It was also recommended to establish a central Institute of Islamic Research "for organizing and stimulating Islamic research according to the modern needs of the society" (Majoka & Khan, 2017).

The process of bringing improvement in the field of education has been in progress, yet, there are some issues which are recurrent and either remained unaddressed since long or addressed inadequately. Here is a brief overview of such issues.

It is generally assumed that the monitory factor is what exacerbates many of the other problems because allocation of funds for education is insufficient. The funds allocated for education have been low as they never went beyond 1.5 to 2.0 percent of the total GDP. As a result of insufficient sources of education 43% of the adult population (i.e. aged 15 and above) remains illiterate (Jeeva, 2019). The number of schools available is also not sufficient as for every 13 primary schools; there is only 1 middle school (GOP, 2017). Unfortunately the allocated fund is also not used properly and returned to the government for the lack of expertise and an unawareness of the procedural formalities. "Pakistan's education crisis does not come down to how much the country spends, but how the money is spent. Pakistan needs to spend better, not simply spend more" (Naviwala, 2016). The disruption of resources is an important challenge that restricts the development of education. This means only about 49% of grade 5 students can recognize and read English sentences, 24.5% can do 2 digit division and huge disparities of fallout exist within and between the provinces (ASER, 2015).

Flawless planning is the foremost component of any successful venture. Unfortunately the planning for education on state level is not in accordance with ground realities, in addition with its faulty implementation. For instance, the universities every year produce degree holders without planning their involvement after completing their education. A large number of degree holders go without jobs every year to add to the battalion of unemployed. The reason behind is that the need of market is not gauged and the courses are not planned accordingly. Literacy and numeracy in early education sector especially in rural areas

Who can read (Class Wise % of Children)						
Class	Nothing	Letters	Words	Sentence	Story	Total
3	10.4	8.9	35.5	27.0	18.3	100
5	9.4	3.4	9.3	18.8	59.1	100
8	3.1	1.3	2.8	6.6	86.2	100

of Pakistan are still alarmingly below the targeted standards (Rashid & Mukhtar, 2012).

Annual Status of Education Report A.S.E.R - PAKISTAN 2019

Pakistan has made notable gains but the fact that 14% in grade 8 and 41% in grade 5 and 82% in grade 3 cannot read a story with comprehension is a major crisis. The learning crisis in these grades indicates a foundational learning gap for early years in the country education system (ECE and Grades 1 and 2). It is time to give attention to the basics in literacy and numeracy at the right time, where children learn as much through social-emotional and cognitive nurturing reading to building of executive functions (ASER, 2019).

Another major issue is of lack of uniform system of education in the country. Although uniformity lacks in every aspect, especially in the curriculum standard of instruction and facilities and the competence of teaching staff (Ahmad, 2014). Yet, when uniformity is discussed it should be understood that "the meaning of 'uniformity' has to be seen in terms of giving a boost to those being left behind." Thus uniformity should be interpreted as equality of opportunity. In current education system a variety of curriculums, different assessment and evaluation procedures make it difficult to ensure a uniform standard of education and an equally facilitated environment of learning for the students on almost all levels (Bari, 2018). "Educational institutions are also plagued by a lack of integration between traditional and modern syllabi and the orthodox teaching method in certain institutions. This diversion polarises society and leads to differences amongst individuals who follow these syllabi". The curriculum doesn't promote an interest for practical work in learner (Ahmad, 2014). Another aspect of the curriculum is that it falls short of research, quest for scientific knowledge and critical thinking and observation, rather, it emphasizes on memorisation and theory only.

Medium of instruction has been one of the major disputes (Hayes, 1987). After 18th amendment the education has become a provincial subject but still on national or provincial level, there is a great disparity regarding medium of instruction. In public schools up to a certain level Urdu is the medium of instruction but in majority private schools it's English. In private sector specially, a beginner learner is exposed to three languages simultaneously i.e., Urdu English and Arabic as most of the courses taught are in English. But in some provinces the primary education is devoid of teaching of English language at all. There is a divide in the argument on this issue as some are of the view that the medium of instruction should be mother tongue while some others opine that it should be English to be in competition with the world at large (Ahmed, 2011).

Teachers are not only the pillars of education system but their work lays the foundation of a prosperous and civilized society. Unfortunately the teachers of public schools sector and some in private sector have a low income profile which leads them to look for other businesses (Zafar et al., 2014). They lack professionalism and show least interest in improving their professional competence. In remote areas, because of lack of supervision, some receive salaries without attending their duties (Shahzadi & Perveen, 2002). Sometimes teachers make their way by unfair political involvement and their competence is compromised because the standard procedures of enrolment are ignored. This kind of teachers are not only a permanent drain on the education system, rather they are a constant source of declining the educational standards (Shah, 2003).

Shortage of trained teachers is another major problem that actually contributes to the declining standard of education in Pakistan. Although there have been numerous reforms to enhance the teaching skills through training, yet this factor cannot be ignored that these teachers have been exposed to traditional teaching methods as students and it will need time and effort to overcome those long inscribed impressions (Gul, 2018). Teachers don't seem to be motivated to learn from the workshops arranged for them especially in public sector. Even if they attend these training workshops, they are not keen to apply new methods of teaching (Ashraf et al., 2015).

Poor infrastructure is one of the leading causes of demotivation for teacher and students both. Since the classrooms in most of the public schools are not adequate for a large number of students, the process of learning is of poor quality. The size of class as well as classroom is discouraging for the teacher and taught both. Most of the classrooms are devoid of teaching aids and therefore, teachers become complacent with their performance. They don't feel motivated to incorporate any new teaching methodology or technique, leaving the learners with the same old rot learning pattern. They also don't make personal efforts to enhance their teaching skills and continue with a low level performance. They continue with the same stale methods of teaching without any improvement in the level of learner or the teacher (Ashraf et al., 2015).

A horrendous rate of drop out from schools is another challenge for the educational institutes. The students enrol in school but gradually they drop out. The reasons for drop out are various including corporal punishment, poverty, low motivation, the dull environment of school, illiteracy and disinterest amongst parents etc. (Farooq, 2013).

Educational experts opine that in 2015 Pakistan would have missed each one of its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to achieve universal primary school access, improve retention in school and increase adult literacy. The exams conducted until middle school levels are mostly based on rot learning (Khan, 2015). The students have to cram a large portion of the text which they reproduce in exams and are promoted to next grades/levels. A good examination system comprises of qualitative as well as quantitative techniques to assess the performance of a learner but unfortunately the examination system even in most of the higher education institutions resort to the same old procedures of evaluation, and are merely a test of student's memory. All the students are tested on a monotonous pattern without taking individual differences into consideration. This type of examination system leads to frustration amongst low achievers who are otherwise talented (Rehman & Khan, 2011). The academic as well as administrative staffs always need a competent authority for supervision. The supervisory check especially in the public sector educational institutes is underrated. The school heads despite having authority, fail to maintain an essential check on teachers' performance. This is because of various factors and the dominant one is the inability and incompetence of the head himself/herself. Secondly, there are groups and lobbies in the institutions which make it difficult to exercise the supervisory practices in true spirit (Illahi, 1986). In such circumstances external and internal interference aggravate the situation (Hussain, 2011).

Amidst all the above mentioned issues, the involvement of private sector in education has also emerged with mixed consequences. According to a report published in 2010, "the private education has become a significant phenomenon in Pakistan and yet little is known about key dynamics of this phenomenon" (I-SAPS, 2010). The private sector educational institutes have some phenomenal issues including "profit making aspect of educational enterprise," affordability issue for low income families, poor management of some privately run institutions and many of the privately run schools are notorious for underpaying teachers, withholding their salaries and other abuses. It has also been observed that the teachers employed in some of the private institutions are less qualified and are exposed to some kind of exploitation (Ahmad, 2014). Despite contributing positively and assisting the state in its responsibility of imparting education to the masses, expensive private schools and institutes are creating a class difference.

The traditional and out dated teaching methodology is a huge impediment in learning and relating that learning to the practical life. Teachers of public sectors in general and some of the lower rate private institutions are least interested in lesson planning. Instructional strategies and assessment practices that create unease and disinterest amongst learners as modern and interesting techniques for teaching are not applied in true spirit and essence. To invigorate the learning competence, latest pedagogical techniques are required to be exercised (Rehman & Khan, 2011).

Conclusion

Foregoing the milieu of the key problems stated above, it can be concluded that the standard education in Pakistan is still faced up with some serious challenges. All round changes right from the policy making to their apt implementation are the need of the hour. The system cannot fare better unless all the sick sections of the system remedied simultaneously. The policy makers on all levels seem to have inadequate knowledge of ground realities. They don't make policies keeping in mind a clear picture of the limitations of the learners living in remote areas, coming from poor strata, or hailing from strict convention bound family There multifarious backgrounds. are problems including misappropriation of sources, institutional malpractices and a faulty structure of academics that all have led to a plethora of problems in the present education system of Pakistan. The education system overall lacks a unified direction with an ambiguity i.e., what is the ultimate goal of education for the students in Pakistan. For improvement in standard, these problems need to be addressed seriously on public as well as private level. For an effective role in nation building, education system should be compatible with the demands of the age. The students will have to be equipped with practical skills also along with theoretical knowledge. Although there is a gradual improvement, yet, the pace of improvement is slow because of some prolonged unaddressed or partially addressed issues discussed above. Finally, this study concludes that the need to improve the current standard of education in Pakistan is serious and dire now. For that the following recommendations are presented.

Recommendations

The milieu described above actually gives an insight into the problems and challenges which have marred the system of education in Pakistan and declined the standard of education. Here are the proposed solutions for the problems discussed above.

1. Fair and appropriate utilization of educational budget will have a far reaching positive impact on the structural side of education system. Government should ensure that the budget allocated for various sections of educational department is utilized fairly and within the stipulated time.

In this regard political influence and unnecessary procedural formalities should be eliminated.

2. The clerical and administrative staffs in most of the public schools are not competent enough to interpret various official directives. For this purpose the competence of the administrative staff should be enhanced and they should also be given refresher courses At the end of each fiscal year a commission should review the strengths and drawbacks of financial resources spent for this purpose.

3. In public sector also, parents should be invited to volunteer for improvement in the overall performance of educational institutes. In this context, there should be representation of all types of people from various strata of life to analyse and solve the issues on the institution level.

4. Infrastructure should be improved and at least supportive enough for the teacher and taught to carry out the process of learning without any hassle. While allocation of funds, the fund specified for a certain section or area should be clearly stated. There should be procedural ease to avoid the wastage of the funds and avoidance of cheating in the utilisation of these funds. There must be a defined timeline for the issuance and expense of these funds. Besides administrative bodies community should also be involved whether the funds allocated by the government are utilised on the building and other facilities for the students and teachers or not.

5. For economic uplift of the teachers, the incentives should be diverse. Teachers can be awarded honorarium on better performance. Their salaries should be adequate enough for a decent life.

6. Teachers training courses/workshops should be designed to develop teaching skills on latest levels. Out-dated teaching methodologies shouldn't be repeated which kills the motivation of teachers to learn anything from these training courses. For the selection of teachers for training workshops, equal opportunity should be made possible for everyone.

7. Institutions awarding teaching degrees should go through a strict supervision and a competent criterion. The selection of teachers for educational institutions should be prioritised without any influence. 8. To subdue different types of discrimination in the education system, uniform syllabi should be introduced, if not fully uniformed at least a syllabi which bars the promotion of social and class distinction among the students coming from various classes of society. While designing the curriculum regional diversity can be handled without compromising national unity.

9. This is the duty of the government to regularise private institutions on some standard unified lines. They shouldn't be allowed to charge beyond a set level of fees and restrict them to increase the fees frequently. The staff recruitment should have some criterion from the government.

10. The content of syllabus should be in line with the ideological foundations of Pakistan, and the national culture. This will help to curtail the divide in society and at least define a unified national direction for the education on primary level.

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