

Prime Ministers' Initiative to Impose Educational Emergency in Pakistan: Stakeholders Perceptions

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Abstract

The education sector in Pakistan has been experiencing a long-term crisis of low levels of literacy, high rate of out of school children, gender differences, lack of proper infrastructure and teaching and learning. To solve these ongoing problems, the Prime Minister of Pakistan announced an Educational Emergency, to hasten reforms and to deal with structural failures. The qualitative research discusses the perceptions of the stakeholders towards the Prime Minister initiative to introduce an emergency in the educational sector of Pakistan and whether the initiative stands any chance of making a significant difference or it will be just another political slogan, as evident in previous policy programs. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data of fifteen important stakeholders/interviewees including parents, teachers, students, researchers, and education experts. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results show that although the stakeholders are generally aware of the gravity of the educational crisis and embrace the declaration of an educational crisis, there is a lot of doubt about the seriousness of the government, its ability to implement and the willingness to devote budgetary resources. Respondents pointed out that the success of the initiative requires more funds, reforms in governance, training of teachers, building of infrastructure and involvement of the communities. The research determines that in the absence of proper planning, sufficient financial distribution and well-established accountability systems, the declaration of an education emergency would not lead to sustainable educational reform in Pakistan.

Keywords: Prime Ministers' Initiative, Educational Emergency, Stakeholders Perceptions

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Introduction

An emergency is a sudden, unexpected or worst situation that requires immediate action due to its potential to cause harm, danger, or significant disruption. Education emergency is considered as an urgent situation that depicts clear evidence of occurrence of series of events which cause human or societal suffering and condition of failing to achieve stated goals of education or process. It is an undesirable and dangerous situation causing irreparable loss to society. It requires immediate action to improve the situation. If emergent situation is not dealt with, it generates incurable loss to the society. Pakistan is suffering from the problems of illiteracy, gender inequality, access to education, and lack of physical infrastructure in schools. These problems are causing high rates of poverty, hunger, environmental degradation and illiteracy and backwardness in science and technology in the country.

The world bank report revealed that 26.2 million children of age 5-16 years are out of school in Pakistan. Pakistan is signatory of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012 and Millennium development goals (MDGs) adopted at millennium Summit in September 2000 held at the [United Nations Headquarters in New York City](#). The State of Pakistan had promised with international community to bring all out of school children in the schools till 2015 thereby achieving the goal of 70 percent literacy rate in Pakistan. It is interesting to note that Pakistan had promised in the constitution of Pakistan under article 25A “that free and compulsory education is right of each child age from 5 to 16 without any discrimination”. It is unfortunate that Pakistan has failed time and again to fulfil its constitutional and international promises. Review of different five-year development plans and education policies in Pakistan revealed that government has set the target of achieving the 100 percent literacy rate in the country had failed to achieve the targets. It is the reason that Prime Minister of Pakistan has declared the educational emergency in Pakistan. He stated that after the 18th amendment the education is provincial subject while I hope provinces will cooperate to deal with the degrading situation of education in Pakistan. It is important to study the opinion of different stakeholder ie parents, teacher, students, researcher and educational experts to get opinion on the initiative and developing an implementation plan for government.

At least 8 percent of GDP may be allocated for educational budget to make educational emergency drive effective and efficient

An educational emergency refers to a crisis situation that significantly disrupts or endangers the education system, affecting students' access to learning

An educational emergency in a local context refers to a crisis situation within a specific community, region, or country that severely disrupts the education system and hampers students' ability to access or continue their education. Poor governance shows non-seriousness of government towards education, allocation of poor budgets. In such cases, students may miss out on critical learning opportunities, leading to gaps in education that can have long-term effects on their academic progress and future prospects.

The local government, the non-governmental organizations and the community leaders are frequently forced to respond to the educational crisis fast. They may establish learning facilities on temporary basis, hand out learning resources or introduce distance learning facilities. This is to ensure that regardless of the crisis, students still get an education and the disruption does not cause permanent education disruption. Local response to educational emergencies is a complex problem that needs a localized solution that takes into account the needs and resources of the affected population.

It can be noted that to tackle educational emergencies at the international level, governments, non-governmental bodies, and the international community should act collectively to ensure that not a single child is sidelined even during a crisis. Such actions are crucial to the continuity of the national educational development and creation of strong education systems capable of withstanding future crisis (INEE, 2018). In a bid to transform Pakistan into one of the most educated countries in the world, Prime Minister of Pakistan has declared an Education Emergency in Pakistan to enroll some 26 million children who are not in school today. In a National Conference on Education Emergency that was held in Islamabad, the Prime Minister highlighted his intentions to deal with this important challenge.

In his speech to a meeting of federal ministers, parliamentarians, vice-chancellors, diplomats and development partners, Prime Minister Sharif stated that he would personally monitor the program and will liaise with all provincial chief ministers in a move that could see this program implemented successfully. The Prime Minister talked about his intention to enroll the high number of out-of-school children and gave his record of success in his tenure as the Chief Minister of Punjab in the education sector. He observed that he had once been successful in getting 90,000 children of the brick kilns to the schools and had transferred 10,000 schools to the Punjab Daanish Authority which offers free and quality education to underprivileged children and boarding facilities. The initial level of free and compulsory education in Pakistan is the primary education. It has five levels of formal

education to children between 5 to 9 years of age. In Pakistan, there are four categories of primary school namely-public, private, religious and self-help schools. English and Urdu are used as the medium of instruction. Wildly is that there is hardly any learning trend of children of pre-primary level of schooling even after introduction of National Education Policy (NEP) 2009. The policy establishes the pre-primary or Katchi entry age as 3 4 years based on one year curriculum, one dedicated teacher and separate room. Katchi grading does not have separate teachers in 95 percent of the public schools because of the scarcity of resources. Formal Katchi classes are not taught in most of the public schools. Provincial governments have recently started adding Katchi classes in certain provincial education plans in some of the public schools. It is a multi-grade environment and therefore the education is very primitive.

Some Raw Statistics

Pakistan has 150,129 primary education facilities in total (131,376 (88 percent) are state-run and 18,753 (12 percent) facilities are operated by the private sector, according to various domestic and international reports. In Pakistan, the total number of children not in schools at the primary level stands at 5 million; 60 percent (girls) and 40 percent (boys) respectively. The number of children in the schools in Pakistan is 18.751 million (primary level); which further can be subdivided to 11.461 million (61 percent) and 7.290 million (39 percent) children in the government and the private sector respectively. Separating the information about total enrolment on primary education, we have 10.471 million boys (55 percent) and 8.280 million girls (45 percent) respectively. Of the total 324,561 teachers in the public sector who are primary school teachers in Pakistan, there are 77 percent and 23 percent in the private sector with 98,236 primary school teachers. The latest available statistics (2018) show that Pakistan has 78 percent teachers trained professionally at the primary school level as compared to the world average of 89.1 percent. When this percentage is disaggregated by gender, bias is obvious since 89 percent of male teachers have received some form of professional training, and 68 percent of female teachers have received any form of such training (Government of Pakistan. (2009).

The 18th Amendment and education.

In Pakistan, primary education became a provincial subject, and the 18 th Amendment to the constitution that was introduced in 2010. The provincial education plans of the post 18 Amendment include strategy formulation that includes:

- Primary education for everyone.

- Curriculum development
- Syllabus planning
- Resource allocation
- School management
- Improvement of infrastructure.
- Quality insurance of primary education access.
- Access to measures that can enhance learning results should be quality assurance.

Article 25-A was added to the constitution concomitant with the 18th Amendment, Article 25-A, which now limited the role of the federal Ministry of Education with the development of the curriculum, its accreditation, and R & D. Free and compulsory education to all children of age group 5 to 16 is made the responsibility of the state in article 15-A. Pakistan has become one of the worst-achieving nations of the South East Asian region regarding access to primary education, its quality and the learning outcomes. This even though it has constitutional guarantees of making primary education free and compulsory in Article 25-A. Literature on the status of primary education offers a lot of evidence on poor performance in comparison with regional comparators. A sector assessment report compiled by the ADB (June 2019) states that Pakistan allocates only 2 percent of gross national product to the education sector and this is certainly a very low figure compared to other countries in the region. Following the 18th Amendment, education was a provincial issue that anticipated that there be more money to fund primary education. Nevertheless, the increase in resource allocation is not apparent and the capacity restraint at provincial and district levels implies that value in resources used in education public spending is not coming through.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were following:

1. to explore the perceptions of stakeholders regarding Prime Ministers' initiative to impose educational emergency in Pakistan whether government efforts will make an improvement in education system or it will be a slogan like different statements, policy initiatives of governments in past.
2. to seek stakeholders' opinions on the strategies to deal the educational emergency.

Research Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature. The participants of the study were different stakeholder ie parents, teacher, students, researcher and educational experts to get opinion on the initiative and developing an implementation plan for government. There were 15 participants of the study. The data was collected through semi structured interviews. The responses on questions of analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings

Theme 1: Concept of Educational emergency

All of fifteen participants had idea about the concept of an educational emergency refers to an urgent crisis in which access to quality education is severely disrupted in different situations.

Theme 2: State of Educational emergency in Pakistan

The findings of the Study show that most of the respondent's state of emergency in Pakistan's education sector suffers from systemic issues, including a lack of sufficient schools, particularly in rural areas, and gender-based disparities that leave many girls without access to basic education. The quality of education is also a major concern, with underqualified teachers, outdated curricula, and poor facilities contributing to low literacy and numeracy rates. The stakeholders complain of general frustration towards the government response towards these problems being very slow and the social and economic constraints that are not allowing people to access education especially the marginalized individuals.

Theme 3: Prime Minister declaration on emergency

The study results show that everyone was conscious of the statement that the Prime Minister made about an educational crisis in Pakistan; their views differed on the severity of the situation and the possible consequences. The declaration was a token recognition of the historical crisis in the education sector in the eyes of most stakeholders who were greatly worried about the number of children who were out of school and the deteriorating quality of education. Trainees were glad that the issue of education was at last given the top priority in the highest level of politics, as they deemed it a good and necessary course to creating national awareness. Irrespective of this recognition, most of the respondents were not optimistic on the practical implications of the declaration. Most of the

respondents mentioned that it was more of a rhetoric as many governments had made such announcements and policy promises before, yet nothing had changed to achieve sustainable reforms. Researchers, scholars and educators noted that the declaration had no clear implementation plan, timeframe and quantifiable target hence the question arose whether it was effective.

Theme 4: Measures to deals with emergency

The majority of the Respondents had various opinions and education experts indicate that the suggested measures to fix the educational crisis, which include the rise of financing, school reconstruction, and educator training systems, are important but ineffective in isolation. It is argued by many that systemic reforms such as decentralization of educational governance, adoption of technology-based solutions in education and addressing corruption in the education sector among others should be done. The importance of culturally relevant strategies taking into consideration local circumstances and values is also highlighted by the communities in rural and underserved locations.

Theme 5: Expectation from government strategy

It has become common knowledge that the policy of the government must have some tangible results. Increased school enrollments, particularly in girls and quality improvement of teaching are expected by the parents and community leaders. The stakeholders in education envision education reforms in curriculum development and evaluation which capture the current standards in education. Transparency and accountability systems are also on-the-increase to monitor how the policies are being implemented and many have argued that the implementation of the policies should be monitored at the grass roots level using a feedback system. There is still skepticism though because of promises in the past that have failed to produce much change.

Discussion

The move by the Prime Minister in announcing an educational emergency in Pakistan comes at a very critical point of the educational context in the country more so as there is a deep-rooted systemic problem that has been bedeviling the sector over the decades. Although the declaration itself has received a resounding acceptance as a needed acknowledgement of the crisis, the perception of the stakeholders is a complicated conglomeration of hope, doubt, and trepidation. Most education professionals and civil societies consider the initiative of the Prime minister as the initial move to mobilize political commitment to combating the weaknesses in the education sector in Pakistan. Studies have shown that the recognition of an educational crisis is commonly a prerequisite to the mobilization of resources and political resources required to bring about reforms

(Smith & Thompson, 2019). In Pakistan where millions of children continue to lack an education, and in rural and war-torn locations in particular, this statement represents a significant change in governmental priorities (UNESCO, 2021). The leaders of civil societies, teachers, and international agencies have reacted positively to the declaration and are optimistic that it will provide the opportunity to urgently reform the curriculum development process, training of teachers, and school building (Khan, 2020).

In spite of this warm welcome, there is still doubt amongst the stakeholders, especially the capacity of the government to translate this declaration to tangible and sustainable measures. There is a track record of grandiose policy pronouncements, which have subsequently not been executed successfully, that has created a cynical attitude among educators and policy makers (Shah and Farooq, 2020). Stakeholders point out that this is not the first time that this has been promised, and little has been done to implement it because of political unrest, no coordination between federal and provincial governments, and financial restrictions (Raza, 2021). There is a history of chronic underinvestment in the education sector in Pakistan, including in recent years, only 2.5% of the GDP is dedicated to education as compared to the global standard of 4-6% (World Bank, 2020). With a lack of substantial rise in funding, most people doubt whether the declaration will lead to any tangible changes.

The government interventions, like budgeting more on education, improving school facilities, and training of teachers are perceived to be very crucial, yet not enough to meet the extent of the crisis. According to the interview with the teachers and education professionals, these interventions are important, but they should be combined with systemic reforms to decentralize the education governance and solve the problems of corruption and inefficiency in that field (Ali, 2020). Culturally relevant and localized solutions, especially in areas with distinct socio-economic issues, including Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are also called (Ahmad, 2021). Also, community leaders underline the necessity of engaging the local stakeholders in the process of the reform so that the policies of the government could correlate with the situation on the ground (Bari, 2020).

The expectations of the population are not low and parents, teachers, and community leaders require the openness and accountability in the realization of the educational reforms offered by the government. Most of them are hoping to experience an immediate rise in enrolment rates (more so among girls) and the quality of education in terms of curriculum and teacher skills (Khalid and Saeed, 2021). In addition, the stakeholders emphasize the need to establish a powerful monitoring mechanism that would be used to monitor reforms advancement and keep the government responsible. It is feared

that the very momentum that has been created by the declaration made by the Prime Minister might not be maintained, and the underlying issues will remain unresolved without having clear benchmarks and publicly reporting (Mansoor, 2021).

Conclusion

Education in Pakistan is a state of emergency. After the 76 years' independence we as nation cannot achieve the goals of 100 percent literacy. we are for a way to fulfil our constitution promises to give free education to all the citizens of Pakistan up to the age of sixteen years. Our secondary education rate is 43.82%. we are running our primary and secondary schools with short of facilities ie: libraries, laborites, playground, sports facilities, seat spaces in building. Our primary and secondary schools are suffering short of school teachers and their head teachers. We have education facilities near half of cater students of age 6-16 years. clearly reveals that Pakistan did not have to cater its half of population of school age from 3-16 years. Thus, it is very much evident that Pakistan is state of emergency.

Declaration of educational emergency in Pakistan by the Prime Minister is good sign for education. Apparently, it shows Prime Minister and government concern about education. However, Pakistani Government 76 past years has made (many?) of the promises to bring out of the school children in the school achieving 100 percent literacy rate provision of educational facilities development of infrastructure, training and recruitment of teachers as per provisional requirements but failed all the times.

Keeping in view the past government shows nonseriousness regarding provision of appropriate budget for education improving government and making strategies plan to solve the educational problems. The declaration of state of emergency by the present Prime Minister seems only political slogan having no values to fulfilled. It is evident after the statement of Prime Minister tangible measures has been taken to deal with the educational emergency in the last 6 months. In the budget 2024-25 very less allocation for education has been made. Pakistan is spending-----% of its GDP on education as on whole from national and international. Due to the high un effective rate this amount has decreased as compared to previous tear allocation. it is significant indicator showing Prime Minister nonseriousness regarding his statements about emergency.

To deal with the educational emergency it is appropriate to mark 12-18 districts for making them a model education. Districts in budget year, rather than implementing policy in the entire Pakistan. The optimum budget allocation may be made and funds may be provided to the district for making them model district regarding education. This campaign should focus on provision education facilities, construction of building, ensuring availability of teaching staff and making school environment friendly.

Government has only declared the educational emergency and yet we are in wait about the strategies to deal with the emergency. Yes, it is difficult to effective on government strategies. However, in the previous 76 years' government is always failed to achieved by its promises and failed to implement its educational polices and plans. If this situation is considered as past indictor, the future may be predicted easily that government Pakistan is and strategies will remain in effective and efficient to deal with education emergency. The nation with continue educational crises until the new government will take over. End the upcoming government official will be seen to take about educational emergency in Pakistan and with claim to overcome educational problems and improving in Pakistan.

Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows based on the results of the study:

1. The government must also set aside minimum 4-6 percent of GDP towards education to make sure that they have sufficient funds to finance infrastructure development, recruitment of teachers and quality improvement programs.
2. Rather than introducing the educational emergency nationwide in a coordinated way, individual districts should be built as model education districts with specific funding, monitoring, and evaluation instruments.
- 3.Emphasis ought to be placed on the building and refurbishment of school premises, supply of fundamental facilities, and establishment of secure and child friendly learning conditions, particularly in the rural and poorer regions.
4. The teacher and head teacher recruitment process should be made merit-based and continuous professional development should be given according to the modern pedagogical requirements.
5. Federal, provincial and district levels should introduce transparent mechanisms of monitoring and accountability that will ensure the proper use of resources as they go through these levels.
6. Planning, implementation, and monitoring should also include active participation of parents, local leaders, NGOs, and civil society organizations in order to improve reform ownership and sustainability.

7.They should increase the availability of solutions using technology that will lead to access to solve the shortage of teachers and offer alternative education to the out-of-school children.

8. Gender disparities and enrolment and retention should be minimised using specific interventions such as stipends and school security and awareness programs.

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