

## **Deciphering the Riddle of Education in Pakistan: A Case of Public Sector Elementary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

*Development of nations is contingent upon their educated populations who can play a pivotal role in nation-building. Those who have promoted their education systems have made progress by leaps and bounds and are known as developed nations in the world. On the contrary, the nations with the troubled education systems, are still struggling to approach the particular status. Pakistan lies in the latter category as its education has fallen prey to several issues that has not only restrained socio-economic development but also has restricted the literacy rate to a greater extent. These issues are commonly found with elementary education which is supposed to be the basis for educational system. In Pakistan, elementary education is further divided into the primary level (Grade 1 to 5) and the elementary level (Grade 6 to 8). The present research has elaborated the riddles, especially associated with elementary education. It has highlighted how restrained development policies hurdle in the way of promotion of elementary education in Pakistan. It explains that traditional methods of teaching in this age of specialization and perfection and confused medium of instruction are major components of these problems. Public elementary schools have almost no access to the equipment of information technology that has added fuel to the fire. In addition to that, there is no check and balance on the public schools due to dormant and inactive supervisory authorities. In the end, the study has recommended some policies through which elementary education in Pakistan can achieve its particular standards. The research is helpful for general readers, students of education, policy-makers, and teachers and for all the concerned authorities who are handling the affairs of elementary education in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Elementary Education, Public Schools, Teacher Education.

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## **Introduction**

Education is a road to national uplift as it creates a sense of responsibility among the public. Educated people not only realize their duties but also know how to protect their national, social and individual rights. Education enhances a consciousness among the nationals of a state that makes them well aware of their national and international status being global citizens. This awareness inculcates in them a sense of trust and cooperation within specific territory. It is a fact that the development of the education sector is a key to success for any nation (Ahmed, et al., 2014). Promotion of education helps in reducing illiteracy which directly restrains one of the biggest curses on the planet i. e. unemployment (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016). So, the importance of education to the economy cannot be denied at all. When a society or nation possesses educated and skilled labour force it has far more chances to develop its economy rapidly. Additionally, it can be stated that education is “fundamental to the broader notion of expanded human capabilities that lie at the heart of the meaning of development” (Todaro & Smith, 2011). Hence, the economic development of a society or nation is based on acquired skills and abilities of the labour force through effective education and impressive delivery of knowledge.

There prevail two theories which describe the relation of educational development with the economic uplift in a lucid way. First, there is Human Capital Theory that considers the accumulation of capital as an important element of economic growth. Second, there is Signalling Theory which states the level of education as an indication of behavioural traits that employers are looking for. As far as the first theory is concerned, it provides the relationship between education and economic advancement (Dubhslaine, 2006). Education soars analytical and cognitive skills among the public in general and students in particular. It helps them in analyzing the given information and then to make its use positively. Anyhow, the developed skills make the laborers to increase productivity in two ways. Firstly, he can use his existing working capital more effectively. According to Welch, education increases worker’s speed along with quality based on his increased understanding of specific tasks and he can make better decisions regarding the allocation of available resources. Secondly, the educated worker can utilize his knowledge for developing technological infrastructure that automatically causes improvement in the production of materials and enhances the communication of information (Dubhslaine, 2006). Generally, when an educated labour force adapts to technological changes it reduces the costs of production and creates possibilities for an increase in the production of a particular firm.

## **Background of the Study**

Pakistan is a developing state with a weaker economy. One can witness political chaos, economic disarray, militant and sectarian violence and social unrest in Pakistan which are, by and large, the offshoot of a weak, polarized and non-unified

education system. Promotion of tolerance, general awareness and literacy has become a dream of this ineffective system. Education has been treated as a ‘step-child’ in Pakistan since its inception. It was not given so much importance that obstructed the development in every sphere of life. Lowest allocation in the budget for this sector has weakened the foundation of quality education. Resultantly, the nation experienced an economic, social and political decline. After laps of almost seventy years, education cannot take Pakistan out of economic, social and political quagmire even after adopting more than twenty-five educational policies (Ahmed, et al., 2014). Pakistan is the sixth largest population in the world that is still facing a blend of problems regarding the uplift of its education sector. It is struggling to provide learners with free education efficiently even Article 25-A obligates the state in this connection. The article reflects that “the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 5 to 16 years old in such a manner as may be determined by law”. Similarly, Article 37-B of the constitution directs the state to remove illiteracy and encourages the provision of free and compulsory education. It states that “the state shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period” (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016).

From 1947 to date, the focus of Pakistan’s educational policies has been the eradication of illiteracy at the elementary level but it is still a promise to fulfil. Recently, Pakistan has launched a nationwide initiative in National Education Policy (NEP) 1998-2010 aiming at minimizing illiteracy and providing the children with basic education. NEP 2009 has been launched one year before finishing the previous one. Its main targets include 100 per cent enrolment by 2015 at the primary level, 86 per cent literacy rate and 7 per cent allocation for the education of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In addition to that, the policy decided a bachelor degree for recruiting the teachers at the elementary level and emphasized the implementation of the common curricular framework in both the public and private sectors (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016). But, unfortunately, these targets could not be achieved as it is due to unplanned and directionless initiatives for the promotion of education at the elementary level. Management, as well as the teaching staff could not come up with their desired goals because of the lack of check and balance and sincere efforts. Now, this negligence of the uplift of elementary education, the basis for the higher education, has pushed the nation into countless complications.

### *Objectives of the Study*

Education sector in Pakistan has been a victim to the mismanagement of the concerned authorities that has entombed the country among the states with the lowest literacy rate. This research aims at exploring the causes which have affected the sector to a dismal extent. An effort has been made to highlight the priorities of the provincial as well as federal governments regarding development of the elementary schools. The

stakeholders and the readers can be able to assess the role of skilled teachers for the rapid growth of the department. It provides a direction for authorities to manipulate the issue of medium of instruction. The study has emphasized on the availability of the resources related to Information Technology (IT) that is a requisite part of education in this age of perfection. Last but not the least, it has examined that lack of funding to the elementary section of education and then reluctance and mismanagement of the managers in utilizing these funds have brought elementary education to the brink of destruction.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive and analytical methods have been followed to analyze the topic. Facts and figures, relevant to the topic, have been collected from the published works, research articles, surveys, reports and newspapers. All the datum reflects the opinion of various authorities on the topic through these facts and figures. This descriptive approach has provided the author with a vision to build his own opinion. Therefore, views of the author of this research are totally based on the analysis of the divergent opinions of the national and international experts who have tried to examine the causes behind the pathetic situation of elementary school education in Pakistan. Additionally, all the numerical data in the mentioned sources has made the author able to make comparison between the availability of facilities and the results produced through these.

### ***Causes behind the Dismal State of Elementary Education The Dilemma of Priorities in Development***

Pakistan is a country where a very low amount is allocated for the education sector in its annual budget. A brief survey of last five years will make the reader able to understand this allocation clearly. According to the educational budget of 2015, Sindh government allocated Rs. 148 bn for education sector with an increment of 7 per cent of the previous budget. Rs. 135 bn were allocated for current expenditures and the remaining only 9 per cent i. e Rs. 13 bn were earmarked for development purposes. It is worth mentioning here that 91 per cent budget was mainly apportioned for salary-related expenditures that minimized the funds for development. There are 92 per cent elementary schools (including primary and elementary schools) in Sindh (Sial, 2016). Now, one can analyze the situation easily: what would be the share of elementary education in this budget and how all the development projects could be completed with this minor amount. Consequently, elementary education has been deprived of its due share in the finance that has led the particular section towards restrained educational development.

Usually, huge amounts of the educational budget are allocated for salaries of teachers and supporting staff at elementary and secondary schools. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government allocated Rs. 88.274 billion for elementary and secondary education in 2015. The amount of Rs. 79.974 billion was fixed for salaries and Rs. 8.3

billion went to non-development expenditures. With that allocation of the fund, the provincial government further promised to form 150 new primary schools and 100 secondary schools for boys and girls. (*The News*, June 16, 2015). In the same year, the Punjab government showed an interest in providing the teachers with training and emphasized on a special allocation of budget for training of teachers. For that purpose, the provincial government allocated Rs. 1.07 billion for Teacher Training Colleges in Punjab. (*The Nation*, June 23, 2015). Baluchistan, that had already shown an inclination towards promoting elementary education, experienced a decline of 15 per cent as compared to the previous budget. The government allocated Rs. 10.02 billion in 2015 for development purposes which were Rs. 11.7 billion in 2014. This decline not only restrained educational activities but also restrict the development projects at elementary schools (*The News*, April 28, 2016).

After the gap of five years, one cannot predict an optimistic future for education in Pakistan. In the budget of 2020, education and health sectors are ignored regarding development especially. As far as the education sector is concerned, only Rs. 83 billion are allocated for it (*The News*, June 13, 2020). Now, the provincial governments will have a minor share which is supposed to be insufficient for running the sector smoothly. The share of elementary schools can also be imagined that will create many more hurdles in the way of management to establish further schools at this level. It will leave more students to study under the blue sky as these schools do not have a sufficient number of rooms where the students can learn the things without any disturbances. There exists an intra-sector controversy over the allocation of resources that has caused colossal damage to elementary education. A contradiction can be observed in the declaration of policies on paper and practical steps by the government to fulfill the promises made in these policies. In recent education policy, special attention is given to the elementary education, promising the targets of achieving literacy and assuring 100 per cent enrolment of the students at primary schools, but there are no appreciable results for that attention. Almost all the concerned authorities are more interested in speeding up higher education than primary or elementary education. For that purpose, most of the educational programmes are highly subsidized. Here a difference is created between rich and poor. The rich can afford for such expansive programmes while the welfare of the poor lies in the primary education programmes. It is a big example of non-allocation of resources where the poor fall victim to the mismanagement of the education sector (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016). Resultantly, the students as well as teachers cannot have access even to the basic facilities like furniture, toilets, water etc.

### *Lack of Skilled Teacher*

Training is essential for quality performance in every profession. Teaching is a challenging job that requires a teacher to be equipped with a lot of variety in teaching methods to deliver the knowledge effectively. In Pakistan, there are less training

opportunities for teachers despite of the existence of various teacher training institutes. Due to the lack of resources, professional trainers and administrators these institutes have failed to assure training of teachers who can perform very well at elementary schools after being trained. Non-availability of funds has put a full stop on the working of most of the training institutes. Those, which are working, still stick to the out-dated and traditional course outlines 'which does not enhance the skills, motivation and quality of teachers' (Ahmed, et al., 2014). As a sub-sector of education, teacher education is the most important necessity that should be reflecting its distinction in pre-service and in-service forms. It is usually designed and adopted to equip the teachers with updated knowledge, information and pedagogical skills. It helps them in developing their abilities and positively reformed behaviour towards their profession. Such training can facilitate the transfer of cognitive, affective and psycho motor knowledge to the learners which build their character and personality to make them able to adjust themselves according to social trends. The effects of teacher training on the process of learning can be elaborated in the following words:

Teacher education consists of all formal and informal policies, activities and experiences that equip prospective teachers with knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required to perform their duties effectively and efficiently in the classroom, school and wider community (Khan, 2011).

Quality of instruction is a primary factor behind low or high learning outcomes in public elementary schools. Many surveys demonstrate that there is no doubt about the competency level of teachers at elementary schools but their knowledge is not translated into improved outcomes for the learners. It highlights the gap in teacher education where teachers are not trained enough to teach their students at this basic level efficiently. Therefore, low motivations among teachers, low teacher efforts and a high level of absenteeism have affected education system badly. In addition to that, multi-grade teaching at primary level is a common practice in rural areas of Pakistan. It can widely be seen in rural areas of Punjab where, on average, one primary teacher teaches more than three grades (Bari, et al., 2013). With this proportion, a teacher cannot control the classroom that creates a sense of deprivation among those students who require individual attention to solve their academic problems. It is the only variety of teaching methods that can cause mutual facilitation between the teacher and his pupils and this variety can only be achieved by conducting training programmes for the teachers at the elementary level.

### *Confused Medium of Instruction*

The medium of Instruction (MoI) plays a critical role in making the education system of any nation successful. It guides the teachers as well as to adopt a particular language, local, national or international, to get close to the educational trends. Specification of a particular language creates a sense of integrated understanding

among the learners. But, the case of Pakistan is a different one in this regard as its leadership could not decide a permanent MoI especially at the elementary level of education that has almost produced confused students. Decision-makers have been under confusion to declare Urdu or English as MoI. Soon after partition, All Pakistan Education Conference (APEC) in 1947 propose Urdu as Pakistan's *lingua franca* and a first advisory board was set up in 1948 to implement Urdu as 'Medium of Instruction' (MoI) at different stages of education. Second education conference in 1951 encouraged mother tongue as MoI at primary level and recommended the adoption of Urdu and English at official and national levels. Again, in 1959, Sharif Commission on National Education endorsed the idea of mother tongue up to grade 5. Later on, article 251 of the constitution of 1973 declared Urdu as national language and English as an official one (Rashid, et al., 2016). General Ziaul Haq's emphasis was on Urdu too and English was ordained to begin from grade 4. In 1989, the democratically elected government formulated a language policy with a special focus on English and in 1992 the decision over MoI was left to the provinces. A pronounced shift towards English can be seen under the regime of General Pervez Musharraf that was underlined in National Education Policy (NEP) of 2009. According to the policy, English would be MoI from grade 4 onwards and by 2011 all the government schools were supposed to be teaching in English (Rashid, et al., 2016).

So, the medium of instruction has been an issue since the inception of Pakistan. Therefore, the level of success of the education system in Pakistan can be assessed in such a way that it has not decided, till today, a common or national medium of instruction at elementary schools. The system is operative in match with local needs and ground realities as 'education in mother tongue' is a decisive factor to segregate and diversify the nation just contrary to the requirements. It has taken more than seventy years to prolong the decision; therefore, various mediums are operational both in private and public schools. Arguably, the confused medium of instruction creates a sort of disparity among the masses and divides them into too many segments (Rashid & Mukhtar, 2012). Here, one example of the Punjab province is quoted where the practice of so-called Urdu and English mediums is on but there is no reality behind the implementation of the instructions prescribed by the education policy. In Punjab, school education begins with "Kachi" class in the public sector where the children of pre-primary age are accommodated with grade 1. The primary level consists of grades 1 to 5 with either Urdu or English as a medium of instruction. In Urdu medium schools, English is taught as a language from grade 1. Then, there is the middle level of elementary education that is composed of grades 6 to 8 and, according to the recent education policy, follows English as a medium (Government of the Punjab, 2013).

The confused medium of instruction in the education system of Pakistan has caused an irreversible loss to the learning process among young learners. The use of either English or Urdu by the teachers at elementary schools has not been productive for

teachers as well as students. Teachers cannot formulate teaching methodologies which can be suitable at various regional levels. On the other hand, learners' abilities, especially in the English language, restrain their learning. In 2006, Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI) presented its report which reflected the lowest level of competency to learn English language among the teachers. This incompetency led towards a conflict between teachers and the learners with references to English versus other languages (Ammar, et al., 2015). Now, it has become a permanent source of tension and anxiety both for teachers and students. The problem of the confused medium of instruction is also associated with teachers at elementary schools. Most of these teachers are not properly trained that restricts them to limited teaching methods to deal with English. Many of them, probably the majority, cannot speak English themselves. And the worsening thing is that when these teachers are directed to teach key subjects like English they get failed as most of them do not possess sufficient subject knowledge. So, there lies a major flaw in the implementation of the plan that calls for teachers to teach subjects they do not know and in the language, they do not understand (Hathaway, 2005).

#### *Non-Availability of IT Resources*

In this age of perfection, the importance of Information Technology (IT) cannot be denied in any sphere of life. IT has made the man able to collect information from all around the world at his door-steps. Similarly, it has opened many ways for education sector to boost up. In most of the developed and developing countries the use of IT has become an essential part of teaching and learning process. As the world is passing through a phase of transformation and development rapidly therefore the usage of IT has not only provided the teachers with new dimensions of teaching but also has affected the process of learning among the students to a maximum level. The particular technology is helping in restructuring and reorganizing the teaching methods which has optimistic results regarding the preparation of students, at elementary schools, for future challenges. Therefore, various governments are encouraging their teachers through the provision of continue need-based assistance either in the shape of training, resources, access or encouragement. In view of such support, the teachers will be able to adjust themselves with the latest technology and then to use it efficiently to get good results and to improve the learning atmosphere in the classroom. While using these human-friendly technologies, which may include video conferencing, websites and multimedia delivery, teachers can overcome the newly emerged challenges to education (Majoka, et al., 2013). In case of Pakistan, till now, the governors of the state are silent in this respect. Specifically, the elementary public schools do not have access to IT resources. This reluctance has produced nothing but confused teaching methods among the teachers who have been assigned to teach Single National Curriculum (SNC) to the youngest generation. If the Elementary schools in Pakistan are facilitated with IT



equipment, then these schools can produce fertile minds who will be able to overcome their academic issues, associated with the latest technology.

### *Ill-will of Management*

There is no practical of teacher evaluation at elementary schools of Pakistan. Neither headmaster nor the management tries to evaluate the teachers that restrain teacher-student learning process to a larger extent. Absence of evaluation allows the teachers to inflict their traditional methodologies on the students. When there is no check on teachers through evaluation then it can eclipse the quality of education at these schools. On the contrary, continuous assessment of this component will make it more effective and productive (Younus, et al., 2017). Notably, when a teacher is evaluated he/she gets a chance to remove the weaknesses which restrict the educational activities. It provides a chance for the teacher to change his methods to get good results. On the other hand, when a teacher does not go through the process of evaluation, he/she sticks to the traditional methods of teaching which have proved almost non-productive in this era. Teacher evaluation gives birth to the sense of accountability among teachers who can utilize it to influence on their students first to control the classroom and then to make them able to obtain good marks in their examinations.

A balance in Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) is necessary for assuring quality education. In Pakistan, PTR is suffering from an imbalance particularly at the elementary level that reflects ill-will of the management. Here, the example of Punjab can be quoted where crowded classrooms present have caused many problems for teachers and students. According to NEMIS 2013-14, PTR at pre-primary level was 56, 33 at the primary level and 23 at the middle level. With an average of 37, classrooms are found crowded. PTR is an indicator of measuring the quality of education which observes that crowded classrooms with a high number of students per teacher damaged this quality. The students face difficulty in following the course and teachers can dedicate less time to the needs of students individually (Shujaat, 2015). Here, educational management is responsible for arranging teachers according to requirement. The reluctance of the management in this area has given the ways to the problems for teachers and they cannot pay their full attention towards their basic purposes. They cannot manipulate a huge number of students in congested rooms where they find difficulties in delivering knowledge and cannot give individual attention. The already weak students fall victim to this mismanagement and they avail rare chances to improve their learning abilities in such an atmosphere.

### **Conclusion**

Though, the education sector in Pakistan is facing dire implications yet the grass-root level of the sector has suffered the most. Political chaos and institutional clashes, within the state, do not allow the rulers at federal and provincial levels to pay a special attention towards the development of the elementary schools. Therefore, the

priority list lacks the initiatives for the uplift of these schools. Absence of skilled teachers in these schools has worsened the situation. Learners are confused with the medium of instruction. Non-availability of IT resources and reluctance of the management to complete the assigned projects are the major hurdles in the way of growth of elementary schools. There is need of a collective and quick action to get rid of all these problems to strengthen the roots of education in Pakistan. The Government should encourage the concerned authorities through suitable financial support and then it should ensure the system of check and balance to avoid the vices like corruption. The drives like Single National Curriculum (SNC) can be helpful to address the problem of medium of instruction. Proper allocation in the annual budget, especially for the elementary schools can work efficiently to overcome the financial crisis. Merit-based scrutiny of the energetic and determined teachers and the managing staff are the most important conditions for the betterment of elementary education in Pakistan.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The government should revise all its federal and provincial policies regarding the provision of effective education at elementary level. Education management should design the things in the shape of academic facilitation for the betterment of teachers and teachers should respond positively and actively. Following are the measures which can be adopted to get rid of hurdles which have eroded the education of elementary level in public sector schools of Pakistan.

1. Allocation of huge amounts for education in annual budgets is a secret behind the promoted education systems of developed states and even some of under-developing nations like Sri Lanka. Therefore, there must be an increase in education budget of Pakistan so that all levels of education can be developed smoothly. Then, there should be an equal distribution of resources for all levels. A special focus should be paid to elementary education because it ensures the basis of further education.
2. A teacher is the most important figure in the education system. He must be acquainted with new teaching methodologies which can be achieved through launching well-managed and effective training programmes. High profile and expert trainers should be hired for the purpose. For teachers, who teach English as a subject, PEELI should be made more productive along with other such initiatives.
3. Regarding the implementation of the medium of instruction, National Education Policy of 2009 lacks in considering the socio-cultural need of the stake-holders i. e. powerful ethnic groups and powerful elite. These ethnic groups cannot make compromises on the humiliation of respective mother tongues while Urdu and English are strongly backed by the elite class. So, the

policy should be developed to bring both the stake holders on the same page, through taking conciliatory measures.

4. In most of the European states, the students of elementary schools are provided with the latest technological devices that pave the way for them to understand things quite easily. In the case of public elementary schools in Pakistan, traditional methods of teachings are followed which have almost proved non-productive. There is no concept of audio-visual aid which enables the students to learn the things rapidly. So, elementary schools should be provided with all the equipment related to information technology to facilitate teachers as well as the students.
5. The education sector should recruit the administrators based on merit so that they can run these affairs efficiently. They should be sincere and active with their duties for having a check on the allocated schools. Teacher, too, should avoid absenteeism and assure good results after observing sincerity with their profession. Additionally, economic, technical and moral assistance through training to the teachers can be helpful to strengthen the roots of education in Pakistan i. e. elementary education.
6. Overall, availability of new furniture, provision of sufficient toilets, facility of drinking water, general repair of the building, and foundation of IT labs, removal of teacher shortage, the pivotal role of school councils, the existence of boundary walls, plantation campaigns and settlement of rented buildings for schools can also be fruitful for the improvement of education at elementary schools.

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