

EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF HURDLES AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION SECTOR IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

Education is the instrument used to build and develop nations. Education is a key to development and progress of the mindsets of the people living in any society. Pakistan has been facing acute shortage of education indicators since independence and talking about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not something different phenomenon. Among the literates, the quality of education learning and skills acquired is largely poor. This mirrors the prevailing practices in our public sector schools with quite poor teaching learning environments and methodologies. Majority of the teachers follow traditional teaching style coupled with no community involvement in the teaching and learning of children. The situation has led to dwindling interest in formal education especially for the poor, and an alarming increase in dropout rate from public sector schools. Many hurdles are there in the way of smooth achievement of educational objectives. This paper underlines the importance of Education, present position, hurdles with particular reference to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and how these problems can be addressed with commitment and responsibility.

Keywords: Education, Pakistan, KPK, public sector, hurdles, proposals

INTRODUCTION

Since the day Pakistan came into existence, it has been facing political and economic challenges leading to increase in poverty and social inequalities. The country also has a comparatively lower literacy rate in South Asian region resulting into decreasing human capacities and limited opportunities for affecting change [1].

The Phenomenon of poor standard of education has been an enduring feature of the education landscape in Pakistan in general and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular since long. Students low achievement level and high dropouts have been particularly problematic in the Primary education sector. Many resources have been allocated by the government to improve quality and reduce dropout of students, especially in the last decade when many international donor agencies came forward to help the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to develop its educational sector. Many large programmes and small projects have been launched to enhance access, reduce dropouts and improve quality of education. These have included the construction of buildings, the provision of better textbooks, teachers training, and infrastructure and Capacity development components[2]. All these programmes have been implemented in isolation from each other. When the projects are closed, the improvement made so far starts deterioration and the government has to look for another project to sustain what has been achieved. But, despite the huge investments in the elementary and secondary education sector, the quality of education is a matter of concern for the government as well as partner donor agencies and other stockholders.

Most of the expenditures in education sector have been incurred on construction of new school buildings and increasing the number of schools to raise enrolments. Under the conditions of quantitative expansion and rapid enrolment growth, the quality of education has severely been compromised by resorting to recruitment of large number of poorly trained or even untrained and under qualified teachers. [3]

On the contrary, the qualitative dimension of teacher education programmes has received marginal attention resetting in mass production of teachers with shallow understanding of both the content knowledge and methodology of education[4]. There are no identified frontiers of the teacher education profession and any teacher belonging to the school cadre can become a teacher educator and join or leave the teacher training institution either at his/her own initiative or at the order of the higher authorities. Many teacher trainers who receive training in teacher education skills through various projects and programmes leave the teacher training institutions and join the administrative positions in general education.

In the same way, many heads and managers in schools who are not able to successfully handle their managerial duties are transferred to training institutions making the teachers training intuitions a place for un-successful leaders and managers. The situation needs to be corrected by making teacher education as a separate cadre in it where the teacher educators must be in a position to adopt teacher education as a profession and serve the system on long term basis as a mission with no sad feelings of being at the lowest ebb of all professional careers.

The National Education Policy-2009 also puts emphasis on teacher education and links the quality of education to the quality of instructional methods in the classroom. Teacher being a major change agent and true enforcer of educational reforms at the gross root level is considered to be the most significant factor in the whole education system. The academic qualification, subject matter knowledge, teaching competency and skills, commitment and attitude of teaches produce similar effects on the quality and standard of education of the students at relevant levels.

In view of the above, attitude and practices are central to bringing about a positive change in the system of education in the Province with the hope of a better systematic approach towards the problem.

PRESENT SITUATION: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The enactment of Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment has brought significant changes having direct bearing on the Education Sector in Pakistan at Federal as well as Provincial levels. The introduction of Article 25-A, makes education a justifiable right and obligates the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children of five to sixteen years of age [5]. As a result of deletion of concurrent legislative list, the key areas of Education Policy, Planning, Curriculum, Standards, and Islamic education have been devolved to the province ambit.

In the wake of 18th Constitutional amendment, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has enacted provincial law on curriculum in terms of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa supervision of Curriculum, Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Education Act 2011[6]. In accord with the Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education has notified the Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education Abbottabad as the Competent Authority for carrying out the devolved functions of Supervision of Curricula, Textbooks and Maintenance of Standards of Educations, which have enormously doubled the work load of the Directorate of

Curriculum and Teacher Education and the Directorate/Authority needs to be relieved of other overlapping roles and duties.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2012, published in January, 2013 has indicated certain facts about the education of children of age group 6-16 year in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa[7] as reproduced below:

1. Of all children aged 6-16 years, 84% are reported to be enrolled in different types of schools i.e. government schools (57.7%), Private Schools (24.6%), Madrassas (1.3%), others (0.2%). It means 16% of all school aged children are out of school.
2. Private schools absorb a large share of school aged children: 31% of all school going children is enrolled in non-state schools.
3. 28% of the children enrolled in private schools are girls and 72% are boys.
4. 57% children from class-5 still cannot read class-2 Urdu/Pashto story.
5. Analysis of reading ability shows that 45% of class 3 students were able to read sentence and nearly 55% could not.
6. Improvements can be seen in English competencies in class-5 over the previous year.
7. Learning levels in arithmetic remain poor in class-5.
8. 45% of all the households surveyed preferred Pashto as the medium of instruction for their children in schools. Urdu was preferred by 39% and English by 16 % of the surveyed households.
9. 75% of the children in private schools reported English as their medium of instruction while 23% had Urdu and 7% had Pashto.
10. 3% of the children in public schools reported having English, 66% had Urdu and 31% had Pashto as medium of instruction.
11. Overall students' attendance in government schools stood at 85%.
12. Overall teacher attendance stood at 87% in government schools.
13. 44% of the teachers in government schools had post graduate, degrees while private schools had only 28% teachers who did.
14. 14% of the teachers had Master in Education in government schools, while only 8% of the teachers in private schools had the same degree. (More qualified teachers in government Schools).
15. Only 17% of government High Schools had computer Labs: No computer lab in Middle OR Primary School exists.
16. 40% of the government Primary Schools were without toilets and 36% were without drinking water.
17. 75% of the government Primary Schools did not have a playground within the school premises and 26% were without a Boundary wall.
18. 70% of Primary, 73% of Middle and 40% of government high Schools did not have the facility of library books.

As per Education Sector Plan 2008-15 of the Elementary & Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 7000 additional classrooms will be required in Primary Schools during

the years 2013-15 to provide the required space to existing enrolled children. Similarly 3000 Primary Schools will need the provision of basic facilities of drinking water, boundary walls and electric supply etc. 4000 Primary School will need repair & rehabilitation and 100 shelterless schools will need buildings. The basic facilities for early childhood education in the existing 1200 schools are also needed in the first phase of this newly introduced scheme [8].

It means that instead of going for quantitative expansion and construction of buildings for new primary schools, the existing infrastructure should be renewed and the basic missing facilities provided to the existing schools to make them effective and attractive for students and reduce dropouts/wastages in education.

The quality of education in public sector schools is the main concern of all stakeholders particularly that of English and Science subjects at Secondary level. The issue of continuous professional development of Primary/Middle School teachers has mostly been addressed under various donor assisted projects, but the training/orientation of existing as well as newly inducted secondary school teachers in the subjects of English and pure sciences i.e. Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics has not been given proper attention under any project[9].

It is, therefore, proposed that the department may arrange the travelling and logistic cost of participating science teachers through the Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa / Elementary Education Foundation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and send nominations to PITE for training of secondary school teachers in science subjects.

HURDLES IN THE WAY OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEIR REDRESSAL

Despite the concerted efforts, the keen desire and significant allocations of funds in Provincial ADP and technical, financial cooperation of various development partners, the issues of access, quality and governance still persist and need to be addressed on sound basis. Of all children aged 6-16 years, 58% are enrolled in 28,500 government Schools (Primary to Higher Secondary level) of the Province[10]. The contribution of private sector is 26%. It means that 16% of the children are still out of the system/schools.

The Annual Schools census Report-2012 of Elementary & Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa indicates the dropouts of Boys as 36% while that of Girls as 49% at Primary level [11]. There could hardly be any settlement or village in the Province where a primary school does not exist. But, many of these schools are underutilized or in some cases un-utilized and occupied by the land donors for their personal use. The reasons could be:

- I. Schools have been established at places where not needed.
- II. Due to political consideration / pressures, the sites have not been chosen well and non-feasible planning has been conducted in this regard.
- III. The pre-condition of appointment of land donor or his son as Chowkidar/Class-iv servant and now the commitment is not fulfilled in letter and spirit.
- IV. School buildings have been constructed without the basic amenities on the donated land. And where ever made available, those are irrespective of its suitability for school and how much strength the school has.

Similarly, the political pressures in postings/transfers have also adversely affected the quality management and governance in the sector. The managers are usually transferred from teaching positions to the management posts. On the one side we lose a good teacher and on

the other side we have a weak manager without any training and any strong will to work. The issue has been addressed by separation of management and teaching cadre but the newly selected officers of management cadre have not be properly trained for their new assignments, as is being done in case of other administrative cadre services.

The standard of education is also the main concern of all stakeholders. The quality of education is linked with the quality of teaching and learning processes in the classrooms[12]. The subject knowledge, skill and attitude of teachers are required to be updated through continuous professional development trainings and programmes. The issue of gender and rural/urban disparities is also an issue of concern and equal educational opportunities are required to be made available for all. All these issues need to be addressed on proper grounds and with full commitment because only education can lead towards progress of mindsets of the society and the whole nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION SECTOR

1. The existing shelterless schools functioning without government buildings should be provided government buildings in a phased way on the basis of highest enrolment and performance.
2. The criteria prescribed for all the developmental schemes must be strictly adhered to and no site should be selected on the basis of political considerations/pressures. In case of violation, the responsible should be strictly dealt with and disciplinary action should be initiated against the concerned and the expenditure incurred on un-feasible site may be recovered from him/her.
3. The required basic facilities of water, additional class rooms, washrooms, boundary walls, electricity, computer/science labs, libraries etc must be provided on priority basis so that the school environment is made motivated, child friendly and less students drop outs.
4. English as an international language and cannot be denied. Similarly, Urdu as national language and should be compulsory. Arabic as Quranic language is also very important for national integration and understanding of Quran. So, these three languages must be included in the course of primary level.
5. The prescribed posting/transfer policy of Provincial government must be followed in letter & spirit and necessary disciplinary action should be initiated against the teachers/managers who use political pressures for their posting/transfers.
6. The teaching staff should be given more incentives and facilities in order to boost their confidence and to motivate them to work with zeal. It has been observed that much of the able, talented and creative teaching lot leave the profession for some other field for want of some incentives i.e. monetary and authoritative. Teaching is a very good and respectable profession which needs equal attention from the authorities and from those at the position to bring change.
7. Training is an important element to bring positive changes in the professional skills. There is a lack of training and mid-career professional courses in teaching profession. This must be a part and parcel of education profession and instructional leadership, educational policy, planning, administration and financial management must be included in the training courses of education managers, school heads and teachers. For this purpose, Six months training at the initial stage may be made compulsory for school leadership and educational managers before their posting

against new positions to improve good governance and management in education sector.

8. Cross interaction with other provinces teaching staff and if possible, the skills and expertise must be shared with those of the developed countries experts and professionals. Donor agencies investing in the education sector in Pakistan must work in collaboration of the public sector in these particular areas to gain positive results.
9. Being official language, and medium of instruction at higher education level, and medium of expression at all kinds of competitive exams in the country and abroad English should be introduced as the official medium of instruction at all levels of education. As the teachers working in public sector schools are more qualified than the private sector schools, so there should be no problem in using English as medium of instruction at school level.

As Most of the Pakistanis are not having their very basic right of getting educated, they can never become independent and live in an educated environment which creates his big class differences and affect the whole social set up. With this kind of situation, no one can expect any positive development.

Crimes, corruption, feudalism, poor economy etc these are all the problems that arise as a result of lack of education, hence, the people fail to elect good people for the government and suffer whole their lives because the mindsets cannot be changed except only with education. It is, therefore, a dire need of the time that proper education system is implemented so that a just social, economic and political system would be ensured. And with these efforts, soon Pakistan will make its way to the heights of development and prosperity.

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