

UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE IN PAKISTAN: ADDRESSING ISSUES, PROBLEMS, AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The aim of this research article was to examine the prevalent issues, challenges, and new dynamics within the educational system of Pakistan. Education assumes a leadership role in society, with educational institutions tasked with the holistic development of individuals in physical, mental, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Its impact extends to the enhancement of economic, social, political, and cultural facets of the nation. Historically, secondary and college education in Pakistan primarily served as a preparation for tertiary education, largely synonymous with university education. Globally, universities collaborate with industrial and agricultural development organizations, contributing significantly to economic progress. However, in Pakistan, despite over five decades of educational efforts, developmental indicators remain less than favourable. The higher education participation rate is notably lower compared to regional counterparts. Challenges encompass issues related to the quality of staff, students, library and laboratory resources, relevance to societal needs, research capabilities, financial constraints, a disproportionate focus on arts over sciences, examination shortcomings, governance inefficiencies, and academic outcomes falling short of international standards. In light of the substantial challenges within Pakistan's education system, the researcher chose this topic for investigation, recognizing the need for comprehensive understanding and potential solutions.

Keywords: Developmental Indicators, Educational Challenges, Governance Issues, Higher Education, Quality of Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping human capital, enhancing productivity, and fostering skilled individuals capable of driving sustainable economic development. However, akin to many other developing nations, Pakistan faces significant challenges in its education sector, as evidenced by low key enrolment rates, regional and gender disparities, insufficiently trained teachers, a lack of adequate teaching materials, and substandard university infrastructure. The sector's underperformance is largely attributed to the historically low level of public investment, a situation that has seen a recent increase to 9.41% in 2022 as compared to 2021. Unfortunately, this rise in investment is not evenly distributed, with a disproportionate focus on higher education, leading to a scenario where the benefits of public subsidies primarily accrue to the upper-income class. A concerning trend is the brain drain, where a substantial number of highly educated individuals seek higher education or better job opportunities abroad, contributing to a significant public loss as many do not return to Pakistan. The declining quality of primary and secondary education is evident, with a particular concern for the alarming state of science education, requiring urgent improvement. Post-independence, Pakistan faced shortages of teachers, ill-equipped laboratories, and a curriculum that lacked relevance to contemporary needs.

Research findings indicate that achieving certain minimum enrolment levels at the primary and secondary levels is crucial for the development of a functional higher education system. For relevant university participation rates, a minimum net primary enrolment rate of 80 percent is suggested. Additionally, around 80 percent net enrolment at the secondary level is deemed necessary for the development of higher education institutions capable of international recognition, employing researchers, and fostering significant innovations. The disparity

between educational institutions at the secondary level is identified as a potential hindrance to tertiary education quality. The education sector in Pakistan grapples with inadequate financial resources, low program implementation efficiency, and poor management, monitoring, supervision, and teaching quality. Consequently, Pakistan lags in global literacy rates, with an adult literacy rate of 59.3% in 2022, significantly lower than countries with comparable resources and social/economic conditions such as Vietnam (96.1%) and India (77.7%).

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the adult literacy rate of Pakistan in 2022 was 59.3%. This means that 59.3% of the population aged 15 and above can read and write. The literacy rate has been increasing in recent years, but it is still below the average for South Asia. Here is a table of the adult literacy rate of Pakistan from 1960 to 2022:

Table 1: Adult Literacy Rate of Pakistan (1960-2022)

Year	Adult Literacy Rate (%)
1960	24.3
1970	29.5
1980	35.2
1990	42.0
2000	49.7
2010	54.8
2019	58.0
2022	59.3

Notably, urban areas, provinces like Sindh and Punjab, higher-income groups, and males exhibit higher literacy rates. The need for comprehensive reforms and targeted interventions is evident to address these pressing challenges and uplift Pakistan's education sector.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its focused examination of the key challenges and emerging issues within Pakistan's education system. By meticulously analyzing factors such as low enrolment rates, disparities, infrastructure deficiencies, and skewed resource allocation, the research aims to provide crucial insights for policymakers and stakeholders. The findings have the potential to guide evidence-based decision-making, informing targeted interventions and reforms. Through its nuanced exploration of the interconnectedness between enrolment levels and the development of higher education institutions, the study offers a comprehensive perspective on the education landscape. Ultimately, the research serves as a catalyst for positive change, advocating for informed policies that can enhance the quality, accessibility, and global competitiveness of education in Pakistan.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study presents the following research objectives:

- To identify key issues in Pakistan's education, including low enrolment, regional gaps, and infrastructure challenges.
- To explore the link between primary and secondary enrolment rates and the development of higher education for improved quality and global standing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical trajectory of education in Pakistan has laid the groundwork for understanding the contemporary challenges faced by its educational landscape. Early policies, such as the "Education Policy of 1959," shaped the foundations of the system (Khan & Ahmed, 2005). However, the repercussions of these policies are evident in the current issues, including the decline in educational standards and the struggle to provide equitable access (Malik & Rehman, 2012). Historical analyses illuminate the genesis of challenges, offering valuable insights for addressing present-day educational dilemmas.

The quality of education in Pakistan has been a persistent concern, with scholars highlighting various contributing factors. Ahmed and Ali (2018) emphasize the inadequacy of infrastructure, while Raza and Khan (2016) delve into the relevance of curricula. Additionally, socio-economic factors play a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes, with Khalid and Hassan (2014) revealing the extent of disparities among different segments of the population. By scrutinizing these multiple dimensions, a comprehensive understanding of the challenges emerges, providing a foundation for strategic interventions.

Emerging challenges in the Pakistani educational landscape necessitate a forward-looking perspective. Khan and Abbas (2020) delve into the impact of recent policy shifts, emphasizing the need for continuous analysis and adaptation. The integration of technology in education is explored by Nawaz and Haider (2019), shedding light on the evolving dynamics in the learning environment. As the educational landscape undergoes transformations, the insights garnered from these studies become indispensable for informed decision-making and proactive measures (Butt & Khan, 2017).

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

Qualitative Aspect

Education serves as the foundation for poverty reduction and social development. A sub-par educational system stands out as a significant impediment to the growth of impoverished nations. In the context of Pakistan, there is a discernible decline in the quality of education, particularly in the realm of science education, necessitating urgent improvement. The shortage of teachers, inadequately equipped laboratories, and a curriculum lacking relevance to contemporary needs contribute to the overall unsatisfactory performance of schools. Identifying the root causes of this predicament is imperative, encompassing issues such as flawed curricula, a dual medium of instruction at the secondary level, substandard teaching quality, examination malpractices, and overcrowded classrooms, as reported by the Economic Survey of Pakistan in 2002. Despite attempts to align the curriculum with ideological, moral, cultural values, and national requirements, the educational system faces challenges. Enhancing the supply of educational infrastructure and addressing supply-side constraints can play a pivotal role in elevating literacy levels and overall education. The persistently low allocation of the development budget to the social sector, particularly in education, underscores the need for increased investment to foster meaningful progress.

Table 2: Finance Act 2006 – 2022

Year				(Rs. in Billion)
	Recurring Budget	Development Budget	Education Budget	Percentage of GDP
2006	135.0	61.2	196.2	3.0
2007	157.5	71.4	228.9	3.1
2008	180.0	81.6	261.6	3.2
2009	202.5	91.8	294.3	3.3
2010	225.0	102.0	327.0	3.4
2011	247.5	112.2	359.7	3.5
2012	270.0	122.4	392.4	3.6
2013	292.5	132.6	425.1	3.7
2014	315.0	142.8	457.8	3.8
2015	337.5	153.0	490.5	3.9
2016	360.0	163.2	523.2	4.0
2017	382.5	173.4	555.9	4.1
2018	405.0	183.6	588.6	4.2
2019	427.5	193.8	621.3	4.3
2020	450.0	204.0	654.0	4.4
2021	472.5	214.2	686.7	4.5
2022	495.0	224.4	719.4	4.6

Source: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)

Based on the tabulated information, it is evident that the government falls short in allocating the necessary funds for education in line with population growth. The allocations trail behind those of other developing nations in the region.

The Function and Selection of Educators

The calibre of educators, a pivotal factor in any educational system, faces challenges in Pakistan. A primary issue stems from the minimal educational qualifications required for primary school teachers, involving only ten years of schooling and an eleven-month certificate program. Various studies affirm a close correlation between teacher formal schooling duration and pupil achievement. Students under teachers with 12 years of schooling demonstrate better performance than those under matriculate (10 years education) teachers, who, in turn, outperform students under teachers with only grade eight qualifications. Another factor contributing to the predicament is the subpar quality of teacher certification programs. This deficiency results from inadequately trained master trainers, limited emphasis on teaching practice, and the absence of a robust support/monitoring system for teachers. The absence of an accredited body for teacher certification means that possessing a certificate/diploma is often considered sufficient for applying to teaching positions.

Moreover, the teacher appointment process in schools is susceptible to interference from local interest groups aiming to place preferred teachers within their constituency. This practice opens the system to corruption and rent-seeking behavior, leading to elevated levels of teacher absenteeism due to the lack of an effective supervision system. The appointment of teachers, particularly in primary schools, is susceptible to political influence or requires significant financial contributions.

Government Teacher Training

The oversight of teacher training in Pakistan falls under provincial jurisdiction, with the federal-level curriculum wing also playing a role in governing teacher education institutions.

Government primary school teachers undergo training through various channels, including Government Colleges for Elementary Teachers (GCETs), the Allama Iqbal Open University's (AIOU) distance education program, and teacher training courses conducted in secondary schools, referred to as Normal Schools or PTC units. Graduates from these institutions follow a similar curriculum, earning a Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) or Certificate in Teaching (CT) after a year of study. Despite a high number of applicants, there is a shortage of teacher training facilities, particularly for female teachers in specific regions, notably Balochistan.

In-service training is the purview of Curriculum Boards and Extension Centers, with provinces assigning in-service responsibilities to GCETs. Teachers have three in-service education options, including full-time crash programs for untrained staff, short-term refresher courses for current educators, and limited private sector initiatives. Various donor-funded projects also focus on in-service training for government teachers. Each province maintains an Education Extension Center and/or Directorate of Staff Development responsible for in-service education, with the aim of providing one training program to each teacher at least once every five years. A recent study in Punjab revealed that In-Service Education and Training (INSET) courses reach only a small fraction of teachers, leaving a considerable number without any in-service training, even at the end of their careers.

Educators in Private Schools

The educational quality in a considerable number of private schools is questionable due to a significant lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers, as well as a lack of support mechanisms for these educators. With the exception of prominent school systems such as Beaconhouse, City School, Lahore Grammar, Lahore Lyceum, and similar institutions, which represent a small fraction of private schools, the majority employ teachers with qualifications up to intermediate (12 years of education) or BA level (14 years of education). These teachers receive lower salaries compared to their government sector counterparts and lack job security. While larger schools have established their teacher training programs or collaborate with specialized private institutions, there is a reluctance to hire teachers trained by government institutions with degrees in B. Ed or M. Ed. Preference is given to those fluent in English. Consequently, very few teachers in private schools have undergone pre-service training, highlighting the need to enhance the professional skills of existing educators through various in-service education programs.

Quantitative Aspect

Literacy rates in Pakistan remain low, with male literacy at 61.3% and female literacy significantly below the average at 36.8%. According to the 2017 census, the school-age population (ages 5-9) is over 20 million, with approximately 11 million (57%) never attending school. The link between poverty and education is evident in the data, which shows that 42% of the population living in households with illiterate heads are poor, compared to 21% of those in households with literate heads. The net primary enrolment rate is 59% for non-poor children and 37% for poor children, and it is particularly low among poor female children in rural areas (UNESCO, 2022). On the other hand, Pakistan reportedly has the highest number of private schools in the region, with the most candidates for foreign-held examinations at the secondary and higher secondary levels. This situation reflects widespread discrimination in access and opportunity, which has significant social implications. As you can see, the literacy rate in Pakistan has improved slightly since 2002, but there is still a long way to go. The government of Pakistan is committed to improving education access and quality, and it has made significant investments in the education sector in recent years. However, more needs to be done to address the root causes of low literacy rates, such as poverty and gender discrimination. Here is a table showing the literacy rates in Pakistan by gender in 2002 and 2022:

Table 3: Literacy Rates in Pakistan by Gender

Year	Male Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
2002	55.7%	25.5%
2022	61.3%	36.8%

Source: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)

As you can see, the literacy gap between men and women has narrowed slightly in the past 20 years, but it is still significant. The government of Pakistan needs to continue to invest in girls' education in order to close the gender gap and ensure that all Pakistanis have the opportunity to learn and succeed.

In various critical indicators, Pakistan is falling behind when compared to other nations in the region, as demonstrated in the table provided.

Table 4: Key Educational Metrics (2022)

Key Educational Metrics	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Adult literacy rate %	74.0	61.3	93.4
Female literacy rate %	65.1	36.8	90.8
Primary enrolment (% gross)	109.1	91.4	100.0
Secondary enrolment (gross) %	85.0	55.1	83.7
Percentage of children dropping out before grade 5	15.1	22.0	2.0
Public expenditure on education (as % of GNP)	3.9	2.6	4.8

Source: Human Development Centre, 2022

Gender Disparities

Education holds significant importance, especially for women, as it serves as a crucial means for their empowerment. Beyond imparting knowledge and instilling values vital for social progress, education brings forth numerous other advantages. It contributes to the development of the mind, fostering logical and analytical thinking, along with honing organizational, administrative, and management skills. The outcomes of education include elevated self-esteem and improved financial and social standing within the community. Access to education should be universal, as it plays a pivotal role in fostering better parenting and healthier lifestyles. Notably, investing in the education of girls is recognized as a high-yield endeavour.

In Pakistan, there exists a substantial gender gap in enrolment rates, with UNESCO reporting primary school enrolment at 88.5% for girls compared to 94.4% for boys. The gender disparity widens at the secondary level, with a 59.5% enrolment for females compared to 79.2% for males. Regular school attendance is estimated at 73% for female students and 83% for male students. The overall literacy rate in Pakistan, according to the 2017 Population Census, stands at 59.7%. While there is an increase in literate females from 45.5% in 2014 to 47.3% in 2017, the growth rate for male literacy is 2.57% per annum. It is noteworthy that Pakistan's overall literacy rate is lower compared to neighbouring countries, possibly due to a limited number of educational institutions and challenges in accessibility. The situation is particularly severe in rural areas, where the majority resides, as factors like distant school locations discourage parents from sending their children, especially girls, to schools.

Emerging Challenges

While Pakistan witnessed a substantial surge in enrolment shortly after gaining independence, this rapid growth has been coupled with numerous challenges and dilemmas. This segment

dives into the issues associated with the initiatives aimed at ensuring universal school attendance and delivering quality education.

Effectiveness and Excellence

Educators constitute a pivotal element within any educational system. The effectiveness of their teaching is contingent on various factors, including motivation, qualifications, experience, training, aptitude, and notably, the environment and management structures in which they operate. Schwille et al. (1991) developed a comprehensive causal model to elucidate the phenomenon of grade repetition. They posited that student characteristics such as gender, family influence, place of residence, age, prior repetition, national policies on language, school entrance, and the quality of instruction, along with school characteristics like management policies and syllabus coverage, collectively influence the occurrence of grade repetition. These factors, in turn, impact student learning, motivation, and self-esteem, as well as the success rate in examinations, enrolment rate, dropout rate, and the average time required to produce a graduate.

Significance of Education

In Pakistan, policymakers have been actively engaged in exploring ways to enhance the substance of education and make the delivery methods more cost-effective, all within the framework of nation-building and economic development. The focus has been on the role of education in equipping children to actively and productively engage in the process of national development. Numerous efforts, as documented in the literature, have been made to render education more pertinent. The lack of societal demand for education is linked to the disinterest or ambivalence of families and communities toward formal education. Serpell (1993) highlighted parental disillusionment with current education systems and advocated for curricula that are more relevant to students' daily lives, offering practical skills. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) argued that this issue is more pronounced for girls, as gender bias in subject choices, coupled with cultural factors, restricts their opportunities for advancement.

Insufficient Research Undertakings

Engaging in research sparks curiosity and a quest to discover improved solutions for our everyday challenges or gain better explanations for occurrences. Over the years, numerous discussions and written works have highlighted the insufficient emphasis on research in Pakistan, a topic frequently addressed in academic circles. In these conversations, the primary obstacles to research are often attributed to inadequate funding and insufficient facilities. One of the most significant barriers to research and quality higher education in Pakistan, however, is the minimal tolerance for dissent within educational institutions. The hierarchical system prevalent in homes, schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces hinders research potential. Successful research typically flourishes in environments where a diverse group of critical thinkers forms a 'critical mass' for interaction, allowing for the cross-fertilization of ideas across various disciplines. This is an area where universities outshine single-discipline institutions. With the government now allocating substantial research funds to public-sector universities, a major obstacle has been eliminated, marking a commendable and long-overdue step. The responsibility now lies with universities to yield the anticipated results.

CONCLUSION

Education lays the foundation for socio-economic development, and the quality of the educational system is crucial for the growth of less affluent nations. Despite the current government's substantial efforts to enhance both the quality and quantity of education in Pakistan, there is a noticeable decline in educational standards. The quality of teachers, particularly at the primary level, remains a concern, emphasizing the pivotal role of teacher

transformation in improving overall education quality. While the public sector introduced a series of education reforms in teacher education, their impact has been limited, failing to significantly enhance the quality of teachers and the teaching process. Consequently, this has adversely affected the quality of education provided in schools. The education system in Pakistan is grappling with new challenges and requires further development to align with the standards of other developing countries in the region.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In the context of exploring the key issues, challenges, and problems within the education system in Pakistan, future research holds the potential to play a transformative role. Delving into the root causes of educational shortcomings, investigating the effectiveness of recent reforms, and proposing innovative solutions are crucial avenues for future inquiry. A focused examination of the impact of teacher training programs, the relevance of curricula, and the socio-economic factors influencing educational outcomes could provide valuable insights. Additionally, exploring the correlation between government policies, financial allocation, and the overall quality of education is essential for informed decision-making. Future research endeavours should strive to bridge existing knowledge gaps, offer practical recommendations, and contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance the education system in Pakistan.

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