

## **Remodeling Education at Grass-roots Level** **A Critical Study of Primary Education System of Pakistan**

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*The purpose of this paper is to review and identify the main causes of the failure of public sector primary education system to meet quantitative and qualitative physical targets as announced in the National Education Policy of Pakistan 1998-2010. The study shows that a country (Pakistan), where masses are very poor and its literacy rate are as low as 54 percent; a major reversal is needed in the approach to deal with the national priorities. The study while examining the split between higher education and primary education, came to the conclusion that the primary education needs immediate attention because it is largely to serve entire population, while the higher education is to serve private interest of a few.*

**Keywords:** masses, reversal, national priorities, private interest

**Field of Research:** Education Management

### **1. Introduction**

The quality of life in many poor countries in the world is made intolerable on account of mismanagement of national resources by the ruling class. This is very much evident from the fact that majority of poor countries in the world do have adequate human, material and mineral resources. For example, Zambia has copper, Nigeria has oil, Malawi has Tobacco, and Sudan has cotton and so on and still they are poorest among the poor. In fact, these countries are poor because their national priorities are misdirected and resources are mismanaged. A clear case of mismanagement is seen in these countries when public corporations make huge losses, elite class pay no taxes, foreign debt rising and indirect taxes making poor the poorest every moment. A poor country cannot afford to have most modern airports, motorways (when there is already a parallel road and rail network in existence), and many such programs where poor man is not directly the beneficiary of these costly projects. This is a sufficient evidence to suggest that poor countries are made poor due to exploitation by their own ruling class. Rulers of the poor countries are among the richest families of the world.

Pakistan is a typical case where the divide between rich and poor is extremely painful. A few families, commanding and ruling the country, are spending lavishly on themselves at the cost of the taxpayers' money. In this state of affairs, providing higher education to a small segment of the society at the cost of public exchequer, when the rest of the population goes without standard elementary education is a pathetic scene. The importance and urgency for analyzing the subject of primary education in the context of

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## Ahmad

Pakistan, is becoming very crucial, because the interest and welfare of the common man has been ignored since long. We need education for all, poverty and illiteracy among the majority of people in Pakistan has made it difficult to bring in better and competent rulers to govern the economy.

A number of foreign and local agencies (including the World Bank), carried out several studies to assist the government of Pakistan in improving the performance of public primary school system. But so far not much has been achieved to show any significant improvement in the number of primary schools and quality of primary education offered by these institutions. Keeping in view the findings of so far available studies on the subject of public primary school system, this paper made an attempt to survey all those developing countries where primary education system satisfactorily delivered all what was required to achieve primary education for all (PEFA). The idea was to select appropriate role models from the developing world, especially from south Asian region, for adopting more effective and cost efficient methods to achieve universal primary education of the quality, which can satisfy growing demand for successfully competing in the global market.

This study was primarily initiated to address causes of the failure of public primary school system in Pakistan with a view to overcome the weaknesses of the findings of previous work done in this field. . This was considered essential to analyze and propose suitable measures, effective enough to bring necessary change to improve the performance of public primary school system so that primary education for all (PEFA) in Pakistan is realized in the shortest possible time.

## **2. Contribution of the Past Studies**

The studies carried out by the World Bank (2007), UNESCO (2005) and GTZ (2006) seem to have shown keen interest in extending their cooperation to improve handling of primary education in Pakistan but not much has been achieved with all the financial and planning assistance provided by these agencies. This is very much reflected in the present state of affairs prevailing in the education sector of Pakistan.

The Social Action Program Project, sponsored by the World Bank in 1990s, was aimed to make a rapid improvement in Pakistan's social indicators (education, health and poverty) but not much was achieved at the end. The "Case Study-Pakistan" and an "Approach Paper" (Dec. 2003) carried out by the World Bank the Bank was of the view that Pakistan is far from achieving quality primary education for all by the year 2015, as committed under UN Millennium goal.

A GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) program of financial and technical assistance for educational reforms in Pakistan came out with very clear issues confronting the education sector of Pakistan. According to Atussa Ziai (GTZ 2006) study report, education sector in Pakistan has institutional problems, especially with fragmented governance. The allocations of responsibilities between the different administrative levels (state, provinces, and districts) are unclear."

## **Ahmad**

In fact, all the available studies and reports on primary education in Pakistan seem to be suggesting that poor performance of primary education in Pakistan is largely due to lack of proper planning, monitoring and management discipline. The press news reports appearing in the newspapers in Pakistan provide sufficient evidence that even the existing primary school setup is not able to deliver the quality of education of any acceptable value to those who have completed the primary school education.

In fact, the studies so far carried out, failed to bring any substantial change in the way public primary school setup is being handled at the moment. Apparently, the public primary education system in Pakistan has been seriously neglected at all levels in the public sector. Education sector in Pakistan has to be made the primary vehicle for empowering the common man. It should be treated as the immediate national priority, requiring comprehensive focus from all concerned. To find some effective solution, this study is to explore the possibilities of bringing change in the attitude and will to achieve primary education for all (PEFA) at the earliest so that the economic welfare of the common man is given the primary focus.

### **3. Methodology**

The study was designed to make a comprehensive survey of the causes of failure by the public sector primary school system in Pakistan. In this context, the national education policy documents issued by the government of Pakistan were taken as the base reports and the results of various studies and evaluation reports carried out by the local and foreign agencies were examined to suggest a more effective solution for improving the performance of public sector primary education system in Pakistan.

The successful experiences of the developing countries (stratified sampling) where the primary education system was made to give appreciable results in achieving primary education for all (PEFA) were studied in depth. This was useful to select role models to serve as guidelines to handle public primary education system in Pakistan fruitfully to achieve success at the earliest.

To make the study more effective in providing viable solution to the problem of inadequate attention to execute programs and policies for the promotion of primary education of a high quality, the split between higher education and basic education was also made crucial part of the study. This is an approach that seems to have been the major cause of neglect of public primary education system in Pakistan and so far it has not been seriously debated.

### **4. Role Models – Depicting Experience and Lessons**

The World Bank in its Annual Development Report 2010 while emphasizing the importance of education in the development process was of the view “Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth”. This is an important piece of advice by an international agency, having several years of experience working with developing countries and helping them to formulate program and policies to enhance efficient

## Ahmad

utilization of scarce resources.

We have several successful living models to substantiate the role of education in directly affecting the economic welfare of the common man. Recent examples are South Korea, China, Singapore, and Japan. Among all of them the most common factors included the following:

- i) Will and competence of the top management to pursue economic welfare of the common man.
- ii) Honesty of approach to turnaround the common man's life.
- iii) Almost 100 percent literacy in the country.
- iv) Compulsory primary education for all.
- v) Substantial amount of budgetary provision for primary education;
- vi) Tight follow-up and monitoring of the execution of the education policies.

### 4.1 South Korea

South Korea transformed itself from an extremely poor rural economy into a bouncing industrial economy in the last 50 years. The country invested heavily in human capital and the Government never neglected children education at any cost. Initially the emphasis was primary education (enrolment ratio of 100 percent), and then by 1996 the emphasis shifted to secondary education (enrolment ratio over 90 percent) and tertiary education (enrolment ratio 61 percent). In recent years the combined educational expenditure by public and private sectors in Korea has remained close to 10 percent of GDP.

Many countries where educational system proved to be extremely helpful in changing the plight of the common man did show very similar characteristics. Some of the lessons and experiences learned from the educational systems of China, Malaysia and Singapore are given below:

### 4.2 People's Republic of China

- i) In July 1986, China introduced the Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education.
- ii) Primary schools were to be tuition-free and reasonably located for the convenience of children attending them. Parents paid a small fee per term for books, food and transport.
- iii) Students from poor families received stipends.
- iv) China's system of education represented a pyramid, larger share to basic education and smaller share to higher education.
- v) Local governments were required not to pursue middle-school education while primary school education was still developing.
- vi) In China net enrolment rate of students at primary level increased from 20 percent in 1949 to 96 percent in 1985.

## Ahmad

### 4.3 Malaysia

- i) Primary education, covering a period of six years is compulsory for all the children in Malaysia.
- ii) All schools use national Curriculum prescribed by the Minister of Education.
- iii) The general objectives of pre-school education are to enable the children to:
  - a) Develop love for their country.
  - b) Be well mannered and practice moral values.
  - c) Master basic communication skills.
  - d) Respect the national language.
  - e) Master the basics of the English language.
  - f) Appreciate physical activities as a basis for good health.
  - g) Develop physically and practice good health and safety measures.
  - h) Develop critical thinking skills through enquiry and the use of all the senses.

### 4.4 Singapore

- i) Primary school education is compulsory.
- ii) Compulsory Education Act 2000 is to check violations.
- iii) Primary education is to give children a good grasp of English, the mother tongue and mathematics.
- iv) Singapore has achieved almost universal education at the primary and secondary levels.

## 5. Weakness of the Existing Approach

Since Independence (1947) the public sector authorities have shown little interest in educating masses. In every development plan, the Government of Pakistan made commitments to increase literacy and ensure compulsory education at the grass **root** level, but so far all those commitments never materialized. The major causes of neglect and poor performance of primary education programs were as follows:

**Misplaced Emphasis:** Higher education has received greater attention while primary education has been left unattended. We have HEC (Higher Education Commission) to plan and execute policies to enlarge preferably foreign qualified Ph. Ds in Pakistan. Whereas for education at grass root level, no serious effort has been made to execute policies to ensure quality primary education for the masses.

Every year Government provides large sums to finance scholarship programs and grants to higher learning institutions, while the running of primary education is left to the local districts, provinces and federal government authorities. Due to scarcity of funds, public sector primary schools are far less than the requirement, non functioning and there is a wide spread corruption in the administration of public sector schools.

Due to lack of coordination and capability to run public primary school network, the quality of education and course curricula are poor. Students dropout rate is very high (in the range of 30-45 percent). The non-availability of adequate number of teachers and

## Ahmad

their unsatisfactory qualification and training made it difficult for primary school qualified students to get admission in good secondary schools or get jobs.

**Poor Monitoring:** There is a serious contradiction in the policies declared on paper by the Government and the actual steps taken to achieve the objectives of the commitments made in those policies. In the education policy of the Government, the importance of giving full attention to compulsory primary education to all at no charge is strongly emphasized and targets of achieving literacy and 100 percent enrolment of students at primary school level are prescribed but no appreciable results are achieved. Whereas, all the attention is devoted to speedup higher education and all those programs are highly subsidized. The higher education program is largely for the rich and those who can afford, while the primary education program is largely for the welfare of the common man. This is a case of misallocation of resources and the poor man is the victim.

**Cause and Effect of Poverty:** Poverty certainly affects children and their ability to gain knowledge. Children in a poor family are at a disadvantage position because of their home environment, and unfriendly attitude of the family towards education. Their body resistance to various diseases is much lower than the children of rich families, this is why these children from poor families are much more likely to suffer from illnesses such as fatigue, headaches, flu, and colds. These diseases often restrict a child's ability to concentrate.

**Expensive Private Institutions:** The private sector enrolment at primary schools is estimated to be close to 40 percent of the total enrolment under primary schools. Due to shortage of public sector primary schools, and because many of the existing public sector primary schools are non-functional on account of shortage of primary school teachers and/or lack of funds to pay for running the school expenses, some parents are forced to send their children to private schools. Private primary schools are expensive but offer better knowledge to children. . With the technical cooperation of the private sector, the Government has introduced public-private partnership programs, but due to piecemeal attempt, not much has been achieved so far.

**Uncoordinated External Help:** Looking at the state of affairs in Pakistan, a large number of donors are funding primary school education through NGOs. Most donor agencies operate in isolation, therefore, their efforts in improving the course curricula and quality of education at primary school level has not contributed much in helping the children of the poor families a better life.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

Pakistan needs to educate its masses, up to a level where they can understand their own responsibilities, as well as that of the governing bodies. They must be able to earn their own living and contribute in promoting the welfare of the society. This is most urgent and must be accomplished without further delay and calls for a sincere and dedicated effort to implement a carefully designed course curricula of compulsory education for all.

## Ahmad

The National Education Policy of Pakistan since 1960s laid exclusive emphasis on achieving high literacy and compulsory primary education for all. The NEP 1998-2010 prescription included the following:

- i) Equal Opportunities of Education for all the citizen of Pakistan.
- ii) 100 percent enrolment at the primary level by the year 2010.
- iii) Public sector education institutes to be brought on a par with the Privately run institutes.
- iv) Strengthening and revival of the status of teacher as an agent of Change.

So far the actual performance to achieve the desired goals reiterated in the National Education Policy of Pakistan 1998-2010 reveal the following performance:

**Equal Opportunities of Education for all:** There is a wide spread inequalities of opportunities to access education in Pakistan. Due to meager budgetary provisions assigned for running education institutions, there are large differentials between quality of education offered by the public schools and private institutions. The course curricula offered by various schools is not comparable and differs on several accounts. In some places it is very rigorous and in other places it is far below from the minimum level. The affordability of parents to pay for the better schools is very limited with the result that the drop out rate of students is very high. The scarcity of budgetary funds has directly affected the employment of teacher in the public sector schools.

Equal opportunities of education (covers all levels) for all must be seen as the ultimate long-term goal, as was planned by South Korea, rather than some thing that can be delivered in foreseeable future. It will be more realistic and desirable to focus on educational programs, which can directly and immediately improve the economic wellbeing of the common man. Thus our goal or immediate objective should be to ensure equal opportunities of primary education for all. This equality of opportunity must be assigned a strict time frame so that it can be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis.

**Primary School Enrolment:** The world weighted average of Net Enrolment Ratio (children of official school age based on the International Standard Classification of Education 1997) in the year 2005 was close to 90 percent, whereas in Pakistan the Net Enrolment Ratio in the year 2005 was 68.0 per cent. In fact, a large number of countries have made primary education compulsory for school age children. This is very much reflected in the data on Net Enrolment Ratio (NER):

## Ahmad

**Table 1: World Net Enrolment Ratio Distribution Year 2005**

Distribution of NER (Class Intervals)	Number of Countries	Index of Distribution (Percentage)
90 -- 100	116	60.4
80 < 90	30	15.6
70 < 80	19	9.8
< 70	27	14.2
Total	192	100

Source: UNESCO IUS Data 2005:

UNESCO-Institute for Statistics. Retrieved from [http://www, efareport.unesco.org](http://www.efareport.unesco.org).

Over the years the world-weighted average of Net Enrolment Ratio has increased consistently. In 1990 it was 78.7, in the year 2000 it reached 87.2 percent and then in the year 2005 it was 89.4 percent. The information contained in Table-1 reveals that at least 76 percent of the countries in the world have made primary education as a necessary base for better living. Apparently, the countries which made revolutionary performance in economic well being of their people, had achieved and maintained almost 100 percent Net Enrolment Ratio, year after year. These countries include, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, China, Singapore and even Mexico.

**Performance of Public and Private Schools:** The primary schools in Pakistan are largely under provincial governments. These schools are highly dependent on the public funds, which are scarce. All the affairs of running these primary schools are in the hands of government employees as teachers and administrators. So far, most of these primary schools have shown very poor academic performance. Like all other public organizations, railways, steel mill, WAPDA, and PIA, there is a widespread corruption in handling the affairs of the public sector school administration. There are very few public schools, which offer quality education and are well known for their good academic performance. All the expenses of public primary schools are heavily subsidized.

The competence required to offer rigorous course curricula, to appoint qualified and trained teachers, to provide necessary education facilities, such as libraries, computer lab, transport and extra curriculum activities is largely missing in public sector primary schools. In fact, the teachers and administrators, as government employees are normally unconcerned in using best of their abilities to improve the academic performance of the students. This is one of the key reasons that the dropout rate of students in public sector schools is very high.

The performance of the existing public schools network in Pakistan, show the following deficiencies:

- i) Quality of education offered by the public sector schools is miserably low.
- ii) Teachers employed by the public sector schools are not adequately qualified.

## Ahmad

- iii) Corrupt practices in appointing teachers and administrative staff in public sector schools are widespread.
- iv) Absenteeism of teachers and administrative staff in public sector schools cause chaos and waste of time of the students.
- v) Course curricula offered by the public sector schools is less rigorous and generally of low quality.
- vi) Incentives for the teachers to employ innovative techniques to teach are almost missing in public schools.

The schools, like any other business must be run on business lines. We need to have highly qualified teachers, conducive environment for the students to learn and most up-to-date curricula to teach courses. The educational program and the course work must be useful to serve the latest market trend. In a way, this seems to be the track followed by the private school system in Pakistan. We need to encourage more private schools to develop highly competitive system to achieve cost efficiencies for promoting affordable fees structure for all. This is the most economical way of equalizing the quality standard for all.

**Teacher as an Agent of Change:** Under the existing system, a primary school teacher in Pakistan requires only 10 years of schooling plus an eleven-month teacher-training certificate to be employed in a public sector school. There are less than 300 teacher education/training institutions in Pakistan, out of which nearly 80 percent of these institutions are owned and run by the government. In addition, a large number of donors have made arrangement to train the teachers through NGOs'. But in spite of all these efforts, the quality of teachers employed in the public sector schools is very low.

At the World Education Forum in Dakar (April 2009), during the discussions it was pointed out that in Pakistan:

- i) Government teacher training system remains obsolete.
- ii) Teachers' number is far less than the need.
- iii) Teacher salaries are low.
- iv) Teachers' competency and education is low.
- v) Teachers lack motivation and commitment.
- vi) Teachers use poor quality learning materials.

All this seems to be resulting in high levels of grade repetition and increase in dropout rates (close to 45 percent). However, the private sector schools are doing very well in hiring good teachers and the enrolment in private schools is increasing rapidly.

The local media reports have shown serious concerns about the ground realities concerning public sector primary schools in Sindh province. It has been reported that a large number of public sector primary schools (more than 700) are non-functional due to extreme shortage of teaching staff, administrative staff and absenteeism of employed staff.

## Ahmad

The success to achieve targets as given in NEP 1998-2010 cannot be materialized, even in the years to come. There are many reasons on account of which NEP 1998-2010 will not be able to achieve its targets. The two main weakness of the NEP 1998-2010 can be seen on the basis of our past experiences and handling capability of the public sector organizations. Firstly, these being a public sector organization, it cannot deliver all what is expected from this organization. Secondly, there will be widespread mismanagement and corruption in the utilization of funds by the public sector schools management.

The private sector institutions can best provide the quality and quantity of teachers needed by the primary schools. It will be more economical to allow private sector to setup training institutions on its own, and charge a price based on the quality of services rendered. The government role should be to motivate and encourage private organizations to come in with all the best arrangements to deliver services in accordance with the international standards at a competitive price.

### 7. Remodeling Design

Since Independence (1947), Pakistan's entire focus has been on projects and programs that directly benefitted the rich and the powerful members of the society. It is high time that we should reverse the system of allocation of national resources to those programs and projects which can facilitate the common man to earn and live honorably and reduce its dependence on public and private charitable institutions. To recover and build the status of the common man, the beginning has to be made urgently and the program of compulsory primary education for all is the one, which can lay necessary foundation for their better prospects in the future.

A Primary Education Commission (PEC) on the lines of Higher Education Commission (HEC) should be established to set the quality standards, formulate a uniform course curriculum and closely monitor the functioning and performance of primary schools. The PEC should have the competent and highly educated academics of repute to formulate and monitor its policies and programs. A foolproof system of disbursements of funds to private and public primary schools to pay for educating primary school children free of cost is to be designed and to be executed by PEC.

In the distribution of Educational funds, primary education should have the major share. The secondary education and higher education should be given second and third priority respectively. The proportionate shares should be as follows:

Primary Education	50 percent
Secondary Education	30 percent
Higher Education	20 percent

In view of the failure of the public sector organizations in Pakistan, the establishment, organization and management of primary schools should be largely the responsibility of private sector. Some model public sector schools can be designed to set the standards. The government should encourage participation of the private sector in running private

## Ahmad

primary schools and give financial awards to high performing private schools on a regular basis.

The responsibility of producing qualified and capable teachers should be left to the market forces, so that the educational institutions of higher learning can respond accordingly. Female teachers have proven capabilities to handle children far better than male teachers. In Singapore more than 80 percent primary school teachers are women.

Compulsory primary education of a recognized quality is bound to create a self generating growth pattern where the entire nation will enter a working net->>> capable of earning income>>>provide help in reducing income disparities>>> result in lowering down poverty levels>>>providing opportunities to live a better life>>>and assist in speeding up the rate of growth of the economy.

## 8. Conclusions

Based on documented evidence from countries like South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore, the study concluded that the public sector primary schools network in Pakistan is incapable of delivering positive results and the public authorities have to bring in private sector institutions under highly competitive environment to improve quality and cut down costs. To increase the efficiency of human and financial resource utilization, the public sector should limit its involvement to cover policy formulation and monitoring of the education system. To provide an exclusive focus to the basic education system in Pakistan, a primary education commission (PEC) needs to be established to bring uniformity in course curricula and teaching quality covering urban and rural areas at all levels. The paper, unlike other studies, strongly recommends reversing of national priorities, starting with education as of immediate concern.

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