

Women Education: A Real Obstacle in Achieving Universal Primary Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research study was aimed to explore if women education is real hurdle in the attainment of universal primary education in Pakistan. This research study used data collected from National Education Policies documents from 1947 to 2017 and statistical data from Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19 and Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17. The major finding of the study was that in almost all education policies of Pakistan, target was set for the attainment of universal primary education but no target was achieved. The study found that majority of female population is illiterate and their gross enrollment and net enrollment is considerably less than male students. It was also found that a substantive amount of school children are out of schools, majority of them were female. This trend exists in most parts of the country and in some parts the situation even worse. It is recommended that policy formulation should be based on comprehensive documentation on the impact of gender on economy and specifically on universal primary education.

Keywords: Universal primary education, Women education, Education policies

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Introduction

National development is largely dependent on the quality of education. It has been considered the most powerful agent of change in the society (Khan, 2007). It provides skilled and educated labor force to the market which increases the productivity of a nation and leads to economic development. It also improved the quality of life of individual that contribute to the development of any society as whole. Education promotes creativity among people that encourages entrepreneurship and technological development (Ozturk, 2008). Primary education is considered the most important and fundamental pillar of education system. It provides feeds to secondary and higher education. Governments all over the world are promoting primary education and consider it the most important element for development. It provides a base to the whole educational system, which is expected to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens of any country. Primary education and the gross national product are deeply intertwined and its impact can be seen in more than 110 developed and developing countries. Twenty-two East Asian and Latin American countries have developed economically through the development and patronization of primary education (Majumdar, 2020).

The importance of primary education has been recognized globally. It is the most important goal of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which states that “children universally – including both boys and girls – will be able to complete a full course of primary education by 2015.” It has been observed that by 2015 massive progress has been made to achieve universal primary education in developed world but in developing countries the situation is not satisfactory, nearly 250 million children were estimated without basic skills. These children were either out of school or those who had completed up to four grades of primary education. (Young, 2017)

Pakistan like other developing nations of the world is determined to achieve universal primary education. It remained the focus of all education policies of Pakistan since its inception. The all Pakistan National Education Conference (1947) highlighted that “National education should be based on strong foundations of free and compulsory primary education and maximum resources should be utilize to provide primary education to all the citizens”. National commission on Education (1959) claimed that compulsory primary education is indispensable for skilled manpower and recognized its central role in the development for a newly born nation. The National Education Policy (1970) re-affirmed government pledge to provide compulsory primary education to its citizens irrespective of their gender, race and creed. The Education National Policy (1972) also highlighted the importance of primary education and claimed that illiteracy will be eradicated through primary education within the shortest possible time. The National

Education Policy (1992) showed it's concerned on illiteracy and low participation of children in primary education. The policy recommended that illiteracy will be eradicated through formal and non-formal education and 100% enrolment of school going children will be insured at primary level. The National Education Policy (2009) recommended that all the provincial and local governments should focus on primary education by providing free compulsory primary education to its people and shall work hard to provide universal primary education to achieve millennium developments goals. The current National Education Policy (2017) highlighted the gaps and weakness in the existing education system and showed its commitment to devise different strategies for the promotion of basic education on priority bases. It also stated that commitments at international forums by government of Pakistan will be fulfilled for this purpose.

Pakistan has developed detailed and inspired education policies throughout the history since 1947. Primary education has been the prime focus of all the education policies so far but this objective has not been achieved. Research studies have identified many reasons that were responsible for not achieving the targets set by the education policies of Pakistan. Unrealistic targets, political commitment and instability, successive wars, financial restraints, insufficient educational services, untrained teachers, poor quality of education and political well were the dominant factors that lead to the failure of these of policies. (Ali, 2013; Ali, 2006; Barber, 2010; Bengali, 1999; Khan 1997; Qurteshi, 2008; Siddiqui, 2016; Zakar, 2013). New education policies have been prepared regularly throughout the history of Pakistan but no consideration had been given to factors that cause the failure of these policies (Ahsan 2003).

Pakistan is striving to increase its literacy rate to achieve universal primary education. Currently the country stands at the bottom and is ranked 113 out of 120 countries falling in the list of nations having the lowest literacy rate in world (United Nations, 2010). Economic Survey of Pakistan (2010) documented that the overall literacy rate is 57.7% with gender discrimination favoring males. Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey 2014-15 stated that huge gender gaps exist in literacy rate of Pakistan and only 49 % women are literate as compared to 70 % males (Govt of Pakistan, 2015). Women comprise of nearly fifty two percent of Pakistan's total population and in the words of Azam (1993) that no society can grow where majority of its population is deprived of their basic right to education. The target of attaining universal primary education is indispensable for the country's development but it may remain wishful thinking until the participation of all segments of the population. This study was based on the hypothesis that depriving women of education is the real obstacle in achieving the targets of universal primary education in Pakistan Therefore; this study was carried out to explore the role of women education in achieving the goal of universal primary education in Pakistan.

This study used archival data collected from from national education policies documents from 1947 to 2017 to analyze the targets sets by these policy documents to achieve universal primary education in Pakistan. The study also used quantitative data collected from Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19 and Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17. The quantitative data were analyzed to find out the role of women education in achieving universal primary education.

Data Analysis

Table 1

Targets for Universal Primary Education (1947-2017)

S #	Policies	Target years
1	All Pak Education Conference (1947)	1967
2	National Education Commission (1959)	1969
3	Education Policy (1972)	1979
4	Education Policy (1979)	1986
5	Education Policy (1992)	2002
6	Education Policy (1998-2010)	2010
7	Education Sector Reforms (2001-06)	2004
8	Education for All (2000-2015)	2015
9	National Education policy 2017	Boys 2020 Girls 2025

Table-1 show education policies of Pakistan and the number of years required for achieving stated targets of universal primary education. It further shows that despite being allocation of targets in specific period of years, still none of the policy could achieve UPE in given frame of time.

Table 2

Province-wise and location-wise Literacy Rates in Pakistan

Province/Area	Total	Male	Female
Pakistan	62.3	72.5	51.8
Rural	53.3	66.3	40.5
Urban	76.6	82.2	70.6
KP	55.3	73.3	38.5
Rural	52.7	71.6	35.3
Urban	66.8	80.4	53.3
Punjab	64.7	72.2	57.4
Rural	56.9	66.5	47.8
Urban	77.2	80.9	73.3
Sindh	62.2	72.8	49.9
Rural	44.1	60.1	25.7
Urban	78.4	84.3	71.7
Balochistan	55.5	73.0	33.5
Rural	50.5	68.9	26.8
Urban	68.5	84.2	50.1

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19

Table 2, shows that literacy rate of Pakistan is 62.3%. Out of total male population 72.5% are literate. While out of total female population only 51% are literate. Which means that majority of female population is illiterate. Almost same trend exist is in all provinces of Pakistan.

Table 3

Enrolment in Primary level by Gender and Location 2016-17

Province/region	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Punjab	5,486,303	(52.23)	5,017,651	(47.76)	10,503,954
Sindh	2,317,893	(58.91)	1,616,090	(41.08)	3,933,983
KP	1,863,273	(58.90)	1,299,754	(41.09)	3,163,027
Balochistan	400,204	(66.26)	203,771	(33.73)	603,975
AJK	207,402	(52.17)	190,123	(47.82)	397,525
Gilgit Baltistan	78,654	(56.13)	61,458	(43.86)	140,112
FATA	263,143	(64.64)	143,889	(35.35)	407,032
ICT	106,033	(52.43)	96,193	(47.56)	202,226
Total	10,722,905	(55.41)	8,628,929	(44.58)	19,351,834
Population	26,751,402	(51.91)	24,778,703	(48.08)	51,530,105

Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17

Table 3 shows that out of the total students enrolled in primary level 55, 41% were male students and 44.58% were female students. Which means that female enrollment is far less than male students. This trend exists mostly in Punjab, Azad Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad. The situation is even worse in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan.

Table 4

5-16 age groups Out of School Children (OOSC) 2016-17

Stage	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Population	26,751,402	(51.91)	24,778,703	(48.08)	51,530,105
Gross enrolment	19,179,590	(56.07)	15,025,630	(43.92)	34,205,220
Net Enrolment	16,068,196	(56.01)	12,617,606	(43.98)	28,685,802
OOSC	10,683,206	(46.76)	12,161,097	(53.23)	22,844,303

Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17

Table 4, shows the difference between male and female population, gross enrolment, net enrolment and out of school children. The Gross enrolment ratio for male students was 51.91% and for female students were 43.92%. The Net Enrolment ration for male students was 56.07% and for female students were 43.98%. In total Out of School Children (OOSC) 46.76% were male students and 53.23% were female students. This shows that majority of female students were deprived of basic right to primary education in Pakistan which is the main obstacle in achieving universal primary education in Pakistan.

Table 5
Primary Schools by gender and location

Province/ Region	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Total
Punjab	21,196	17,070	21,249	59,515
Sindh	30,310	9,298	2,822	42,430
KP	13,580	8,757	1,863	24,200
Balochistan	8,662	3,257	393	12,312
AJK	2,309	1,913	704	4,926
Gilgit Baltistan	550	274	239	1,063
FATA	2,940	2,137	27	5,104
ICT	116	80	383	579
Pakistan	79,663	42,786	27,680	150,129

Source: *Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17*

Table 5 shows region-wise numbers of schools for boys and girls. This shows that there are 150,129 total primary schools in Pakistan out which 79,663 (53.06 %) were male schools, 42,786 (28.49 %) are female schools and 27,680 (18.43%) are mixed school. This means that the numbers of girl's schools are almost as half in numbers than boys.

Results and Discussions

This study investigated the role of women education in the achievement of universal primary education in Pakistan. The study found that targets were sets to achieve universal primary education in almost all education policies documents of Pakistan. But no target has so far been achieved due to various reasons. Since independence governments in Pakistan have recognized education as a basic human right and free compulsory education for all has been supported by successive governments. Shaukat (2017) highlighted that Pakistan pledged to achieve the targets of universal primary education by 2015 but in spite of several positive signs, it failed to achieve the targets. Research studies shows that gender discrimination (Malik, 2015) meager allocation of funds (Ahmad, 2012), lack of infrastructure (Memon, 2007) are the barriers in the way of achieving the desired results. The history of policy making showed that these policies have not been implemented and there is need to implement these policies.

The literacy and education of woman can make fundamental difference in the development of economic, scientific and cultural potential at national level (Raza, 2010). Education for All (EFA) (2000) puts significant emphasis on women's education and proposed that women education can be increased through the elimination of gender disparities at all levels of education, but the targets set by international forums and education policies of Pakistan for the development of education is still far from satisfactory. The state of education at all level and particularly women education is in miserable condition.

The study found that majority of female population is illiterate and female gross enrollment and net enrollment is considerably less than male students. It was also found that a large number of school children are out of schools, majority of them are female children and the numbers of girl's schools are almost as half in numbers than boys. This trend exists mostly in highly populated province of Punjab, the state of Azad Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad. The situation is even worse in other federating units of the country like Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). It is evident that woman education is the most obvious reasons that mostly contribute to the lack of education in Pakistan (Afzal, 2013). Women are deprived of education because of different reasons. These reasons are mostly social, economic and cultural. Gender prejudices is also being consider an important reasons due to which they are unable to play active role in the development of society (Faridi, 2009). The World Bank reports on education highlighted that in Pakistan average years of education for female are only 2.5 whereas male receive five years of average education. a huge gender differences exist in rural and urban areas of Pakistan. The completion rate of primary school education for female students is three times lower than that of boys in rural areas and in urban areas the completion rate of primary education for female education is twice low than male students (Herz, 2004). The low female literacy rate in both rural and urban areas clearly indicated that spending on human development clearly inclined towards male (Skalli, 2001).

Culturally Pakistani society is considered not gender friendly and in some part of the country in rural area women education is not accepted. Due to which the literacy rate of Pakistani women remains the lowest in the world. Also, the education sector as whole has been neglected by all the successive governments of Pakistan. This neglect of education sectors further leads to the deprivation of women education in both urban and rural areas (Sattar, 2012). Women education has been considered is controversial subject since its introduction to the existing education system in sub-continent. Women have not been given equal opportunities to play their due role in the development of society because they have been deprived their basic right to education. Women have been provided limited opportunities to obtain higher education (Khan, 2007). Extreme poverty, social and cultural restrains and rigid and traditional attitudes of family are the reasons that deprived women of education and their role in the development of a society.

It is important to note that an educated woman who receives basic education can offer more to their children than uneducated women. The parents in Pakistani society deprived their daughters from their basic right to education due to social norms and customs. There is need that government should take extra measure to provide basic education to all the woman without any discrimination. The government and educators should work together to provide every opportunities to the women of this country. Once

parents realized that investing in their daughters education is very much important for their own well being and economic development of the nation, many problems will be solved including the achievement of universal primary education in Pakistan.

Conclusion

It was concluded that majority of female population is illiterate and a large number of school children are out of schools, majority of them are female children, and this trend can be seen in all the provinces of Pakistan which is the real obstacle in achieving universal primary education.

Recommendations

It was recommended that policy formulation should be based on comprehensive documentation on the impact of women education on economy and primary education. The policies need to be implemented in real spirits and national commitment. Ministry of Education may be sensitized to promote access to education for women. More funds may be allocated to the disadvantage regions to provide equal access to education focusing on women.

The government should open new girl's schools within easy reach of the children. Making education free and granting concession to poor and meritorious girl students in the form of scholarship. Efforts should be made to enforce compulsory primary education on all the school going children. There is need to create a social climate in rural community to enroll their daughters in school. Convenience such as adjustment of school timings and vacation to suit local needs and conditions may be provided to promote women education. Shift system may be introduced in the regions where coeducation is not acceptable. The federal, provincial and local government should join hands with community and volunteer organizations for the expansion of woman education in every corner of Pakistan.

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