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A Comparative Study of Primary Education in China and Pakistan-1947-2018

Abstract

This paper aims to look at primary educational developments since 1947 to 2018 in China and Pakistan on a comparative basis. It primarily addresses the causes of illiteracy in China and Pakistan after independence and tries to overcome the gaps of earlier works. In Pakistan both the enrollment and the literacy rates have remained below 60%. In China adult literacy rate was 96.36%, and China's enrollment rate of pre-school and primary schools was 84% and 100%, respectively.¹ We can see that the educational level of Pakistan has relatively lagged much behind that of China. Being on good terms both countries can, and should, learn from one another in the field of primary education and thereby help to improve the future of their coming generations.

Keywords: China, Pakistan, primary education, development

Introduction

Pakistan and China have been cooperating in the China Pakistan Economic Cooperation (CPEC) program under the aegis of the "One Belt and One Road" (OBOR) initiative, which aims at promoting Pakistan's social and economic development in addition to helping to reduce the high costs of Chinese exports to ME, Africa and Europe. However, a successful outcome for the CPEC would require input and support of a professionally strong and highly qualified technical talent from both the Pakistani and the Chinese sides. This would involve an all-round complete talent training system at all levels. Given the great differences between the educational systems of China and Pakistan, both sides need to learn from each other and improve their technical training systems to meet the needs of CPEC. In particular, China's success in the universalization of primary education and Pakistan's outstanding performance in the higher education sector are not only worth learning from each other but can also play a crucial role in providing

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educational wisdom to other less-developed countries under the "One Belt and One Road" initiative.

Pakistan is a country of approximately 210 million people.² Pakistan has one of the world's fastest growing populations and is the sixth most populous country in the world. The constitution of Pakistan requires the state to provide free primary and secondary education to all. Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan obligates the state to provide free and compulsory quality education to children between the ages of 5 and 16 years.³ The total population of China in 2015, according to the latest population data, was around 1.38 billion. The population density of China is 150 people per square kilometer and China's gender ratio is 104.81 men for every 100 women.⁴

In Pakistan the reality of educational development is very different from that prescribed in the country's constitution. The educational system in Pakistan is generally divided into five levels: Primary (Grades 1 through 5), middle (Grades 6 through 8), high school (Grades 9 and 10, leading to the secondary school certificate [SSC]), inter-mediate (Grades 11 and 12, Leading to a higher secondary school certificate [HSSC]), and university-level education (leading to Graduate, Master's and doctoral degrees). The government launched a nationwide initiative via The National Education Policy (NEP) 1998-2010 with the aim of eradicating illiteracy and providing the basic education system to all children. A new NEP 2009 was launched one year before the end of the previous NEP. By 2015, the Ministry of Education had expected to achieve a 100% enrollment level among children of primary school age and a literacy rate of 86% (2015) among students aged over 10, but it failed to do so.⁵

Two Aspects of Elementary Education in China

- 1) Regular government-run and private primary schools recruit children aged between six and seven and implement universal primary compulsory education. The duration of schooling is five to six years.
- 2) Special primary schools are open to adults, mainly teaching Chinese language, two subjects of arithmetic; literacy class, the admission of illiterate, semi-literate, to learn 1500 - 2000 words for literacy standards is the basic requirement.

Secondary Education

- 1) Regular Middle School: It is divided into two stages, junior high, which lasts for 3 years, followed by senior high of 2-3 years duration. The total for both is 5-6 years.
- 2) Agricultural Middle Schools: Generally enroll junior high school graduates who study for 2-3 years.
- 3) Vocational School or Vocational High School: These enroll junior high and high school graduates and the study takes 3 years to complete.
- 4) Technical School: Generally enroll junior high school graduates with a study period of 2 - 3 years.
- 5) Secondary Professional Schools: Enroll junior high school graduates who study for 3 -4 years, while high school graduates study for only 2 years.⁶

This paper will take the past educational developments of China and Pakistan as examples for comparative study. The study aims primarily at addressing the causes of illiteracy in Pakistan in order to overcome weaknesses in the findings of previous work in this area.

The paper will put forward the necessary analysis and appropriate measures, which will be effective enough to bring about the necessary changes to improve the performance of the education system, which PEFA in Pakistan will be achieved in the shortest time along with the removal of illiteracy as it is in the constitution and recent development goals of Pakistan.

Design of the Paper

In this context, the national education policy documents issued by the Government of Pakistan were taken as the base reports, and the results of various studies and evaluation reports carried out by the local and foreign agencies were examined to suggest a more effective solution for illiteracy and improving the performance of the public sector in the primary education system. This should help to throw some light on the major causes of neglecting the public primary education system, and it has not been debated seriously so far.⁷

Existing Problems and Approaches

At the time of respective independence of both countries, literacy rate in China and Pakistan was almost the same. At the time of the founding of new China on October 1, 1949 the literacy rate was 20%. This number included those who only knew a few hundred Chinese characters and these would be considered semi-literate today.⁸ At the time of independence from British colonial rule on August 14, 1947, 15% of the Pakistan population was considered literate while the condition of women and people in backward areas was even worse.

According to the latest available statistics the Chinese enrollment rate of primary schools in 2015 was 96.36%. Similarly, literacy rate had also remained stable at 93%. The Pakistan enrollment rate has, however, remained below 60%. Similarly, the country's literacy rate has also remained below 58%.⁹

With the rapid development of China's economy and the continuous improvement of its international status, China has put forward the strategies of rejuvenating the country through science and education, and strengthening the country by talented people. Improvements in national income levels lead to greater education consumption. However, owing to the only way to invest education in China, which is mainly undertaken by the central and local governments, the education funds are seriously insufficient, which restricts the development of education. In the mid-1980s, the economist Li Yining concluded that when the per capita GDP reached \$800-1000, the proportion of public education expenditure in GDP must reach 4.07%-4.25%, so as to achieve the sound development of education and economy.¹⁰ In 1993, the outline of China's Education Reform and Development Issued by the State Council clearly stated: "Gradually increase the proportion of the state's fiscal expenditure on education in the gross national product to 4% by the end of this century."¹¹ This goal was finally achieved in 2012.

Chinese society has attached great importance to education since ancient times, so what is China's actual investment in education? According to statistics, China's total investment in education is as high as about 4.25 trillion CNY, but due to the large population, the per capita education funding is only about 3,100 CNY although China's investment in education is increasing every year. From 2012 to 2017, it was maintained at an average annual growth of about 7.9%, which shows China's determination to increase investment in education.¹²

Attention to Primary Education

Every year, Pakistan government provides large sums to finance scholarship programs and grants to higher learning institutions, while the control and management of primary education is left to the local districts, provinces, and the federal government. Due to scarcity of funds the number of public sector primary schools is far less than the number required and can't functioning well. Added to that is the widespread corruption in the administration of public sector schools.

Higher education has received greater attention, while primary education has been left relatively unattended. There is a Higher Education Commission (HEC) to plan and execute policies for increasing the number of foreign qualified PhD. In Pakistan where no serious effort has been made to execute policies for ensuring quality primary education. This is a case of misallocation of resources and mostly the poor are the victims in this regard.

Due to lack of management and competence for proper running of public primary school network, the quality of education and course curricula is poor. Students' dropout rate is very high, probably in the range of 30%-45%.¹³

Comparatively, since 1985 in China, the government implements nine-year compulsory education. This was put forward as a major goal concerning the improvement of the national and the prosperity of the country. In 1986, the first *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* was publicized. The implementation of compulsory education thus became a nationally desired goal and a legal responsibility with the passage of time. The state guarantees fairness in education in accordance with law. In 1992, the Communist Party of China proposed making the nine-year basic compulsory education universal by the end of the twentieth century to eliminate illiteracy among young and middle-aged people. And as the focal point of local government's educational plan, it has been a national strategic development plan for a long time.¹⁴

Effects of Poverty

Poverty affects children negatively and severely impedes their ability to gain knowledge. Children from a poor family are in a disadvantageous position, because of their home environment and unfriendly attitude of the family towards education. Their physical resistance to various diseases is much lower than that of the children from well-off families. This is why these children from poor families are much more likely to suffer from illnesses, such as fatigue, headaches, flu, and cold. These diseases often restrict a child's ability to concentrate properly on their education which thereby restricts their ability to receive a good job and a good living.

In Pakistan, the private sector enrollment in primary schools is estimated to be close to 40% of the total enrollment of the primary schools. Due to shortage of public sector primary schools, and because many existing public sector primary schools are non-functional on account of shortage of primary school teachers and/or lack of funds to pay for running the schools, parents are often forced to send their children to private schools. Private primary schools are expensive but offer better a better standard of education to children. With the technical cooperation of the private sector, the government has introduced public-private partnership programs but due to piecemeal attempt not much has been achieved so far.

China has a large proportion of rural poor people and in addition to universalization of compulsory education. China has placed poverty alleviation at the center of its national development strategy. With the continuous acceleration and deepening of the urbanization process, a widening gulf has appeared between the rural and urban areas in the development of culture and education. So the basic elimination of illiteracy among young adults has become the most important goal of China's education.

The popularization of compulsory education in China has helped facilitate basic education in rural areas and eliminated unaffordability of education as a cause of illiteracy. With that China has embarked on a high-quality development path aimed at improving the quality of education. Lack of education has always been a major constraint in the sustainable development of poor areas so elimination of illiteracy of young adults is bound to lead to major societal improvements and innovations.

In 1978 China issued *the Directive of the State Council on the Elimination of Illiteracy*, which stipulated that the primary task of illiterate young adults is to be able to read 1,500 words, have the ability to read newspapers written in simple language, and be able to keep simple accounts and notes.¹⁵ The evaluation criteria for literacy work are detailed and classified from this time. In 1993, China's National Conference on Education for All was held in Beijing, at which *the Program of Action for Education for All* was announced.¹⁶ From 1994-2004, a total of 32.493 million people has been making remarkable achievements regarding literacy all over China.¹⁷

Facts and Present Conditions

According to the available data, the net enrollment at primary level in Pakistan till 2011-12 had remained below 60% although it has improved marginally over time.¹⁸ The target of achieving literacy by 2015 required an increase of almost 40% in the next four years (2011 to 2015, as data is only available until year 2011) compared to the 22% achieved in the last 10 years. The performance of the provinces in achieving the NPER target is not surprisingly, in line with their ranking in terms of resources, endowment and population size. The completion/survival rate seems to have declined rapidly in the recent years. This implies that about half the students who enrolled in the primary school did not complete their education. The interim target for 2010 was set at 80% but that could not be achieved. The reasons for high dropout rate lie within both the educational

system and the economic conditions of the students' households. . Intensive research is needed to bring out the factors that account for such high dropout rates, and remedial measures need to be taken to increase the attractiveness of schools and reduce the need for households to keep their children either at home or at work. Furthermore, surveys on the extent and quality of private school education need to be carried out. There is a dire need to offer incentives to girls and disadvantaged groups, like income incentives, provision of books, uniforms and mid-day meals, etc. There is a further need to invest in proper infrastructure and strengthen teachers' training. Other obstacles identified by various studies include the non-availability of teachers, non-availability of schools especially for girls in the rural areas, insecurity (while going to and from schools, as well as within schools), lack of female teachers in rural areas, lack of gender-sensitive and clean learning environment, lack of secondary level education in the communities, and early marriages.

Private education is surely here to stay, and it should be allowed to flourish and expand. However, private education should not be seen as a solution for the education sector problems that Pakistan is currently facing. Moreover, the fact that private education is better than the current public sector education should not be taken as a reason for abandoning future reliance on the public sector. Rather, it should be seen as a challenge for the public sector. Both the federal and the provincial governments have to support and help the public sector in order to improve things. If we are to address the problems of the overall education system in Pakistan, there seems to be a need for advocacy for creating a movement which demands quality from the public sector education system.

Faced with the same problem as Pakistan, China has advanced the reform of basic education step by step in light of its national conditions. In 1980, China put forward for the first time the historical task that elementary education should be universal throughout the country, and junior middle school education needed to be popularized in areas where conditions permitted.¹⁹ Published in 1985, the Committee Decision on Reforms of the Education System aimed that: Nine-year compulsory education would be carried out step-wise and the country would be divided into three regions for the plan's implementation. First region included development of education in coastal areas and in a few developed inland areas. The goal was to achieve universal junior secondary education in both quality and quantity by around 1990; second region selected for popularization of quality primary education comprised of the towns and villages with medium level of development, and to lay the foundation for popularizing junior middle school education by 1995. And the last region comprised of the economically backward areas in which the goal was to take various measures for actively carrying out different levels of universal basic education work with strong state support.²⁰

Teacher Qualifications

Based on the 2016 data from an analysis of the situation of the teaching profession in China, there were more than 510 colleges and universities offering teacher education. In addition, a large number of secondary schools were training kindergarten teachers. At present, China graduates 740,000 teachers from normal

universities every year whereas the recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers every year is about 300,000 people. From the perspective of quantity relationship, the supply of teachers is greater than the demand. Due to the young teachers in junior middle schools and the declining number of school-age students in junior middle schools, a large number of teachers will become redundant in the next decade due to the small number of teachers' positions provided by retirement and the natural loss of teachers. In the next 10 years the middle school teachers' HR policy should involve shift towards a "friendly" characteristic. According to the experience of developed countries, the conditions of the society will appear to the rich middle school teachers requiring more higher education qualifications, so as to make the middle school teachers' professions less attractive. The above is the analysis of the status quo of the Chinese teacher profession.²¹

In Pakistan it is different that under the existing system, a primary school teacher requires only 10 years of schooling plus an 11-month teacher-training certificate to be employed in a public sector school. There are less than 300 teacher-education/training institutions in Pakistan of which nearly 80% are owned and run by the government. In addition, many donors have made arrangement to train the teachers through NGOs. However, despite all these efforts, the quality of teachers employed in the public sector schools is very low.

All this seems to result in high levels of grade repetition and the increase in dropout rates from middle schools (about 50%). The targets as laid out in the NEP 2009 would not be achieved even in the near future.

Public and Private Schools

In Pakistan the number of private schools has grown tremendously during the past two decades and they constitute about 40% of all institutions in Pakistan. At the primary level, 34% children (5-9 year age group) of total net enrollment is in private schools. Private sector enrollment is increasing because of it is perceived better quality of education, as compared to the public sector. Because of its better quality, private education is expensive, and it is beyond the reach of many people because of unavailability of resources.

Most of the public schools across the country are currently dysfunctional and of very poor quality. They are underfunded and mismanaged, and have poor standards, lack proper monitoring, evaluation systems, and proper support for the human resource systems. The teachers working in the system have low morale, infrastructure is not up to the mark, provision of books, and furniture is of poor standards, and there is also a general lack of direction and motivation in the education departments at all levels. It is no wonder that any comparison with the private schools shows that the private schools are better, and given the choice and resources people choose to send their children to private schools.

During the last twenty years in China, private schools have developed rapidly, accounting for 35% of middle schools. Compared with public schools, enrollment in private schools is falling because of poor government regulation, poor quality of education and a shortage of teachers and poor laboratory facilities. There is no

doubt that people are more willing to send their children to public schools than to private schools and because China has a nine-year compulsory education.

In the process of popularizing compulsory education in China, the economic development driving the demand for education, and the development of education will also stimulate the economic growth. The establishment of an active interaction between education development and economic demand is the driving force for the country's sustainable development. This could be achieved mainly through stressing three different aspects: first, the overall improvement in education levels enhances the country's independent innovative abilities; second, investment in education improves the quantity and quality of human capital ; and finally, the optimal allocation of educational resources improves the income of economically disadvantaged groups, expands the consumer demands of residents, and creates conditions for economic growth.²²

In areas where primary education is weak, a challenge that is often ignored but which must be faced is the lag of economic development and the backwardness of people's living standards. It fails to generate sufficient incentives for education on the demand side and the interaction between education and economic development is not established.²³

Holes in Education

Education plays a pivotal role in the growth and progress of countries in an increasingly competitive, inter-connected, and globalizing world, where the creation of skills and human capital are key components of any development strategy. It helps to improve living standards and enhances the quality of life and can provide essential opportunities for all. While education's contribution in the growth and development prospects of a country has been widely recognized and increasingly crucial, education in itself is also recognized as a fundamental basic right for citizens in many countries.

No mechanism exists to monitor the allocation in Net Primary Enrollment Ratio goals at the provincial level, and the importance of commitment to these goals is not well understood, particularly in the smaller provinces. The recent budgets indicate allocation in terms of amount, but not in terms of proportion to GDP. Mechanisms of monitoring and capacity building for the goals are the most important task for the country. The government needs to show far more commitment towards achieving the education goals of NEP 2009 than has been demonstrated in the past. At present, the budgetary allocations are not sufficient for successful implementation of these projects and accomplishing the goals of achieving the universal primary education by 2015. In spite of commitment shown by the government, the budget for education remains at less than 2% of GDP, out of which the major amount is spent on administrative issues, like salaries and other requirements, leaving only minimal amount for the new initiatives. There seems to have been no suitable mechanism of gathering information at the federal level of the programs and large-scale successful interventions are going on in the provinces. Provinces are independent in running their own projects and programs and do not need to work with the federal government. Therefore, monitoring and

evaluation of these programs at the federal level is difficult, making the analysis of such interventions more complicated for researchers and policy-makers.

Following the 18th amendment in the Constitution, which does away with the concurrent list, it is likely that resources and power will be further devolved to the provinces. The National Finance Commission (NFC) award should also allow some of the smaller and less-developed provinces to have greater funds for development. Clearly, at this stage of planning, far greater emphasis needs to be given to how provinces deal with these new powers and how their implementation takes place. For this reason, coordination and sharing between provinces also needs to be strengthened in all social sector delivery programs.

One of the causes for children not attending school is lack of quality in education, particularly at the primary level and lack of competent teaching staff. In many places, parental attitudes towards girls are very conservative, as they set lower priority for female education and hence sending them to schools is not appreciated. Moreover, girls schooling requires extra effort and schools need to be located closer to their residences compared to schools for boys. Therefore the private schools and government schools cooperate and making it impossible for even lower middle-class families to utilize this options for their children.

China's basic education accountability mechanism is clear, and the central government has a strict inspection system. On the one hand, provincial governments evaluate and implement the educational programs of their regions, while on the other hand, governments at all levels must submit work records for national review.²⁴ The national education supervision group will also conduct another review in order to ensure the authenticity of the review results. They not only listen to the introduction of the local government but also hold seminars for principals, teachers and parents when necessary.²⁵ The detailed accountability mechanism ensures the motivation of officials and the long-term scientific nature of policies.

Conclusions

Education is an important link for improving the comprehensive strength of the country and enhancing the national innovation ability. In today's world of an increasingly fierce international competition, education should be the focus of both China's and Pakistan's current and long-term planning.

In the education finance, all related governments should promote the education-coordinated development. In terms of spending responsibilities, the educational spending responsibility of governments at all levels should be clarified. The national government should ensure that all social members enjoy equal educational opportunities by balancing the educational conditions in different regions and assuming the ultimate responsibility for finances for education. At the institutional level, the fiscal management of tax distribution system should be further improved. On the one hand, the unconditional transfer of funding for education should be improved, so that the central government can appropriately concentrate on parts of its financial resources from the central and eastern regions for transferring payments to the western regions, so as to make up for the gap of

education revenue and expenditure in poorer areas. The education transfer payment system between provinces and counties should be established vertically to realize the equalization of educational provision ability of local governments. On the other hand, a special transfer payment system should be established to focus on improving the running of schools and teaching conditions. First, the government should clarify its spending responsibilities in primary, secondary and higher education and increase its investment in primary and secondary education. Secondly, based on clarifying the functions of the government, it should be regulated and restrained in the form of laws, such as the education funds law, so that the distribution of financial funds in the three-level education structure may have a legal basis to prevent the government from abusing its power. The government should adjust the three-level education investment structure according to the degree of economic development and changes in the external environment and make primary and secondary education the key areas of government's education investment.

Along with the great progress in economic development, structural reforms are also deepening and have made great achievements, all of which benefit from the development of education. Education plays an important role in promoting economic development, optimizing industrial structure upgrade and improvement of a country's international competitiveness and status. Therefore, in the current reforms of Pakistan and China, the areas dealing with vigorously developing education, especially basic education, should be the focus of government work. Based on the current situation of education, the countries should gradually explore an education system suitable for their respective country's national conditions and promote the development of education on the basis of absorbing the best characteristics of foreign educational system by learning from them.

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