

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PLANS

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ABSTRACT

Education is the most neglected social/service sector in most of the third world countries including Pakistan. Among education sector, the share of special needs education is too pathetic to describe. The educational and rehabilitation services provided to disabled children were not worth mentioning in Pakistan at the time of its creation. After independence, Pakistan had to face some serious challenges, due to which no proper emphasis was given to special education and even education. Among other reasons, lack of resources, financial as well as human, was the major one in this context. The need and importance of special education was felt in different educational policies of Pakistan in different times. At the first time, in its report, the Commission on National Education (1959) highlighted the importance of special education. After that the Education Policy (1972) and the National Policy and Implementation Programme (1979) gave some importance to this sector. The same was also reflected in different medium-term (five-year) plans. This was felt more seriously when the Directorate General of Special Education, Islamabad formulated a draft National Policy for Special Education in 1986 and revised it in 1988 to bring it in line with the emerging needs of special/disabled population. After that a special education policy was launched in 1999. Recently, Government of Pakistan has launched a new National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2002, which is dynamically being implemented. The present study highlights the focus given to special education in the educational as well as special education policies of Pakistan and its reflection in different five-year plans.

Key Words: - Special Education, Educational Policies, Educational Plans.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of education for every person as well as every nation cannot be over-emphasized. Its importance is increased to a greater extent in case of persons with disabilities, as education can help them to adjust in the society. In special education, there are specially designed instructions to meet the unique needs and abilities of disabled children. Disabled children have conditions that adversely affect their progress in conventional educational programmes. Gifted children are those who demonstrate high capacity in intellectual, creative, or artistic areas, may perform poorly in regular educational programmes. Special education services can help both disabled and gifted children make progress in education programmes. However, only disabled children are taken in special education programmes in Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan recognizes its responsibility to educate the handicapped pupils first time in the report of Commission on National Education, 1959. But the proposal to provide education for these children was not made until the Education Policy 1972-1980, and in the Fifth Five Year Plan (Pakistan Planning Commission, 1978), a modest sum was allocated to special education. In 1980s, much greater government involvement was witnessed and increased budgetary provision for special education, though

still insufficient, was made. During the Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-1988), the social welfare programme concentrated on strengthening existing institutions of social welfare and special education. In order to overcome organizational setbacks, the Federal Directorate General of Special Education with provincial counterparts was set up in 1985. Today a considerable number of special education institutions are functioning under the control of the provincial governments for the children having different disabilities. Recently, the special education institutions run by the federal government are devolved to the respective provincial governments in the consequences of the implementation of 18th amendment in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Although the achievement in the form of services for the disabled children has been insignificant as compared to the need and problem of disability in the country, yet there is some hope for the future, and education is the best tool for enabling special children to take charge of their destinies. The present paper focuses on a review of the special education in Pakistan in the perspective of educational policies and plans.

The present study aimed at reviewing the efforts of the Government of Pakistan in the introduction and expansion of the services for the persons with disabilities. For this, the provisions of special education and related services were analyzed in the educational policies and five-year development plans.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of the study as indicated above was bifurcated into following objectives:

1. To present a clear picture of special education services in Pakistan since its creation in 1947.
2. To provide a basis for decision making for the formulation of future plans and policies in the field of special education.
3. To give awareness to society, teachers and especially special education teachers about the special education services in Pakistan.
4. To highlight the shortage of existing educational facilities for disabled children in the country and to focus the need for more appropriate facilities.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was basically qualitative / descriptive in nature and based mainly on the review of related literature. The researchers followed the different methodologies for the present study such as consultation of libraries, review of related research journals, review of Government documents, internet surfing, etc.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN FIVE YEAR PLANS

Historically, educational policy and practice in Pakistan has been influenced by the legacy of the British (1757 - 1947) (Fontana and Lari, 2006). A specific programme for the disabled persons named "Services for the Physically Handicapped" was included in the very First Plan of National Development (1955-60). However the programme could not be fully implemented due to lack of administrative support, funds, trained personnel's, etc. The programme had since been repeated in the subsequent four plans 1960 to 1983. In the Fifth Five Year Plan, a notable sum of 26 million was allocated for the purpose as compared to 2 million provided in the First Plan. The establishment of four model special education institutions for disabled children in Islamabad, under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, was an achievement of the Fifth Plan (1978-83).

In the 1980s, much greater government involvement was witnessed and increased budgetary provision for special education (though still inadequate) was made (Lari, 2006). During the Sixth Plan (1983-1988), the social welfare programme focused on improving existing institutions of special education and social welfare, both government and non-government. In order to overcome organizational setbacks, a Federal Directorate General of Special Education with provincial counterparts was set up in 1985 and the first National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Disabled was formulated in 1986 (Lari, 2006).

While quoting WHO figures for disability (10 to 15% of the population), and recognizing the need for special schooling and rehabilitative services, the Seventh Five-Year Plan (Pakistan Planning Commission 1988) noted that the existing facilities were few and inadequate. The facilities came under the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education (recently devolved), which is responsible for providing both special schooling and integrated and comprehensive rehabilitative services to children with disabilities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES OF PAKISTAN

Immediate after creation of Pakistan, a need was felt to organize the education system according to the requirements of newly born country. The responsibility of the Government to educate its handicapped pupils was recognized in the Commission on National Education (Pakistan Ministry of Education, 1959). But the proposal to provide education for these children was not made until the Education Policy 1972-1980 (Dani, 1986).

Report of the Commission on National Education (1959)

This Commission on National Education was appointed by a resolution adopted by the Government of Pakistan on December 30, 1958. It comprised of 10 prominent educationists / experts from various departments related to education. The President of Pakistan inaugurated the commission. The commission started its function with the inaugural address on January 15, 1959 and presented its report to President on August 26, 1959.

The Commission found that government should be responsible for "training of teachers who will serve the institutions for the handicapped" run by private philanthropists. The Commission focused the following major areas:

- i. For the education and rehabilitation of special children, it was felt that the professionals such as the doctor, psychologist, physiotherapist, etc must share with the teacher the responsibility for helping those children to achieve at least some degree of productive activity and a satisfactory adjustment in the society.
- ii. It was recommended that for almost all of the disability types, the general education should be combined with vocational education so that the individual may be equipped to earn his own living and trained to live cheerfully within the limits of his disability.
- iii. The responsibility of society for the education and other care of these children was highlighted in the report of the Commission. Owing to our limited resources, it was suggested to mobilize the community to accept its responsibility for the education of the handicapped.
- iv. Because the experience of other countries revealed that the actual care of handicapped children was suitably and effectively performed by the more personal medical and educational services of private philanthropic organizations, it was recommended to benefit from such organizations.

- v. To overcome the limitations of resources and to benefit the ability of private organizations, it was suggested that there should be a partnership between the Government and representatives of social organizations, to set up agencies specifically for the care of the several types of handicapped persons.
- vi. The Government suggested providing at its own expense and responsibility the highly specialized training of teachers to serve in the institutions for the handicapped. Initially, there should be at least one centre for the training of teachers for the blind and another for the training of teachers for the deaf and mute in our country. To take over such a programme, our personnel were suggested to be sent abroad for training and specialization.

The Education Policy (1972-1980)

In the Education Policy (1972-80), arrangements for special education for handicapped children were planned to make by opening new institutions and strengthening the existing ones, so that the handicapped children should be provided the opportunity to become productive and self-reliant citizens of the country.

Educational institutions, generally known as public schools and including such institutions as Aitcheson College, Lahore, wholly or partially financed by Government, were inaccessible to the poor students. For the education of gifted and intelligent children, it was decided that all public schools and institutions falling within the category would be taken over by the Government and converted into schools for the gifted to provide an enriched programme to gifted students, entirely free, drawn from all over the country without reference to their financial status or social background.

The National Education Policy and Implementation Programme (1979)

This policy was announced in 1979. In its foreword, the main purpose of the new policy was declared to recommend daring new effort for reconstruction of education in the country. Following were the major focus areas of the Policy.

Policy Statement

In the policy statement, education, treatment, institutional care and rehabilitation of the handicapped was stated important moral and religious obligations as a nation. According to the policy, the handicapped citizen should be so rehabilitated as to enable them to enter the main stream of national life.

Rationale

The policy document admitted the fact that there were great efforts of the philanthropic organizations for the progress made in the field of special education in the country. As the private organizations were limited in resources and ability, hence coordination among similar organizations was not easy. The institutions for special children established by the Government were inadequate in terms of teachers, equipment, books and other physical facilities. The Policy recognized that the Government would be failing in its responsibilities if it did not assume direct charge of education and rehabilitation of the handicapped.

Programmes

The following programmes were proposed in the policy regarding the education of the handicapped children:

- i. Survey of existing facilities for education of the handicapped in all the four provinces.
- ii. Identification of institutions, which had the potential of becoming national institutions.
- iii. Development of National Demonstration Pilot Projects for Education of the Disabled and Handicapped.
- iv. Development of projects for identifying needs for strengthening existing institutions for the disabled.

It was proposed that the educational programmes for the handicapped children would include provision of general education together with the vocational education of the right type so that the handicapped persons did not grow up as a burden on the resources of the nation but could be directed into productive activities.

As there was only one school in Pakistan to train teachers for the deaf and dumb schools, it was planned to provide such institutions for the handicapped at government's expenses. One teacher-training institute for the deaf and dumb would be opened in Sind and another for Blind in the Punjab.

The efforts of the philanthropist organizations were proposed to support, supplement and coordinate by the government in opening more special schools in the communities and strengthening the existing ones. Active involvement of Health, Social Welfare and Industry would be sought to prepare and launch integrated programmes for the handicapped. The curricula and syllabi of special education were also to be made in according to the needs and requirements of the disabled persons as well as society.

SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICIES

As an initial step the Directorate General of Special Education formulated a National Policy for Special Education in 1986 and revised it in 1988 to make it more appropriate for the emerging needs of special population. After that, a special education policy was launched in 1999. Recently, Government of Pakistan has launched a new National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2002, which is dynamically being implemented.

National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Disabled, 1986

The United Nations declared 1983-1992 as the Decade of the Disabled, which brought into focus the need to formulate a national strategy to deal with the problems of the disabled of all categories. Thus, the Ministry of Health, Special Education and Social Welfare envisaged the National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Disabled in December 1986, and this was in fact the first policy on special education in Pakistan.

The National Policy, 1986 was primarily concerned with issues such as organizing services for the disabled and the implementation of programmes, and paid insufficient attention to the critical matter of the curriculum.

A review of the 1986 Policy was undertaken in 1988 that referred to a category-based system of special education in Pakistan. The five categories of special needs education were identified in the policy. According to a survey conducted in Islamabad/Rawalpindi, the distribution / percentage of the five different disabilities were: i) Mental disability 21% , ii) Visual impairment 15% , iii) Hearing impairment 9% , iv) Physical disability 33% , v) Multiple disability 19% , and vi) Not classified 3%

The National Policy for Special Education, 1999

After the National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (1986), the Government of Pakistan formulated another policy on Special Education in 1999. The National Policy for Special Education (1999) recognized that the process of rehabilitation for many people with disabilities was an on-going one. It focused the need for change in public attitudes to the disabled and the crucial role of media in highlighting the successes of persons with disabilities. The policy also proposed some monetary concessions to be made for the disabled as well as providing them with legislative support.

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) was the first full-fledged National Special Education Policy to fulfill need for the education, rehabilitation and care of the disabled both by government and by the private sector. In the policy, the provision of special facilities for the education, training and rehabilitation of disabled persons was regarded as being of central importance concerning the rights of a significant percentage of our population.

The goal of the policy was the empowerment of persons with disabilities, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender or other consideration for the realization of their full potential in all spheres of life, specially social, economic, personal and political.

The policy was formulated with a background of information about the number of disabled persons in Pakistan based upon the WHO estimates of 10% of the population and upon more detailed information provided by Pakistan-based studies including the National Census, 1998. The National Census Report of 1998 however indicated a low estimate of 2.49% of the total population, based on the reported cases of persons with disabilities. The distribution of different disabilities within the defined population of disabled persons, as indicated by the 1998 census, provided a valuable guide for planning programme Physically Handicapped (19%), Mentally Handicapped & Insane (14%), Multiple Disability (8.21%), Visually Impaired (8.6%), Hearing Impaired (7.40%), Others, not classified but included as disability (43.33%)

Areas of Focus and Special Attention

Following are the focus areas of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002.

Early Intervention, Assessment and Medical Treatment

The goal of the policy was the empowerment and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities for the realization of their full potential in all spheres of life. To achieve the goal, prevention, detection, early intervention, guidance and counseling, etc. was proposed in the policy.

Education and Training

Pakistan has made significant progress in all related areas since the establishment of Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) and National Trust for the Disabled (NTD) at the federal level in eighties. The provincial governments and NGOs joined the movement and initiated special projects. At the International level, the movement towards making special education an integral part of education has been gaining acceptance. Therefore, integration and mainstreaming of children with disability in normal system of education should be promoted at all levels. Following measures were proposed for to achieve the goal:

- provision of special aids and equipment,

- alignment of policies between the federal, provincial and district governments at the level of relevant ministries and departments,
- changes in curriculum in collaboration with relevant departments/agencies, and
- provision of specialized aids and equipment.

The existing system of post-graduate training in special education at the university level was planned to further strengthen. The training institutes like National Institute of Special Education (NISE) was proposed to further strengthen their programme of Teacher Training and Research to improve special education services. Similarly, the number of training institutions available for occupational therapy and physiotherapy were planned to increase along with training centers for speech therapists and other relevant professionals.

Vocational Training, Employment and Rehabilitation

Vocational training, employment, and rehabilitation of disabled persons were the main focus areas of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002). To achieve the target, the policy concentrated on the use of information and assisting technology, self-employment. It was planned to give incentives to employers for the provision of employment to disabled/special persons.

Research and Development

Both academic and applied research was planned to encourage for the benefit for persons with disabilities both at the federal and provincial levels. Efforts would be made to enlist the interest and support of the universities and other organizations particularly in the areas of medicine, social work, psychology, vocational training, engineering and technology.

Advocacy and Mass Awareness

To create a positive public attitude towards the persons with disabilities, the positive images of the persons with disabilities was planned to highlight by the projection of their success stories through mass media. All possible channels, at community as well as media level, are also planned to utilize for the creation of public awareness about the nature and types of disabilities and the need for community support for their identification as well as rehabilitation.

Sports and Recreation

Provision of appropriately designed sports and recreational facilities for children with disabilities and adults were planned to undertake in collaboration with all public and private authorities. Each district/local authority was expected to ensure that budgetary provisions to enable groups of persons with disabilities to establish clubs for sports and recreation and to provide appropriate free premises.

Design of Buildings, Parks and Public Places

The safe and easy access of persons with disabilities in public places / buildings was planned to ensure by introducing the codes of practice for the design of new public buildings and for the adaptation of existing premises. For this, it was planned that designs of public buildings will be prepared with the consultation of the Ministry of Social Welfare & Special Education, which provided specifications for such aspects of those buildings used by persons with disabilities such as ramps, lifts, toilets etc. Accessibility to other buildings of public use also requires special designing to facilitate easy approach for persons with disabilities.

Institutional Arrangement/Mechanism

The policy proposed the following institutional arrangements for its successful implementation.

- i. As the role of Federal Government in meeting the needs of disabled persons is very important at national level, the present support level of the federal government for efforts in the field of education and rehabilitation of person with disabilities was planned to enhance. For this purpose, joint efforts of the concerned Ministries in addition to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education were proposed to fulfill the objectives, laid down in this Policy.
- ii. The role of provincial governments is crucial in providing all the required facilities to a maximum number of persons with disabilities. Based on the needs assessment, the provincial governments are expected to draw up action plans for public and private sectors. Federal Government would also provide assistance in areas of curriculum development and research.
- iii. District governments are expected to enhance the scope of programmes for persons with disabilities. It was planned to include the introduction of the system of integration of children with disabilities in normal schools in the area of jurisdiction of the district councils and union councils in the local bodies system.
- iv. It was planned to seek community involvement, for which the establishment of voluntary organizations are planned to encourage. The resources of NGOs in the field of community social work were planned to channeled in the direction of projects for the welfare and uplift of persons with disabilities.
- v. To be effective, rehabilitation requires the involvement of a wide variety of professionals, organizations and community at large. Involvement of "Special Friends" and voluntary support groups were planned to ensure.

CONCLUSION

The education and rehabilitation services for the persons with disabilities are not up to mark in the developing countries including Pakistan. At the time of Pakistan's creation in 1947, government efforts channeled towards nation building and educational provisions for children with disabilities were few in number. Yet non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided services to a large number of disabled persons, mainly in the cities. In different educational policies of Pakistan, special education was given importance to some extent, but the same was not proportionate to the special population. It was also reflected in the subsequent national plans, but was not fully implemented due to different reasons. These include the lack of administrative support, funds, trained personnel's, etc. The government increased the focus on special education in 1980s influenced by some international events. These events include the International Year of the Child (1979), the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981), and the Decade of the Disabled (1983-1992). As a result, considerable number of special education institutions (still insufficient) was established and the full-fledged special education policies were formulated. It is need of the time to expand the special education services so that the maximum number of special population may be benefited.

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