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An overview of the Development of Primary Education in Pakistan

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Introduction
Seeking education is a right of every citizen, therefore, it is a responsibility of each state to provide education to its nation. The Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 clearly assigns responsibility to the state for imparting education to every one irrespective of the gender and sect. But most of the countries seem to have failed to fulfill this obligation. Therefore, this declaration seems to have remained just as a slogan and unfilled promise for millions of children, women and men in the world. This also appears to be true in Pakistan that almost five decades have passed, the literacy rate has hardly increased to 35% (average 0.7% per year) and 68% (average 1.36% per year) of school going children enrolled in the schools. However, this seems a universal problem of the less economically developed countries (LEDC) in the world.

This can be exemplified from the UNESCO report (1991) that nearly one thousand million adults, two third of them women, are unable to read or write in the world. Over 130 million schools age going children have no access to primary schooling in the world. Each year several million children dropout school without the basic knowledge and skills that they need for a healthy and productive life. In Pakistan, dropout rate at the primary school level is also high due to various reasons including poverty, attitude of parents, illtreatment of children, ignorance of parents, unattractive schools, poor quality of teachers, irrelevance of curriculum and non conducive classroom learning milieu. On the other hand, the quality of education which is being offered in the schools also does not impart the required attitude, skills and knowledge (ASK) to the children enabling them to solve their own problems in their daily life.

Primary education is considered as a foundation in the whole education cycle since it provides intake to the other educational institutions, however, the social rate of return of primary education is lower than the other levels of education. In order to make primary education effective and meaningful, more than 150 countries including Pakistan agreed to replace the concept of primary education with basic education in line with the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All which includes areas of learning such as literacy, numeracy, problem solving skills, knowledge, attitude and international and societal values needed for the survival of human beings in the 21st century.

Scenario of primary education in Pakistan
Since independence of the country various revolutionary rather than evolutionary reforms were made in Pakistan to make primary education responsive to the needs of the clientele. This can be exemplified from the various Annual Developmental Plans, Five Year Plans, Educational Commissions and Policies. Thus, the qualitative and quantitative targets and priorities of primary education were re-defined and rescheduled because the original target was not fully attained. This fact is endorsed by the Government of Pakistan (1992) that universalization of primary education has remained a desired goal of successive policies and plans that are yet to be achieved. For example, National Education Commission 1959 fixed UPE target by the year 1970. The Education Policy 1972-80 extended the target date to 1979 for boys and 1984 for girls. The National Education Policy 1979 envisaged the attainment of UPE by the year 1986 for boys and 1992 for girls. But the target of universalization is still far behind the proposed target in the envisaged policies and plans. Hence the UPE target has further been extended by the year 2002. The main reasons for non achievement of the UPE targets are said as follows:

- lack of adequate physical facilities
- lack of incentives for teachers and taught
- lack of relevant and balanced curriculum
- lack of qualified teachers generally and particularly the female teachers in rural areas
- lack of realistic planning and follow up and monitoring mechanism
- ambitious targets of plans and policies
- lack of effective supervisory system
- emphasis on rote learning rather than activity orientated learning

This seems a common problem of the less economically developed countries in the world. Therefore, a World Conference on Education for All was convened in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 to chalk out the programmes in the light of the World Declaration 1990 and further provide a framework of action for the preparation of their own Action Plans of Basic Education for the imple-
The drop-out rate at the national level is 48%. For girls, the figure of drop-out is extremely high specially in Balochistan which is about 80%. The drop-out trend is even more serious in the rural areas in general which needs to be arrested immediately. The retention rate at the end of primary schooling was only 51% in 1990 at the national level. However, in spite of the high growth rate and low investment in the education sector a substantial expansion of educational facilities have taken place since independence, therefore, enrolment at primary school level has increased from 0.77 million in 1948 to 12.414 million in 1993. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-98) indicates that the participation rate for boys at primary level will increase from 84.8% to 95.5% while for girls it will increase from 53.7% to 81.7% which comes 87.7% as a whole. The target of girls education seems to be unrealistic which may not be achieved by the end of 1998 since there still appears a gender imbalance in terms of physical facilities. However, the proposed target can be made possible if the private sector, community and NGOs are encouraged to make investment in the primary education of rural areas. The most important factor is to mobilize the community initiatives in order to meet the target of girls participation. In this regard the Government has already launched a motivational campaign through the print and electronic media that might help increase the girls enrolment. This phenomenon appears to be impressive and remarkable but the systematic efforts are still required to improve the existing scenario of primary education in Pakistan. The less economically developed countries have earmarked 3.6% of their GDP whereas in Pakistan 2.3% of GDP was earmarked in 1990-91.

On the other hand, the rate of increase of primary enrolment over the past three decades had lagged considerably behind the rate of increase of real expenditure on the primary education. During 1960-90, real annual increase in expenditure on primary schools was about 9% while the corresponding rate of increase of enrolment was about 5% (Government of Pakistan 1993). This suggests that resources allocated were not used efficiently as they should have been. Such constraints at the macro and micro level need to be removed.

We are about to enter the 21st century which is more demanding and challenging than the present 20th century. For the survival of our children Azam (1996) argues that they should learn the "Basic Life Skills" to face the complexities of social reality. It is my contention that the effective and relevant education can only help our children grow for developing an awareness and understanding of the social, economical and political problems and develop skills and attitude to solve those problems. Thus each one needs to become a life long learner in his/her life. This might lead to promote the assertive attitude of receptivity of real life experiential and participative learning. Azam (1996) further argues that we need to have an "enlightened education" for the development of the humanistic and materialistic aspects of life. Without education skilled and healthy labour force that contributes to economic productivity will find it difficult to compete in world market. Furthermore, the reduction of poverty and the employment will also be difficult task with the very high population growth rate of over 3% per annum. Given the situation, improvements in the living standards,
employment, quality education can only be achieved with substantially higher economic growth rates. But without major improvements in human resources development and high investment in education sector the high economic growth rate and quality education will probably not sustain. Therefore, there is a need for strategic and deliberative interventions in the education sector (Government of Sindh, 1992).

The economic growth depends to a large extent on improvement in productivity which depends heavily on the level of education. The education of women must be related to the socio-economic development that might make females economically dependent and improve their living standards of the society. The female education will also help bring down the population growth rate in the country. The Government of Pakistan seems to be serious about the qualitative and quantitative improvement of primary education in the country. Both the Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-98) and National Education Policy (1992-2002) highlight the measures to be taken to improve the existing status of primary education. Some important measures proposed in the Eighth Five Year Plan are as follows:

"Universalization of primary education, both for boys and girls over a minimum period of time has been adopted as the main instruments for achieving mass literacy in the long run...[It] will provide primary education facilities at a reachable distance for every boy and girl of the relevant age group. Buildings will be provided for the existing shelterless schools and class rooms will be added to the existing overcrowded schools. Resources of primary education will be enhanced through SAP. The wastage at primary school level will be minimized by reducing the drop out rate and improving the efficiency of the system through better supervision and with the involvement of local community. To increase utilization of the existing schools, specially those of girls schools in the rural areas, strong motivational campaign will be launched for parents to persuade them to send their children to schools... efforts will be made to reduce the disparities in availability of the schooling facilities for boys and girls both in rural and urban areas..."

(Government of Pakistan, 1994, p.300)

The strategy of Eighth Five Year Plan for education is to design and implement the programmes which are expected to lead towards the democratization of educational opportunities. The educational profile, particularly of women in the rural areas will be improved. The quality and relevance of education will be improved through curricular reforms and other essential inputs. To make it responsive to community requirements, the administrative and financial control of school education will be decentralized to ensure effective participation of local bodies (Government of Pakistan 1992). The National Education Policy (1992) re-emphasizes the achievement of the target of universalization of primary education by the year 2002.

But this needs effective measures and concerted efforts to evolve a workable and coherent mechanism to achieve the target of UPE within the stipulated time. Otherwise, we need 200 years more to achieve universal literacy at the present rate (Fayyaz 1993). Making primary education compulsory in the country might not help achieve the universal target until the educational facilities are provided with each school going child in his/her locality. The World Bank report mentions that many schools are without boundary walls, roofs, running water and usable washrooms. The female teachers are in short supply in rural areas and teachers are not deployed efficiently according to the schools need (Dawn 1996b). If such situation persists, we might not able to achieve the UPE target within the stipulated time.

However, to achieve the target of UPE, the various projects in primary education have been launched by both the national and provincial governments with the co-finance of the donor agencies such as World Bank, ADB, NORAD, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, JICA, CIDA, EEC, GTZ, ODA etc. but the donor driven education has not contributed to improve the present state-of-affairs of primary education (Dawn 1996c). In 1993, the Social Action Programme (SAP) with the help of federal government and the donor agencies was introduced to improve the existing infrastructure in the social sector.

Each province launched its Social Action Programme to supplement the Government’s regular developmental programmes. The primary purpose of this programme was to decentralize the process of planning, development, implementation and monitoring tasks at the grass root level so that the participation of the community should be ensured. Perhaps, this is the first time in the history of Pakistan to consult the community to solicit their needs and ensure their active participation in the developmental tasks. However, such awareness has not yet been developed among the community to initiate the educational activities in their areas. The Institutional Reforms Group in their seminar held on August 11, 1996 at Karachi also confirms that the community participation is still low which means that even once SAP projects get off the ground, they would be difficult to sustain unless the community is cognizant of the benefit (Daily Dawn, 1996a). Among other problems which have slowed down the implementation of SAP is the lack of coordination among the concerned departments and agencies, bureaucracy and politicians which led to create a communication gap and made further inordinate delays in the completion of projects (Dawn, August, 1996b).

In order to implement the above projects/programmes in primary education successfully and achieve developmental objectives within the stipulated time, the following measures have been taken in the respective provinces:

- entry qualification/age for primary school teachers has been lowered.
- encouraging the retired teachers to work on contract basis.
- providing incentives to teachers and taught.
- providing in-service training for their professional development.
- establishment of schools within a distance of 2.5 k.m. for boys and 1.5 k.m. for girls.
- re-construction of dangerous/shelterless schools.
- construction of mosque schools.
- boundary walls for girl students.
- changing academic year from May to August of each year.
- pilot school nutrition programme in selected districts.
- abolition of school hours on pilot basis in selected districts.
- relaxing school hours on pilot basis in selected districts.
automatic promotion on the basis of achievement tests on pilot basis in the selected districts.

- award for scholarship to girls.
- localization of primary teachers recruitment in rural areas.
- selection of primary school supervisors from among the primary teachers.
- distribution of free textbooks and improvement of quality thereof.

But still the quality education and universalization of education are the major concerns among the educationists and parents in Pakistan. The World Bank report mentions that still country's enrolment rate remains relatively low and it trails behind some of the Pakistan's South Asian neighbours. Moreover, the quality of education has emerged as a major obstacle to expand enrolment level for basic education (Dawn 1996b).

Conclusion

Looking at the developmental perspective of primary education in Pakistan, it is evident that the enrolment in primary schools has substantially increased (National Education Council 1986). There also seems a remarkable achievement in girls education since the parents' demands for girls education is very high (Dawn 1996b). But generally the education system has failed to provide education up to the expectations of the parents since its quality has deteriorated. The recent emphasis on making primary education compulsory will be another unrealistic measure that can be postponed until the physical facilities are provided to each child within the reachable distance. To penalize the parents who do not want to send their children due to poverty or any other reasons might demotivate the parents that will affect the achievement of target of UPE.

The key problem with the existing system of education is that it presents an over-simplistic assumption that the students are expected to learn knowledge through rote learning. Thus memory becomes the yardstick of good education (Warwick and Reimers 1995, Dawn 1996c and Memon and Mithani 1996). Smith (1985) rightly argues that education not only changes with the year but it should be responsive to the needs of people which might lead to create a sound mind and body of the children. Thus, our education should develop children intellectually, emotionally, physically and morally. Dewey an American pragmatic educational philosopher reinforces this point that education is a process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. Whereas in our schools the majority of teachers consider students mind as an empty vessel which is to be filled up with the official knowledge by the teacher. Thus, this learning environment does not allow students to construct their own knowledge based on their experiences. Education must broaden the students' awareness about their surroundings that help them solve their day-to-day problems and make them confident to become citizens. The role of teachers should provide opportunities to the students for developing their creative and critical thinking skills. Effective education is based on exploration and self discovery that can lead to conceptual understanding of the students for their meaningful learning.

Azam (1994) argues that our children should be imparted life skills including thinking skills, communication skills, social and interpersonal skills, self actualization skills, coping skills and leadership skills that might lead to make them confident in order to solve their own problems. To achieve the target of UPE there is a need of commitment and will of politicians, devotion of bureaucrats, and realistic vision of the planners. The voluntary participation of community and NGOs, effective participation of private sector may help overcome the existing problem of quantity and quality education. The primary education should also need to be skill and competence oriented in order to make its social rate of return improved. For implementing such innovative and practical curriculum, teachers need to be provided with professional development in the areas i.e. content knowledge, pedagogical skills, classroom organisation, and management, questioning skills, students assessment. This type of education might attract the society in general and community in particular. The implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategy needs to be improved and too much over centralization should also be avoided. The GNP percentage on education should also be increased from 2.3 % to 4 % otherwise, the scenario of primary education will maintain status quo.

Bibliography