

Analysis

Education in Pakistan: Current Situation and Development Challenge

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SUMMARY

Pakistan, manifested with enormous pitfalls is suffering from education crisis since after independence. No government has been successful enough to overcome this problem. The literacy rate in Pakistan is yet 59.9% with 25 million out of school children. There are three modes of education in Pakistan. The first is the English Medium System which actually produces students to benefit the society. Students are also taught in the native language but it is more common in the rural area. The threat to educational system in Pakistan is the madrasah system that not only disables pupils from critical thinking but also is a major cause to produce a certain ideology that provokes terrorism. Many Students in Pakistan have fought hard for education. Malala Yosufzai is a Nobel Peace Prize winner due to her advocacy for girl's right to education. Aitzaz saved many students' lives by stopping a terrorist from attacking a school with the suicide bomb. Pakistan needs increase her budget which is at present only 2.1% for education. Constitution of Pakistan focuses on education for all but it's simply not possible unless it's made free and easily accessible – by building more and more institutes. Only then Pakistan can progress.■

KEYWORDS

Education system; Pakistan; UNESCO; Development; National Education

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“Education the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. Can't the value of an educated society be justified in more simple words than these of Mandela? The word education is derived from Latin words *educatum*, *educare*, *educatio*, etc all meaning to train, to bring up and to nourish (1). It develops distinct capabilities in humans. Education lightens life. It means to free us from misconceptions and blind beliefs. Muslims too had an era of glory while they were educated and as soon as they repudiated it, fell into the lap of melancholy. Education is, in real means, the backbone of a society. Without properly educating the inhabitants, no country can survive with broad shoulders. It builds nation and brings prosperity into the country. Everywhere these are educated people who get respect and honor.

Unfortunately, Pakistan lags far behind in education from the world. The current literacy rate in Pakistan is 59.9% (2). There are three mediums of education in Pakistan: English medium following Oxford and Cambridge, Urdu medium teaching in the native language and the madrasa system preaching religious education.

Education system is divided into six levels (3):

- Primary education: for children aged 3 to 5 and not mandatory, only few go for it.
- Primary: Grade 1st through 5th
- Middle: Grade 6th through 8th
- High Schooling: Grade 9th and 10th
- Intermediate: Grade 11th and 12th
- University: Undergraduate and graduate degrees

People residing in rural areas are at an even greater loss regarding education. Even if the children find a good interest in studying, many times they can't. It can be due to lack of money to afford or simply due to family pressure which shall be discussed later. The main reason parents do not let their children study is again illiteracy. Proper education gives lifelong perks. It just doesn't make you knowledgeable but also a better person. It enhances social acceptability in society as well as empowers decision making, give strength to solve problems and enables multi-tasking. To be fair, it is not a want but a need for every human being on earth. Millions of people are deprived of this basic necessity in Pakistan. One can move in the streets of country and may easily know the fact.

In Punjab province, there are only six districts that have above 70% literacy rate which are Gujranwala, Lahore, Chakwal, Rawalpindi and Gujrat (4). In different paces the literacy rate varies ranging from 99% in Wah (5) to 16% in Dera Bugti (6). In areas where educated class lives, the environment is totally different from that of uneducated area. Their way of living, talking style, habits, interests, everything is different. Both can find it difficult to adjust in other's place. When people from uneducated

areas move towards posh areas, they have to change their ways to adjust there. For this, their young ones become happy to become more educated and civilized.

Among adults, literacy is low, but improving though at a slow rate. In 1992, more than 36% aged above fifteen were literate compared to statistics of 1970 when only 21% were. In 1981, about 7% of women were literate in rural areas compared to 35% in urban areas. When it was about men, 27% in rural and 57% in urban areas were literate (7). Pakistanis, as a nation, have failed to decide about the medium of education over 69 years. Different mediums are running in both the public and the private sector. Students are taught in English as well as the native languages, dividing them. In elite private schools, where education quality is much better, heavy fee is charged that most can't afford and hence the right to quality education cannot be attained. Private sector schools are for a specific standard of people having money. However the duty is of state to let quality education be at the doorstep for every child but it has failed over and over again to do so.

Constitution of Pakistan, Article 25-A accepts the responsibility of state to give free and mandatory education to all the children between ages of five to sixteen years. However it is just a part of constitution. Ground realities speak louder than laws. People need to be educated on land and not on constitutional papers. This is very important which all must understand. In Pakistan, students-teacher ratio is very high, due to which every student cannot be treated well. Shortage of classified teachers is a big concern. Only 25% of university teachers are PhDs and 20% of them are active in research (8). Seldom do the teachers seek motivation for dedication to their profession. Salary and other facilities are not given up to the mark and hence the teacher himself finds it difficult to take interest in teaching.

More than often, examination system tends to test the student's ability to memorize things and not to comprehend and solve problems. It doesn't happen everywhere off course. There are many good institutes like LUMS and NUST that are equally effective to that of developed countries. Many students from Pakistan lead in their studies and attain skills that benefit big organizations. Also, a lot of students go abroad for higher education and yes, they are productive people. They compete with the students of modern nations.

A major reason for out of school children is poverty. Parents are restricted due to tight chains of poverty and they cannot afford their children's education. Even if it's for free, many children, yet, have to suffer from child labor to bring some money back home for the night meal – probably the only food for the whole day. Sometimes, parents admit their children to madrasa where education is completely free and even food and shelter is given there, so for the child's comfort and in dream of a religious education, they send them to these institutes. Studying there isolates them from the modern society and more than often,

student feels it difficult to manage in the modern era. He can't even compete with the students of the same country; modern world is far away from him. It's very clear for Muslims that religious education is quiet necessary for them but it never means to shun all modern education, especially technical education (9).

The different classes of education are producing a big gap between the students. It needs to be considered. The level of education in public schools (mostly offering education in native language) should be improved and madrasa system, if cannot completely be changed due to one reason or the other, should must be improved to produce effective pupils.

The number of registered madrasas in Pakistan lies in between 18 to 24 thousand. Unregistered are a lot more (10). They produce a big mass of young people who do not give well to the society. This is really an alarming situation as too much less productive people are being produced by too much madrasahs.

In Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Jordan and most of Islamic world, state is controlling religious learning which promotes religious harmony in society. Madrasas are responsible to promote a certain ideology, provoking sectarian hatred and more than often, do not allow students to adopt new ways and get closer to the secular world.

Pakistan is lagging behind to achieve "Education For All". According to EFA report, Pakistan is present in the list of 18 most Low Countries income wise in which Pakistan is at 11th. Bangladesh, Nepal, Sudan, Rwanda are even relatively better than Pakistan regarding education of masses (11).

Among the children who are not enrolled in schools, 70% have never seen the inside of a school, 30% are drop-outs (12). Their dreams are just crushed under the heavy belt of poverty and other social taboos. If they are given opportunities, they actually have a good talent, just like any child from the modern world, to benefit themselves as well as becoming responsible citizens. Currently 25.02 million children are out of school aged between 5 and 16. Among children who are in the age to attend primary school, 23% are out of school (13). It is shockingly bad for Pakistan.

The constitution of Pakistan, Article 37 (b) also clearly says that the State of Pakistan shall promote education and remove illiteracy. Also it shall give free and mandatory secondary education within minimum time (14).

Hiring of teachers need to be assured from the qualified people worth capable of teaching and they should be paid according to their qualification and not according to the grade of students. Students-teacher ratio needs to be lowered from current 40:1. It will help the teacher keep an eye on every student's weaknesses and strengths. Workshops ought to be arranged for teachers for their better learning and enhancing skills.

In Pakistan higher education is a main concern. It is crystal clear that in the modern world, if you do not have

some solid skill, you lag behind others. Passing primary or just learning to read a paper doesn't make you capable of proceeding with the world. Opening primary schools but depriving students of higher education make them literate but still they cannot be much fruitful to their families as well as the nation. Making primary education free but placing hurdles against higher studies is just like using a generator to overcome load shedding of electricity. Moreover young people should be attracted towards college study. Investment in this sector must be increased to meet the ever-growing demand of the society. Technical education should be the first priority. With 5.4 million out of school children, Pakistan missed EFA target that was to be achieved by 2015.

A major portion of students does not know about the latest science fields and this is the real reason why is the country lacking in this area. The trend is after completing intermediate, for most people the choice becomes engineering or becoming a doctor. In the race of fulfilling their dreams, they forget to think out of box and feel other fields too, to make an impact on their lives. It is now that entrepreneurship and IT fields have started to attract many undergraduates and graduates respectively. Changing traditional trends and encouraging the students for emerging sciences is very essential. Career counselling services have now been started and being improved with every passing day. Seminars are arranged in many cities by different counselling societies to help students know their thirst for different careers.

To promote science and research culture in the country, National Academy of Young Scientists (NAYS) has started science for youth program comprising all levels of education (15).

To become a Member of Parliament, high education is not mandatory and hence the public representatives themselves too, are unaware of the worth of education. Their own children usually enjoy studying abroad becoming successful people but the common man of the country has to worry a lot for education of his children. In many backward areas, ruling elite by notion do not provide facilities for a common man to study. Else they can no longer be befooled to vote for the extremely corrupt leaders.

Education needs money off course to reach doorstep of every citizen. On a national level, it needs a budget but Pakistan's government itself is not sincere in this regard as pointed earlier. Only around 2.1% of the total budget is spent on education every year. It has been the trend for last many years (16). It needs to be doubled for better educational reforms. Money speaks loudly. Use it for a good cause and results shall be adorable.

It's clear that Pakistan is not spending on education as required. This mistake has led her towards illiteracy as well as intolerance producing extremist ideologies. As the government is not giving opportunities for education, the quest for it is rapidly growing. Millions of children of school going age are either failing to attend school or have

dropped out, mainly due to poverty and some social taboos linked with girls' education. As secular education is limited through functioning schools, militants and religious people have taken the responsibility to fill the voids by setting up seminaries that not only offer free education but also give special stipends that attract people and even more than attraction, satisfy parents that their children at least getting some education, no matter of what quality alas.

UNESCO stated that about 5.5 million students in Pakistan have dropped out which takes Pakistan stands at a pitiable 180th place for a long time in world's ranking of literacy (17). It is a time to stand up for a cause.

Aristotle once said that roots of education are though bitter but the fruit is very sweet. Pakistan is facing very tough time for educating youth and especially girls because of the plague of terrorism. Pakistan is giving many sacrifices for education. Since 9/11, terror attacks have been increased a lot in Pakistan and education is affected too. Talibans state that since Pakistan is an ally of America, they will keep destroying it in every possible way. No other country has been suffered as badly as Pakistan has.

Out of 3,400 attacks over 110 countries during era of 1970 to 2013, 724 happened in Pakistan which is more than 20% of all worldwide attacks on educational institutes. Second position is secured by Thailand with 213 attacks, which are even less than half of Pakistan's. In Pakistan, one-tenth of all terrorist attacks target schools (18). Pakistan is engaged deeply in war against terrorism, which has affected literacy a lot. Militants target schools and colleges all around the country. Several educational institutes have been blown up especially that of girls and where it's co-education. Any teachers and students were killed in the past. Most attacks occurred at Balochistan, KPK and FATA

Malala Yosafzai is a big name who became a victim of Taliban's oppression but didn't give up. She demanded education for young girls. She was shot in the head by Taliban's on October 9, 2012 on her way to home back from school. She survived and kept on advocating girl's right to education and received Nobel Peace Prize.

She often says that a child, a book, a teacher and a pen can change the world. She was born on July 12, 1997 in Mingora that is a very backward area. The area had a natural beauty and a tourist attraction spot a long time ago until Taliban came and ruined it, making it difficult for people to educate themselves even. Malala's father was given high alert that they would be attacked if she kept on persuading girls for education. And the cruel people did what they said. They tried to take her life. But her efforts didn't

go in vain. The area is now cleared and people are enjoying their lives once again. Thanks to efforts of Pakistan Army. Malala, for her humanitarian work, was nominated for Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. Again she was nominated in 2014 and this time she won it – becoming the youngest person ever to receive it (19).

It was 16th Dec 2014 when seven terrorists, in uniform of Pakistan paramilitary forces, entered a school APS Peshawar in Peshawar, KPK and opened fires on innocent angels. They first set ablaze a Suzuki Van in which they had arrived. It turned local people's attention. Pupils were running here and there and they were trying to kill every soul. Most of the children couldn't find a place to save their selves. More than a hundred and fifty people died there including 134 children (20). The wounds of most of students have healed but their minds are still suffering. Memories come into their minds when they attend classes and the whole story makes them suffer badly. Most cannot concentrate on studies now as they could do before.

In the moment of crisis, Mrs. Qazi – wife of a retired army colonel held her spirits high and kept on advising children to lie down and act as being dead. She herself was running from room to room in order to save children's lives in the time of chaos. Another teacher was supporting her. For them, lives of children meant a lot of which Talibans had no concern. Both were killed brutally by the attackers. Jaffar Gul, a boy who was injured in the attack, later said that both the teachers sacrificed their lives for us. Had they not taken responsibility, we all 900 students could have been long dead. The attack was such severe (21).

Aitzaz died on 7th January 2014 in a village in Hangu District. This 15 years old lad was playing with his friends outside the school, when a man was seen wearing a suicide jacket who was heading towards their school. His fellows warned him not to go near him as it was a risk for his own life. But this little hero was brave enough to decide that lives of hundreds of children can be saved by his life. So he jumped upon the suicide bomber who detonated his vest killing Aitzaz and himself. Almost 2000 pupils were at that time, inside the schools. It brings tear to the eyes how can extremists take the heart to kill such innocents – and that too just because of education (22).

Suffering from poverty, terrorism, energy crisis and many other social evils, still having a plenty of youth eager to study despite harsh circumstances is a ray of hope for Pakistan. It is hoped that sooner or later, most of people shall be educated in Pakistan, as people really want it.

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

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