

ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN: CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the problems of primary education system in Pakistan. For this purpose a critical review of existing literature was carried out. On the basis of deeper and critical investigation into the literature, the study found that primary education is the most neglected, poorly financed and poorly managed. There is political interference in the system which breeds corruption, favoritism and nepotism. The system of supervision is weak and traditionally characterized having no effective mechanism for teacher training with poor system of accountability, teachers are underpaid and successive educational policies have failed to bring any positive changes in the system due to poor implementation. The curriculum of the primary education is outdated. Assessment is based on the memory of the students rather than their performance. On the basis of this study it is recommended that the problems can be solved by robust system of accountability, eradication of corruption, quality assessment system, non political interference, quality curriculum, teacher motivation.

Keywords: Primary education, causes of problems, foundation of education, deplorable

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital process of the development of any society. It is considered one of the main pillars of a society (Adams, 1998). Education is the foundation of all types of developments in the world. It is an established fact that in the world only those nations have made progress and development which have a sound education system (Ball, 1990). Education develops individuals. It creates awareness among the people about life and its challenges in the world. It fills empty minds with ideas and creativity. Thus educationally sound nations play leadership role in the world (American Federation of Teachers, 2000). Since its independence, Pakistan lagged behind in national development and progress due to weak education system. The primary system of education could not make progress due to many factors such as parochial feudal and state politicians, corrupt bureaucracy, authoritarian regimes, fragile civil society and weak democracy. The system of primary education was deliberately neglected in the country. Instead of developing the nation on the basis of free and quality education, the system was hijacked by so-called monsters of democracy and development (Zafar, 2003).

Instead of laying the foundation of a sound and quality system of primary education which could provide a firm basis for the future edifice of education in the country, the newly born state was engulfed by political uncertainty, nepotism culture, thirst of power and corruption (Ashraf, 1983). The education system was classified on the basis of class distinctions. The poor segment of the society was provided with a poorly constructed government education system which was deprived of even basic needs such as classrooms, teachers and textbooks. Majority of the primary schools were opened under the shade of trees where the child of the

common man was to be educated. On the other hand, high quality schools were opened for the children of the so called elite class of the society. This class distinction in the society has further affected the already dying government education system in the country (Government of Pakistan, 1998).

Another gloomy aspect of the story is that even in the present day the government has focused only the higher education and primary education has been neglected. This ignorance of primary education system has created gaps between the education institutions at various levels. This can be easily seen in the performances of students coming from elite schools and traditional government schools (Government of Punjab, 2002). This situation has created more confounded the problems of parents, teachers and students who are associated with government primary schools in the country. Due to this situation, Pakistan is lagging behind many countries in the South Asian region in terms of basic literacy rates. It is the lowest in the region (Government of Pakistan, 2001).

Studies have shown that there are some gross management and structural problems in the primary education system of Pakistan. The conditions of primary schools in the rural areas are more deplorable than in the urban areas. The schools do not have even teachers to conduct teaching and learning programs (Government of Punjab, 2004). In many schools local people keep their animals. Many schools are being used as temporary shelter by gypsies and refugees. As a result of this situation, these schools are producing incompetent, poor skilled and poor knowledgeable students for the higher education in the country. On one side there is every facility available to children studying in elite schools of the country and on the other hand are the dilapidated schools where shabby children study without teachers, books, and other basic facilities (Hussain, 2001).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems of primary education in Pakistan can be traced back to the very inception of the country when the newly independent state inherited an already defined system of education. This system was weak, poorly managed and classified. The system could not be reformed according to the needs and social genre of the people (Sheikh and Rasool, 1998). Due to this Pakistan is still struggling with the lowest literacy rate in the world even after 65 years of its existence. This study attempts to analyze the causes of various problems which have so far plagued the foundation (primary) education in Pakistan.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following were the main objectives of this study.

1. To identify the main problems of primacy education system in Pakistan.
2. To examine critically the causes of the problems of primary education systems in Pakistan.
3. To present possible long term solutions on the basis of the study to the problems of primary education system in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study attempts to explore the main causes of the problems of primary education system in Pakistan. For this purpose, a vast literature was critically reviewed. The analysis of the problems and its causes is presented below,

CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pakistan inherited a poor system of education. Since its independence no significant changes have been brought about in the overall education system generally and primary education particularly. As a result, the country stands in the lowest rank in terms of literacy rate in the region. Pakistan has less than 50% literacy rate. Out of this male literacy rate is 68% and female only 57% which is the lowest among other countries in the region like Sri Lanka and India. Normally literacy rate is measured by the level of education in the country. There are three tiers of the education system of Pakistan such as primary, elementary and higher. Among this primary education is the most neglected and deprived in terms of facilities and resources. Most of the resources allocated for education are spent on higher education at the cost of primary education. This discriminatory policy of the government has crippled the system of primary education completely (Illahi, 1986). For the improvement of quality in higher education, primary education needs to be improved, because it provides foundations for the building of higher education. In reality the role of primary education is threefold in the economic development of a country due to its highest rate of return. Some Asian and western developed countries are examples. These countries developed their economies on the basis of their education and especially sound primary education system. Primary education improves and enhances skills of the people which increase productivity in all spheres of life (Khan, 1992).

Analysis of the Problems of Primary Education System in Pakistan

Lack of Financial Resources

Finance is the life blood of any system. Lack of money affects the growth and development of a system (Ballou and Podgursky, 2000). At the time of independence, Pakistan since its inception inherited a poor education system which was already financially handicapped. The primary education system could not get enough monetary allocations from the government which further weakened the system physically and academically (Shah, 2003). The budgetary allocation for education in Pakistan is lesser than other countries in the region. The current education budget allocation is less than 2% of the Gross Domestic product (GDP). As compared to Pakistan, Srilanka allocates 3.2 % on education, Nepal 2.7%, India 3.5% and Bangladesh 3.5% of their GDPs. Furthermore, the system is infested with financial corruption which exacerbated the problems of the system. Resultantly, the quality of teaching and learning, administration and planning, implementation of policies got affected (Hayes, 1987).

Structural and Management Problems

As compare to other countries of the region, after gaining freedom, Pakistan started with a dilapidated system of education. This situation continued till date. There were some cosmetic measures taken through acquiring funds form donor agencies, but theses programmes failed due to sustainability issue (Qureshi, 2002). There are 154000 primary schools with only 42000 teachers in both urban and rural area of Pakistan. Most of these schools have two of three rooms which are not enough to support increasing students' needs and management requirements (Bregman and Muhammad, 1998). This situation has badly affected the degree of quality of the schools both in academic and management terms. Some schools even do not have basic facilities such as wash rooms, classroom and furniture which compel the students to get education under trees. In many areas schools do not have boundary walls which provide shelter to many creatures at night. In some places school building is used by the locals as places for their animals and guest houses due to poor monitoring and administrative supervision (Saleem, 2002). All these factors have marred the quality of education. Moreover, feudal system, extreme poverty, lack of good governance has derailed the system of primary education in the country. Many people in the interior of Punjab, Sindh and

Baluchistan are reluctant to educate their children. They either cannot afford or pressurized by the prevailing cultural or traditional set up such as feudal and landlords (Rasheed, 2004).

Increased Drop Outs

The poor teaching and learning standards, weak management and supervision has led to increased drop outs at primary level. Consequently the parents are reluctant to send their children to those schools (Shahzadi and Perveen, 2002). There has been continues decrease in the enrolment of primary education in the country. Despite of rapidly increasing population 40% of the children in Pakistan are below five years of age. This is an alarming situation in the country which has propelled other problems such as child labour, child abuse, and child trafficking and so on (Khalid, 1998).

Poor Policy Implementation

Over the years the education policies in have not been properly and effectively implemented. There are many reasons behind the slow or poor policy implementation such as political manipulations, corruption, systemic issues and poor management and supervision (Rehman, 2002). Another reason is political instability and poor economy of the country. In the poor implementation of education policies the role of poor governmental successive policies cannot be ruled out. Every successive government comes up with new policy on the expulsion of the policies of the previous government. Thus the repercussions of the successive governmental policies have marred the structure of the education system since 1947 (Hoodbhoy, 1998).

Outdated Examination System

The standards of examination in the education of primary education in Pakistan are the lowest in the world. The system of examination is outdated. It does not meet the needs of the national and international standards. The practices of assessment and evaluations at school levels are traditional. Assessment and evaluations are conducted to check only the memory of students rather than quality of performance. Examinations are influenced by institutional politics. The system of supervision in examination is very poor which creates room for malpractices such as copying and other exam related crimes in schools. The quality of paper setting and checking is poor which affects the overall performance of the students (Farooq, 1993).

Ineffective Communication

Communication is the backbone of any system or organization. It connects the various parts of a system and develops sound coordination (Borman and Kimball, 2005). It has been observed that teachers in the primary schools often remain indifferent to the developments in the overall system of education due to poor system of communication. There are grave examples of absenteeism from duties in schools (Khan, 1980). The system of checks and balance is very poor due to weak administration and coordination. Primary teachers are at the bottom of the whole system of education. Most of the time teachers remain uninformed about the policies and plans framed at the governmental level due to poor communication. All this affects the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools (Zafar, 2003).

Lack of Professional Development

Teaching is a professional activity. There are new changes that occur on continuous basis in the society and around the world. Teachers need to be continuously abreast with latest theories, research and new knowledge (Siddique, 1990). Teachers who are not professionally sound cannot solve their professional and social issues. Teachers who acquire latest knowledge and develop their skills teach effectively (Farooq, 1990). There are less training facilitates available to teachers at primary level in Pakistan. Due to lack of latest knowledge and skills the teachers are found weak in solving the problems of students in the process of

schooling. Untrained teachers cannot manage the behaviors of maladjusted students and use corporal punishment as tool. This attitude of teachers discourages students and results in drop out. Those students who graduate from the primary schools have poor communication skills and social skills (British Council, 1988).

Lack of Learning Resources

Primary education in Pakistan is faced with acute problem of lack of learning resources. This trend is more chronic in government schools where even schools do not have boards, textbook, library and other related learning resources to help teacher and student in the process of teaching and learning (Muhammad, 2002).

Due to lack teaching and learning aids in schools teacher face many during teaching process. There are no playground facilities in schools which affects the physical development of students (Qureshi, 2002). This situation has created more problems for teachers as they cannot provide the students wider opportunities for learning and development. Teachers are forced to cover the syllabus within the given period of the year. Teaching and learning becomes mechanical. In these conditions teachers fail to create meaningful learning environment in schools (Hussain, 2001).

Lack of School Supervision

Rasheed (2004) argues that the process of supervision in the education system is more beautifully mentioned in the policies but badly practiced in the fields. The process of supervision in primary schools is fraught with many weaknesses. The supervisors are professionally untrained. The process of supervision is filled with bureaucratic underpinnings. After the passage of local government ordinance 2002 the government has introduced the system of decentralization in education. But poor management of education system at district level has slowed down the process of reformation of primary education (Khan, 1998). The process of supervision in Pakistan is characterized with the notion of inspection. Supervisors behave with teachers in an arrogant manner. This trend has diminished the purpose of professional supervision in schools due to which teachers get discouraged and feel inferior. The supervisors treat teachers like slaves and inferiors. This trend has created mistrust and discouragement among the teachers. The supervisors instead of giving effective feedback for improvements, harass the teachers and no improvement takes place (Mohanty, 1990).

Lack of Coordination

The system of education in Pakistan does not a sound mechanism of coordination at primary level. The communication process between policy makers and schools staff is so poor that teachers at primary level remain unaware of new policies and development for many years after their passage (Zafar, 2003). The state of poor coordination in the system has promoted misunderstandings between the schools and the administration system. Lack of effective coordination between schools and administrative set up at district level has exacerbated problems of teachers in primary schools (Farooq, 1993).

Curriculum Issues

The primary school curriculum in Pakistan is outdated. It does not cater to the needs of the nation in the present age. Students are required to memorize the content and reproduce it in the examination. Thus schools in Pakistan are producing the best types of parrots in the world. The current curriculum does not improve the thinking abilities of students. It is useless and impractical (Hoodbhoy, 1998). Teachers are asked to cover the given syllabus and prepare the students only for examination. This practice has left the teachers ignorant of

many aspects of the curriculum which ultimately affects not only their own performance but also the process of teaching and learning in schools. In many cases teachers are not aware of the aims and goals of curriculum. This creates gaps between understating of the curriculum and its effective implementation. In developed countries of the world teachers are invited to participate in the process of curriculum design and development. Their inputs are considered vital for the right direction of the education system (Malik, 1991).

Issues of Text Books

Primary school teachers face problem of instruction due to non-availability of quality textbooks. There is a culture of multi-medium of instructions in schools. This confuses both the teacher and the student. Besides, there is lack of training of teachers on how to facilitate or explain concepts from different textbooks (Hussain, 2001). The lack of training and orientation has created confusion among teachers which is reflected in their poor teaching performances. The teachers finally lose interest in the profession. In many cases teachers in primary schools are forced to cover the syllabus before examination by all means (Khalid, 1998).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study discovered that primary education is the most neglected in the whole education system. The system is poorly financed and poorly managed. There is political interference in the system which breeds corruption, favoritism and nepotism. The system of supervision at primary level is weak and traditionally characterized. There is no effective mechanism of teacher training. Teachers are not trained on continual basis. Parents are dissatisfied with the quality of education in government primary schools. The system of accountability at primary level is very poor in schools. Primary school teachers are underpaid and less motivated. The successive educational policies have failed to bring any positive changes due to poor implementation and evaluation mechanisms. The assessment and curriculum of the primary education is outdated. It does not cater to the needs of the child. It does not meet national and international standards. It encourages cramming of the content and deprives students from critical thinking, reflection, analysis and creativity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of this study the following recommendations are presented.

1. Primary education system needs financial support. For this purpose government may increase its budgetary allocations.
2. The number of teachers per schools needs to be increased.
3. In order to reform the primary system of education in Pakistan teachers need to be trained effectively on continuous basis.
4. A robust system of accountability may be introduced. This will enhance the capacity of the system to work effectively.
5. Corruption needs to be eradicated at the primary level. For this purpose procedures and rules need to be implemented and monitored effectively.
6. Examination system needs to be overhauled and made effective in the light of new changes and needs of the day.
7. Political interference in the system needs to be completely exterminated.
8. Curriculum needs to be revisited, evaluated and revised keeping in view the needs of the child and the demands of the current age.

9. Medium of instruction in the schools is needed to be improved. Teachers could be trained in the languages especially in English and Urdu.
10. Teachers are needed to be motivated through financial and other social benefits. The financial support to primary schools needs to be increased.
11. Resources of teaching and learning need to be increased at the primary level.

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