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Educational scenario of Pakistan: affair, contention and solutions

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Abstract

The educational scenario includes all institutions that are involved in delivering formal education (public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, onsite or virtual instruction) and their faculties, students, physical infrastructure, resources and rules. In a broader definition the scenario also includes the institutions that are directly involved in financing, managing, operating or regulating such institutions (like government ministries and regulatory bodies, central testing organizations, textbook boards and accreditation boards). The rules and regulations that guide the individual and institutional interactions within the set up are also part of the educational scenario.

It is mandated in the Constitution of Pakistan to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 5-16 years and enhance adult literacy. With the 18th constitutional amendment the concurrent list which comprised of 47 subjects was abolished and these subjects, including education, were transferred to federating units as a move towards provincial autonomy.

The year 2015 is important in the context that it marks the deadline for the participants of Dakar declaration (Education for All [EFA] commitment) including Pakistan. Education related statistics coupled with Pakistan's progress regarding education targets set in Vision 2030 and Pakistan's lagging behind in achieving EFA targets and its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for education call for an analysis of the education system of Pakistan and to look into the issues and problems it is facing so that workable solutions could be recommended.

Keywords: Affairs, contentions. Education. Scenario. Pakistan. Environment.

Introduction

Educational scenario of Pakistan

The educational scenario of Pakistan is comprised of 260,903 institutions and is facilitating 41,018,384 students with the help of 1,535,461 teachers. The system includes 180,846 public institutions and 80,057 private institutions. Hence 31% educational institutes are run by private sector while 69% are public institutes.

Analysis of educational scenario in Pakistan

Pakistan has expressed its commitment to promote education and literacy in the country by education policies at domestic level and getting involved into international commitments on education. In this regard national education policies are the visions which suggest strategies to increase literacy rate, capacity building, and enhance facilities in the schools and educational institutes. MDGs and EFA programmes are global commitments of Pakistan for the promotion of literacy.

A review of the educational scenario of Pakistan suggests that there has been little change in Pakistan's schools since 2010, when the 18th Amendment enshrined education as a fundamental human right in the constitution. Problems of access, quality, infrastructure and inequality of opportunity, remain endemic.

Affairs

A) MDGs and Pakistan

Due to the problems in educational scenario of Pakistan, the country is lagging behind in achieving its MDGs of education. The MDGs have laid down two goals for education sector:

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Goal 2: The goal 2 of MDGs is to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) and by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. By the year 2014 the enrolment statistics show an increase in the enrolment of students of the age of 3-16 year while dropout rate decreased. But the need for increasing enrolment of students remains high to achieve MDGs target. Punjab is leading province wise in net primary enrolment rate with 62% enrolment. The enrolment rate in Sindh province is 52%, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) 54% and primary enrolment rate in Balochistan is 45%.

Goal 3: The goal 3 of MDGs is Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. It is aimed at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education not later than 2015. There is a stark disparity between male and female literacy rates. The national literacy rate of male was 71% while that of female was 48% in 2012-13. Provinces reported the same gender disparity. Punjab literacy rate in male was 71% and for females it was 54%. In Sindh literacy rate in male was 72% and female 47%, in KPK male 70% and females 35%, while in Balochistan male 62% and female 23%.

B) Education for All (EFA) Commitment

The EFA goals focus on early childhood care and education including pre-schooling, universal primary education and secondary education to youth, adult literacy with gender parity and quality of education as crosscutting thematic and programme priorities.

EFA Review Report October 2014 outlines that despite repeated policy commitments, primary education in Pakistan is lagging behind in achieving its target of universal primary education. Currently the primary gross enrolment rate stands at 85.9% while Pakistan requires increasing it up to 100% by 2015-16 to fulfil EFA goals. Of the estimated total primary school going 21.4 million children of ages 5-9 years, 68.5% are enrolled in schools, of which 8.2 million or 56% are boys and 6.5 million or 44% are girls. Economic Survey of Pakistan confirms that during the year 2013-14 literacy remained much higher in urban areas than in rural areas and higher among males.

C) Vision 2030

Vision 2030 of Planning Commission of Pakistan looks for an academic environment which promotes the thinking mind. The goal under Vision 2030 is one curriculum and one national examination system under state responsibility. The strategies charted out to achieve the goal included:

- (i) Increasing public expenditure on education and skills generation from 2.7% of GDP to 5% by 2010 and 7% by 2015.
- (ii) Re-introduce the technical and vocational stream in the last two years of secondary schools.
- (iii) Gradually increase vocational and technical education numbers to 25-30% of all secondary enrolment by 2015 and 50 per cent by 2030.
- (iv) Enhance the scale and quality of education in general and the scale and quality of scientific/technical education in Pakistan in particular.

Contention

The affairs lead to the comprehension of the contention which are faced in the development of educational scenario

and promotion of literacy. The study outlines seven major contention such as:

1) Lack of Proper Planning: Pakistan is a signatory to MDGs and EFA goals. However it seems that it will not be able to achieve these international commitments because of financial management issues and constraints to achieve the MDGs and EFA goals.

2) Social constraints: It is important to realize that the problems which hinder the provision of education are not just due to issues of management by government but some of them are deeply rooted in the social and cultural orientation of the people. Overcoming the latter is difficult and would require a change in attitude of the people, until then universal primary education is difficult to achieve.

3) Gender gap: Major factors that hinder enrolment rates of girls include poverty, cultural constraints, illiteracy of parents and parental concerns about safety and mobility of their daughters. Society's emphasis on girl's modesty, protection and early marriages may limit family's willingness to send them to school. Enrolment of rural girls is 45% lower than that of urban girls; while for boys the difference is 10% only, showing that gender gap is an important factor.

4) Cost of education: The economic cost is higher in private schools, but these are located in richer settlements only. The paradox is that private schools are better but not everywhere and government schools ensure equitable access but do not provide quality education.

5) War on Terror: Pakistan's engagement in war against terrorism also affected the promotion of literacy campaign. The militants targeted schools and students; several educational institutions were blown up, teachers and students were killed in Balochistan, KPK and FATA. This may have to contribute not as much as other factors, but this remains an important factor.

6) Funds for Education: Pakistan spends 2.4% GDP on education. At national level, 89% education expenditure comprises of current expenses such as teachers' salaries, while only 11% comprises of development expenditure which is not sufficient to raise quality of education.

7) Technical Education: Sufficient attention has not been paid to the technical and vocational education in Pakistan. The number of technical and vocational training institutes is not sufficient and many are deprived of infrastructure, teachers and tools for training. The population of a state is one of the main elements of its national power. It can become an asset once it is skilled. Unskilled population means more jobless people in the country, which affects the national development negatively. Therefore, technical education needs priority handling by the government.

Poverty, law and order situation, natural disasters, budgetary constraints, lack of access, poor quality, equity, and governance have also contributed in less enrolments.

An analysis of the affairs and contentions suggest that:

The official data shows the allocation of funds for educational projects but there is no mechanism which ensures the proper expenditure of those funds on education.

- The existing infrastructure is not being properly utilized in several parts of the country.
- There are various challenges that include expertise, institutional and capacity issues, forging national cohesion, uniform standards for textbook development, and quality assurance.
- The faculty hiring process is historically known to be politicized. It is because of this that the quality of teaching suffers and even more so when low investments are made in teachers' training. As a result teachers are not regular and their time at school is not as productive as it would be with a well-trained teacher.
- Inside schools there are challenges which include shortage of teachers, teacher absenteeism, missing basic facilities and lack of friendly environment.
- Out of school challenges include shortage of schools, distance – especially for females, insecurity, poverty, cultural norms, parents are reluctant or parents lack awareness.

Solutions

There is a need for implementation of national education policy and vision 2030 education goals. An analysis of education policy suggests that at the policy level there are several admirable ideas, but practically there are some shortcomings also.

It may not be possible for the government at the moment to implement uniform education system in the country, but a uniform curriculum can be introduced in educational institutes of the country. This will provide equal opportunity to the students of rural areas to compete with students of urban areas in the job market.

Since majority of Pakistani population resides in rural areas and the access to education is a major problem for them, it seems feasible that a balanced approach for formal and informal education be adopted. Government as well as non-government sector should work together to promote education in rural areas.

The government should take measures to get school buildings vacated which are occupied by feudal lords of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab. Efforts should be made to ensure that proper education is provided in those schools.

The federal government is paying attention to the vocational and technical training, but it is important to make the already existing vocational and technical training centers more efficient so that skilled youth could be produced.

Since education is a provincial subject, the provincial education secretariats need to be strengthened. Special policy planning units should be established in provinces' education departments for implementation of educational policies and formulation of new policies whenever needed. The provincial education departments need to work out financial resources required for realizing the compliance of Article 25-A.

Federal Government should play a supportive role vis-à-vis the provinces for the early compliance of the constitutional obligation laid down in Article 25-A. Special grants can be provided to the provinces where the literacy rate is low.

Pakistan is not the only country which is facing challenges regarding promotion of literacy and meeting EFA and MDGs commitments. Education remains a subject which is paid least attention in the whole South Asian region. UNDP report 2014 suggests that there has been an improvement in other elements of human development such as life expectancy, per

capita income and human development index value (in past 3 years); but there has been no progress in the number of schooling years. The expected average for years of schooling in 2010 was 10.6 years but the actual average of schooling remained 4.7 for all South Asian countries. In the year 2013 the expected average of number of years increased to 11.2 but the actual average of years of schooling of South Asian countries remained 4.7. Regional cooperation mechanism can also be developed to promote literacy in South Asian region. Sharing success stories, making country-specific modifications and their implementation can generate positive results.

Recommendations

- Technical education should be made a part of secondary education. Classes for carpentry, electrical, and other technical education must be included in the curriculum.
- Providing economic incentives to the students may encourage the parents to send their children to school and may help in reducing the dropout ratio.
- Local government system is helpful in promoting education and literacy in the country. In local government system the funds for education would be spent on a need basis by the locality.
- Corruption in education departments is one of the factors for the poor literacy in the country. An effective monitoring system is needed in education departments.
- For any system to work it is imperative that relevant structures are developed. Legislation and structure should be framed to plan for the promotion of education in the country. After the 18th amendment the education has become a provincial subject, therefore, the provinces should form legislations and design educational policies which ensure quality education.
- Unemployment of educated men and women is a major concern for Pakistan. There should be career counselling of the pupils in schools so that they have an understanding of job market and they can develop their skills accordingly.
- Counselling of parents is required, so that they can choose a career for their child which is market friendly.
- There are two approaches to acquiring education: First, which is being followed by many in Pakistan is to get education to earn bread and butter. The second approach is to get education for the sake of personal development and learning. This approach is followed by affluent and economically stable people who send their children to private schools and abroad for education. The problem arises when non-affluent families send their children to private schools, and universities. This aspiration for sending children for higher education is wrong, because the country does not need managers and officers only. There are several other jobs where people are needed. Hence the mind-set of sending one's children to university only for becoming officers and managers needs to be changed.

Conclusion

The reforms required in the education system of Pakistan cannot be done by the government alone, public-private participation and a mix of formal as well as non-formal education can pull out majority of country's population from illiteracy. Similarly, to make the youth of the country an

asset, attention should also be paid to vocational and technical training.

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