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Item Type	Article
Authors	Ghazi, Safdar Rehman;Ali, Riasat;Ali Khan, Umar
Publisher	Qurtuba University
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Download date	2026-05-16 22:48:38
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/187834

Dilemma of Primary Education Quality and Suggestive Measures

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Abstract

Improving the quality of education has become a global agenda at all educational levels and more so at the primary level. Although the government of Pakistan also has taken some bold steps in this regard such as; Teachers' Training Programmes, Development of New Curricula, Improvements in Examination and Assessment System, Incentives for Teaching Staff as well as for Students and Introduction of Good Administration and Management but the quality of primary education is still a far cry. There are a variety of reasons for the poor quality of primary education. The main cause as assessed by the authors is the teacher's poor quality pedagogical skills. There is a need to take some special remedial measures to improve the situations in this regard. Especially, establishment of a Quality Education Commission can help in improving the situations.

Introduction

The framework of Education includes many components, namely Teacher and Teaching, Curriculum and Co-curriculum, Examinations and Assessments, Students, Research, and Administration & Management. With the rapid growth in the enrollment of education in Pakistan without any effective accreditation systems, the quality of education is being ignored by most of the institutions at all levels. Strengthening the quality of education has become a global agenda at all educational levels and more so at the primary level. The quality of basic education is important not only for preparing individuals for the subsequent educational levels but to equip them with the requisite basic life skills. In Pakistan, where the primary education system ranks

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among the world's least affective, improving primary teacher education has become a top priority.

According to Mirza, elaborated the system of education in three categories of input, process and output whereas input means resources allocated and used, process denotes to contents, methods of teaching, learning and organization, and output implies to the scale of goodness of pupils who leave school and absorb in different sectors of society.¹

Many people consider the quality of education as the learning outcomes of students. Learning is the desirable change in behavior of the learner and this change in behaviour in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy context is in three domains i.e. cognitive, effective and psychomotor.²

Objectives

Following were the objectives of this study:

- 1). To define and elaborate the concept of quality education.
- 2). To investigate about the theoretical conscious and practical implication of pedagogical skills of the primary teachers for quality education.
- 3). To suggest the measures to bring quality in primary education in Pakistan.

Delimitations

- 1). The quality education can be achieved only if quality is ensured at each level of the educational process from standard setting, learning environment, teacher training, teaching-learning process, assessment and monitoring etc. but this study is delimited to the teaching learning process or pedagogical skills and experiences of the primary teachers with a view point of provided physical facilities relating teaching-learning process for quality education.

- 2). This study was documentary and also delimited by the views and opinions of the five educational experts, forty head teachers and eighty primary teachers of forty government schools equally from primary and elementary schools from five districts of the Punjab.

Methodology

The historical research methods were followed in this research. Investigations were made through documents, literature, experts and stakeholders concerned. All the documents and opinions were explained, and analyzed. Especially most of the projects and programs launched in four provinces of Pakistan for primary education quality were viewed and analyzed. To obtain first hand information, knowledge and opinions were the primary source while the related literature was the secondary source in this study. Survey of forty government primary and elementary schools two for each category from Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Jhang, and Toba Tek Singh, and one school of each category from rural and one from urban of the districts, was the part of this study to get first hand information. Meetings with the head teachers and two senior primary teachers of the sampled schools were also held. Five experts, one from each of the PITE, PEAS, NEAS, DSD, and NUML were also consulted. Then the findings, discussions and conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made.

Review of Related Literature

There are a number of reasons why primary education in Pakistan ranks so poorly. Quality of education in terms of physical facilities is not only important in retaining children in educational institutions but also is critical in attracting out of school children. Level of physical facilities available at most public and private educational institutions in Pakistan is

dismally poor. Although the World Bank loan helped the government in constructing boundary walls and latrines in thousands of schools, particularly those for girls, is an attempt to improve infrastructure facility; much still needs to be done to improve education standards in primary schools. The government has experimented a number of initiatives and interventions for improving quality with national and foreign funding. To improve the quality of education at primary level as well as to get the goal of education for all the NCHD's UPE program is launched in Pakistan with the given objectives:

- a) Achieving 100% enrollment of children in schools (age 5-7) years,
- b) Reducing the dropout rate from the current level, and
- c) Increasing Minimum Learning Achievement (MLA) from existing 33% to 66%, by ensuring quality education through teachers training.

The National Education Policy, 1992, in the context of primary education, clearly mentions the plan to adopt special measures for improving the quality of education.³ In the ESR Action Plan 2001-2005 the strategies for quality improvement and assurance with respect to teaching-learning process is outlined:

- Staff development, teacher education and training, and professional development of planners, managers and staff at all levels.
- Establishment of National Educational Assessment System (NEAS) which has been established
- Strengthening the Teacher Training institutions.⁴

In May 1999 at an international conference entitled *Enhancing Capabilities for Community Participation* held in Karachi, core elements

of quality education; competent teacher and leadership, active engagement of teachers and students in the teaching learning process, a safe and inviting working environment, and basic instructional material were outlined orderly of importance.

At the First Technical Group Meeting of the South Asia EFA Forum held in Islamabad (March 2002), the teacher, learning process and teacher development program were major core elements of quality as identified from a child-centered perspective.⁵

In the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2005 in Pakistan, there is a specific quality clause. Quality assurance is seen as a cross-cutting thrust area out of the seven thrust areas of the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan. For each sub-sector in education, Quality comprises the following features:

- i). Curriculum appropriateness and development.
- ii). Textbooks and supplementary reading materials.
- iii). Assessment for competencies and examinations.
- iv). Teacher ability and training.
- v). Conducive physical environment.⁶

In Ministerial Meeting of South Asia EFA Forum (21-23 May, 2003) the selected successful experiences in quality education are summarized as:

- 1). National Level Experience: National Teaching Kit for Primary Classes
- 2). Supplementary Readers in Punjab
- 3). Primary Education Program-Improvement of Learning Environment (PEP-ILE) NWFP
- 4). Community Support Process. Baluchistan
- 5). Fellowship School Programme in Baluchistan with Replication

in Sindh

- 6). Parent Teacher Association with Special Reference to Federal Area
- 7). Curriculum Reforms Project under PEP-II Project
- 8). Provincial Education Assessment System in NWFP⁷

On the basis of their findings Mirza, et al (2003), considered that the following experiences can be replicated cost effectively with certain modifications for primary education quality:

1. Teaching Kit: Updated Teaching Kit with provisions of replacement and necessary teacher training at center school level. The preparation cost per Teaching Kit is Rs. 3000/-
2. Supplementary Readers: A library of 100 titles with five copies of each can be established at a cost of Rs. 4000/- only. Additional cost may be required for providing a cupboard for the readers.
3. Improved Learning Environment (PEP-ILE): A coherent decentralized plan of continuous teacher training, monitoring and evaluation can be established at the pattern of PEP-ILE in other provinces.
4. Scientific Preparation of Textbooks and Teacher Guides: Books should be tested before scale implementation. The programme be linked with teacher training and follow-up in the classrooms.
5. The National Education Assessment System should be developed for the purpose of monitoring learning achievement and providing feedback on various elements of the educational system and process.
6. Fellowship School Programme It has special value for remote areas which do not have a school. For four years, the government

funds a subsidy of Rs. 2,500 per student; and subsequently the school is handed over to the community.

7. School Community Participation: Programmes and formal structures involving community and parents such as PTAs, School Councils, Village Education Committees, Women Village Education Committees, Parent Education Councils etc. can be established according to the local needs and context.

According to Mirza, in Pakistan scarce material resources and lack of technical human resources is a great barrier in the way of quality education.⁸

Discussion

Improvement in the quality, efficiency, and equity of education, to a considerable extent, depends on the nexus of teaching and learning, which in turn is influenced by the quality of teachers. The importance of teacher as key figure in the education process has always been recognized. The most recent National Education Policy 1998-2010 also recognizes that the teacher is considered the most crucial factor in implementing all educational reforms at the grass-root level. The quality of public primary school is a matter of concern both in terms of number of teachers provided and their qualifications. Most of teachers are not well qualified with the lack of resources. A teacher with such a profile has to teach almost in a difficult context, an environment of least facilities and support.

Findings and Conclusions

After a careful review and analysis it was found that the following four experiences with respect to teacher and his pedagogical skills were the main failure:

- 1). Teaching Kit is supplied in mid seventies but never updated or repaired and most of the teachers do not use teaching kit while teaching the students and no proper way/care is adopted for the use and maintenance. Teachers are not aware of the proper use of the teaching kit and they hesitate to use it due to lack of usage knowledge as well as due to fear of breakage.
- 2). Science Kit was also provided in elementary schools which can be used successfully at elementary level as well as for primary classes but most of the teachers do not use it at any level due to lack of knowledge and the fear of breakage.
- 3). Punjab Textbook Board published many Supplementary Readers and venturing on more to increase interest of the students for reading and comprehension but the lack of teacher's interest and maintenance most of students even can not find any chance to touch the Supplementary Readers in whole period of their studies especially at primary level. Textbooks, copy of curriculum and resource material for teacher have never been provided.
- 4). In-service Teacher Training Programme was prepared to enable teachers to create a conducive environment for the child and carry out child oriented and activity based learning. Textbooks, workbooks and teacher guides have been prepared for different subjects. The material has been designed for activity based learning but practically due to lack of teacher's interest and inefficiency, no child-centered and activity-based teaching-learning approach can be observed in almost all the schools.

In the above mentioned context of failure, among the most prominent challenges faced by teachers today in Pakistan are lack of training opportunities and teacher education standards. It is also

concluded that the quality of teacher and his pedagogical skills is the most critical aspect of schooling and that it has a direct impact on student learning. The changes that are made to the education system as a whole need to support and encourage the commitment of the teachers as they are the most valuable resource for improving primary education throughout Pakistan. There are five key areas that are critical for a quality education system:

- Teacher education policies and practices,
- Well-defined role, structure and function of teacher education institutes,
- Recognized role of teacher educators as leaders and managers,
- Open dialogue on issues and challenges in teacher education, and
- Innovative practices and interventions in teacher education.

Recommendations

What is quality? How can we effectively measure it? How can we achieve it? How can we improve it? How much does it cost? What results should we expect if we spend the money? What is happening in the school and classroom, specifically teaching and learning processes? To answer such questions it is a need of time to establish a permanent teacher/quality education commission with the vision:

- Presently working NEAS at federal level and PEAS, PITE, DSD etc. at provincial level should be merged in the commission or let them working as sub departments/wings of it.
- The government should allocate at least 6% of the GNP to education in which more than 1% should be reserved for the commission and purpose.
- The Commission must look at educational researches, classroom practices, public values and professional opinions. Using this

data, a model should also be developed that will set a cost per student at a prototype primary then multiplies that cost by the number of students at each level. Each prototype would provide a vision of a high-performing school with goals for class size, number of teachers and specialists, help for students having trouble, materials and supplies, technology and more.

- Scientifically developed learning materials, tools, and teacher guides can change the classroom teaching-learning environment and infuse confidence among teachers. Therefore the scientific preparation of textbooks and teacher guides should be tested before scale implementation. The programme can be linked with teacher training and follow-up in the classrooms.
- Updated Teaching and Science Kits with provisions of replacement and necessary teacher training at center school level should be provided.
- Teacher education standard has become an indispensable feature of the teacher education system. The teachers have hardly any opportunity for systematic in-service training. On-the-job training, monitoring and guidance are nearly non-existent. Provision of training facilities near the teachers' homes/posting places under decentralized cascade training model are very effective for in-service teacher training. A coherent decentralized plan of continuous teacher training, monitoring and evaluation should be established. Follow-up, monitoring and support have been very effective to intensify teacher training and to ensure its application in the classrooms.
- There is also need to make a good public-private partnership and to encourage private organizations for promotion of quality

education in Pakistan. In this regard private sector can also be motivated to take steps to enhance the quality of education and to publish more children literature, and to establish libraries in schools or provision of cupboards for Supplementary Readers, books and other material.

- The commission must also engage/arrange National and International Conferences on Quality Assurance in Education with the important goals such as under:
- To share experiences and good practices of Education Quality in Pakistan,
- To generate a collective wisdom, vision, and strategies for high quality education,
- To enhance the knowledge of Quality Assurance processes in Education,
- To benchmark with international good practices and be at par with them,
- To network with each other on Quality in Education,
- To integrate Education with the required social, national and ethical norms,
- To start publication of children magazine, on monthly, biannual, or quarterly basis, and
- To publish monthly journal titled as “Muallam” specifically meant for teachers’ ideas and sharing experiences with one another.
- The commission may derive its guidelines to focus on sharing the best practices of quality education and explore, analyze and synthesize the successful methodologies and strategies that have resulted in good quality of outcomes in education. Topics of

interest focusing around improving the quality of education may also be concluded and included from time to time such as:

- Model cases, examples, creative ideas and good practices in Educational Institutions,
- Analysis and good practices of teachers, curriculum and assessment systems,
- Code of Ethics and the social dimension of Teachers and Students,
- Meeting the challenges for uplifting the socio-economic conditions of teachers,
- How well are teachers prepared on teaching methods and class room leadership,
- Enhancing the effectiveness of teachers' performance measuring systems,
- Analysis of Best Teachers Award being used in different institutions, and
- Good Leadership Practices in Educational Institutions.

Endnotes:

¹ M. S.Mirza, *Quality of Primary Education in Pakistan*, Ministry of Education: Government of Pakistan, 2003.

² B. S. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, New York, David McKay Company Inc., 1956

³ National Education Policy, *Ministry of Education*, Govt. of Pakistan, 1992.

⁴ Education Sector Reforms: Action Plan 2001-2005, *Ministry of Education*, Govt. of Pakistan, 2002

⁵ Mohammad Saleem, Country Paper on Quality of Education for Technical Group Meeting of South Asian Forum, *Ministry of Education*, 2002

⁶ Education Sector Reforms: Action Plan 2001-2005.

⁷ Mohammad Saleem, Country Paper on Quality of Education for Technical Group Meeting of South Asian Forum.

⁸ M. S.Mirza, *Quality of Primary Education in Pakistan*