

## **Education System of Pakistan and the UK: Comparisons in Context to Inter-provincial and Inter-countries Reflections**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the comparisons of the education system of Pakistan and the UK from six dimensions i.e. education and training authority, educational structure, curriculum formulation, assessment and evaluation, supervision and management, and teacher education and training. The results revealed that against all these six dimensions, similarities and differences exist within four provinces of Pakistan, but these are relatively more prominent while comparing the four countries in the UK: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England, national curriculum tests at different grade levels are statutory; both in England and Wales teachers' induction and inspection of schools are more structured than in Ireland and Scotland. The length of first degree programmes is usually one year more in Scotland than other three countries in the UK. In Pakistan, education system is relatively more alike across the four provinces due to uniform national curricula and policy formulation at federal level. The continuous assessment system from grade 1-12 is relatively more structured in Punjab. The overall achievement level of students is relatively high in Sindh, Punjab and NWFP lie in the middle; and Balochistan and other regions ranked at the lowest. Low achievement in English and mathematics is a common feature in Pakistan and the UK.

**Key Words:** Education system, inter-provincial, inter-countries comparison.

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### **Background**

International comparisons in education and training are of great importance to understand the recent innovations and developments in countries. Pakistan is a federal territory with sufficient provincial autonomy. On the other hand, the UK is a union of four countries – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with an English Parliament a central government, but with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland having devolved powers. All the four countries have many common features with some differences. No doubt, some studies exist in regard to inter-comparisons of the four countries in the United Kingdom; a few are available on inter-provincial comparisons in Pakistan. But perhaps no study is available

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considering triangular comparisons: 1) inter-provincial comparison in Pakistan; 2) inter-countries comparison in the UK; and 3) international comparisons between Pakistan and the UK, and this is the core objective of this study. The comparison is delimited to six key dimensions i.e. responsibility of education, educational structure, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, inspection, supervision and management, and teacher education and training.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the similarities and differences in the education system of Pakistan across its four provinces?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the education system of the UK across its four countries?
3. How do education systems in Pakistan and the UK alike and different in regard to the six dimensions of education?

## **Responsibility of Education and Training**

In Pakistan, education is a federal as well as provincial function. There is a Ministry of Education at Islamabad, which formulates the policies and plans at national level. It involves the provinces in the formulation of national education policies and plans. The provinces develop their own plans and execute according to their situations and available resources in the light of national education policies. Since the introduction of devolution plan in education sector in 2002, most affairs of the school education are dealt with the Executive District Officers (Education). For example, policy implementation, and supervision and monitoring of schools, recruitment and transfers of teachers are the main functions of the district governments. EDO (Education) is supported by district education officers (DEOs) and deputy district education officers (Dy. DEOs) and other staff. The other key roles and responsibilities like policy formulation, teacher training, and budget allocation to district governments to a large extent are still with the provincial governments. At provincial levels, the administrative head of the Education Department is 'Secretary' or in certain cases there are two secretaries: one for schools, designated as 'Special Secretary (Schools)' and the other 'Special Secretary (Higher Education)'. They are supported by a number of additional and deputy secretaries and other staff.

In the UK, on the other hand, education is the responsibility of each country. In each country, there is a separate institution which deals with all the affairs of education, though the role and functions differ more or less. For example, in England, there is a Department for Education and Skills (DfES); in Wales, Welsh Office; in Scotland, Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED); and in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education. There are some other bodies in each state like Training and Development

Agency (TDA) in England; there is no such agency in Scotland, rather General Teaching Council (GTC) undertakes all such functions. Each country is responsible for framing its own policies and plans.

## **Educational Structure: Institutions, Students' Age and Duration of Schooling**

In Pakistan, the education system is three-tier: elementary (grade 1-8), secondary (grade 9-12), and tertiary or higher education, after 12 years' schooling. Elementary education is split up into primary (grade 1-5) and elementary/middle (grade 6-8) and is catered in primary and elementary schools. Education is not a compulsory or statutory requirement, even at primary level in Pakistan, and hence has resulted in low literacy rate and participation rate at all levels. This can be seen from that over 5.5 million children (age group 5-9) are out of school (Government of Pakistan, 1998). In primary or elementary schools, the children are usually enrolled at the age of five; but this is not statutory as in England, or even like Scotland where though children entry is at the age of five, but not statutory like England. In Scotland, as Matheson (2000) states unlike England, there is rarely a hard and fast cut-off dates for the so-called 'rising fives'. In the rural schools of Pakistan, children sometimes join a primary school at the age of six or even more. In some countries of the UK, primary level is further split up into two stages like in England and Wales, the six years primary is split up into Key Stage 1 (year 5-6) and Key Stage 2 (year 7-11). In Scotland, primary education lasts for seven years, as Matheson (2000) states 'The Scots always have to do seven years primary school and there are no middle schools as compared to the English having, in general, six years of primary except where there are middle schools'.

Secondary education in Pakistan lasts for four years (grade 9-12). It is catered in government secondary and higher secondary schools; most of these schools have middle classes as well. In all the provinces almost the same types of schools and colleges exist to cater secondary classes. In the UK, secondary schools generally cater education of age group 12-16 or sometimes 12-17 or 18 wherein students join A-Levels. In Northern Ireland, difference in institutions exist in the context of religious communities/sects; schools are managed by three groups – Protestants, Catholics and parent/community-supported (integrated schools), as stated by Dunn (2000) 'the characteristic of the education system in Northern Ireland is 'segregation' by religion which is not seen in other countries of the United Kingdom (p. 88). The parental attitude to sending children in schools of other religions is rarely seen in Northern Ireland. English education system allows Anglican, Jewish, Muslims and Roman Catholic schools. In the public sector, the uniformity or little diversity of the schools in Wales is more similar to Pakistan. In Pakistan, all state schools are primary,

elementary, secondary, higher secondary; there are some comprehensive, pilot secondary and technical schools, but all comprise a little proportion like Wales wherein among the 2048 schools in 1994, few specialist schools for drama and 15 Grant Maintained (GM) schools, altogether constitute a fewer less than 1% compared to more than 4% in England (Halpin et al, 1997). The organization of secondary education is selective in Northern Ireland (Wilson, 1987) whereas in Scotland, Wales and (a little more equivocally) England are comprehensive (Raffe, 2000, p.11). In the UK, 14-16 years education is compulsory, which does not exist in Pakistan.

A striking difference between Pakistan and the UK can be seen with regard to resources in state schools. In comparison to the UK, Pakistani educational institutions lack in trained teachers, and handful teaching and physical resources (Hayes, 1987; The British Council, 1988; Farooq, 1990; Saeed, 1997; Mahmood, Ghafoor & Saeed, 2003). The infrastructure in some good private schools in Pakistan can be considered at par with the UK

Higher education in Pakistan starts after the completion of grade 12. It is carried out in universities, colleges and other such institutions. The universities and degree awarding institutions are autonomous but are characterized by their respective provincial governments and the Higher Education Commission Pakistan. In the UK, like Pakistan students on the completion of secondary education enroll in universities or other general or professional colleges. The degree programmes vary in duration across the different countries. For example, in England first degree programmes are usually of three years for full time students (part-time students might take up to five years to complete their first degree), but in Scottish universities the Honour's degree is of four years. As Matheson (2000) states 'until recently, it was a common practice in many of Scotland's universities for students to take an ordinary degree before proceeding to Honours'. In Pakistan, the first degree under the traditional or conventional stream is of two years, but under the new stream this is of four years. The degree programmes in medicine and pharmacy are of five years; the duration of first degree in agriculture and engineering is either four or five years in different universities. In the UK, master degree is usually of one year, but in Pakistan, master is of two years. In both Pakistan and the UK, the duration of PhD is at least three years; and mostly routed through M.Phil. in the relevant discipline.

## **Curriculum: Nature, Formulation and Responsible Authority**

In Pakistan, school curricula for grades 1-12 is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Wing, Islamabad. In each province there is a Curriculum Bureau or Curriculum Research and Development Centre (CRDC) which provides academic support to the Ministry of Education, Islamabad. Curriculum formulation is a lengthy process, as the ministry has to take expert opinions from all regions of the country. The curriculum draft is finalized by the National Curriculum Review Committee, Islamabad. Thus

uniform curriculum of each subject is followed all over the country; although textbooks in different subjects may vary across the provincial text book boards (PTB). The higher education curriculum in Pakistan is the function of the respective departments of the universities or colleges. The title of courses and broader framework are usually discussed in the faculty, and then each teacher plans in his/her own way to impart instructions in the classrooms.

In the UK, curriculum formulation process varies across the four countries. For instance, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is a statutory subject-based national curriculum, from the age group five; the details of the prescribed curriculum vary to some extent across these three countries. In Scotland, the curriculum from 5 to 14 is based on five broad curriculum areas, and from 14 to 16 on ‘eight modes’ of study (Croxford, 1999), or as stated by McPherson and Raffe (1988) ‘curriculum is just guidelines, but not prescriptions’. In practice, differences are more pronounced in primary than secondary schools, where subjects dominate the curriculum in Scotland, as they do elsewhere. At secondary education level, again the principal difference is between Scotland, where the curriculum comprises shorter academic courses (Highers) and vocational modules, and in the rest of the UK it comprises longer academic courses (A Levels) and vocational programmes leading to group awards. Partly, the post-16 tracks are weaker in Scotland than elsewhere (Raffe, 1993). Spours, Young, Howieson and Rafee (1998a) also found that “The English and Welsh systems represent tracked systems and the Scottish system an intermediate ‘linked system’ although three countries are moving along a continuum in the direction of a more unified system”.

Comparing the curriculum formulation across Pakistan and four countries of the UK, it is found that school curricula are centralized in Pakistan, and to a large extent in three countries of the UK - England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not in Scotland which is more flexible and is either school or teacher-centred. At higher education level, the universities are totally autonomous bodies to develop their own curricula in the UK, but in Pakistan to a lesser extent, as HEC is fixing minimum standards for each degree programme in terms of minimum credit hours, nature and weightage of core and other courses, and mode of assessment.

## **Assessment and Examinations: Grading and Certifications**

In Pakistan, assessment and examinations from grades 1 to 12 is the function of the provincial and/or districts governments. There are no national curriculum tests at primary and lower secondary or elementary level in the three provinces, AJK, FATA and FANA; in Punjab province, tests at the terminal stages of primary (grade 5) and elementary or middle (grade 8) have recently been introduced and are conducted by provincial and district governments. Unlike other regions and provinces, in Punjab, progression of

elementary grader students to the next class/grade is based on continuous assessments; the system introduced under Examination Reforms (2002) (Government of Punjab, 2002). It was based on six assessments per academic year which was later revised and now it is based on four assessments in an academic year; three assessments during the year, and one at the end of the academic year. There exists compulsory examinations at the end of grade 10, 11 and 12 throughout the country, which are conducted by autonomous bodies called as Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs) spread throughout the country. BISEs award Secondary School Certificates (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificates (HSC) after successful completion of examinations at grade 10 and 12 levels respectively. To maintain quality assurance and uniformity across these BISEs, there exists an Inter-Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) at Islamabad. Almost the uniform grades are followed by all BISEs from A+ (Extraordinary) to F (Fail).

In the UK, national curriculum tests are statutory in England; there are no such statutory tests in Scotland, rather these are at the discretion of teachers at the age group of 7 and 11. The national curriculum tests in England are conducted at the final stages of KS1 (age 7), KS2 (age 11), KS3 (age 14) and KS4 (age 16). In Wales, the primary school SATs have been abandoned as being unhelpful in raising standards (Reid, 2007). In England and Wales the students assessment through term-wise tests is more structured than the other two states, and on the basis of these assessments, students are promoted to the next class/grade. Unlike Pakistan, a little difference exists in regard to the award of certificates, e.g. in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, students are awarded GCSE on passing examinations after 16 years schooling, but in Scotland it is awarded on the completion of 17 or 18 years schooling. Differences exist with regard to grades, for example, in England, the highest performance grade is A\* and it goes on to E (Raffe, 2000; p. 13); in Wales some what like England, but go from A\* to G; and in Scotland there is no GCSE examination like English, rather there is Standard Grade, administered by a single examination board, the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA). Standard Grades start from the highest of 1 to the lowest of 7. Between 1993-97 All Wales Modularisation and Credit Based Development Project developed CREDIS, post-16 credit framework for education and training below higher education (Ffowrwm, 1997). CREDIS has been criticized from different angles, e.g. it has reduced divisions between academic and vocational learning at the level of learning experience of students. This is in contrast to the relatively flexible post-16 curriculum based on Highers that is found in Scotland. In England and Wales, the qualifications of A-Levels and GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications) are also seen. Unlike Wales, in England credit systems have only developed in areas such as Leicester where Open College Networks are strong (Raffe, Spours, Young & Howieson, 2000).

One of a common feature between Pakistan and the UK, especially England and Wales, that the comparative gap of performance of boys and girls is increasing (Stobart, Elwood & Quinlan, 1992; Arnot, David & Weiner, 1996), and the apparent under-achievement of boys is concentrated at the lower end of attainment (The Observer, 1998; The Times Educational Supplement, 1998). In the context of England and Scotland, the Third International Mathematics and Science Survey little distinguishes the attainment of Scottish 9 and 13-year olds from those in England as far as mathematics are concerned, both England and Scotland achieved relatively low mean scores (NFIER, 1998; Semple, 1998; TMISS, 1998a). At age nine, England performed above average in science while Scotland was above average at age nine and at the average at age 13 (TIMMS, 1998a, 1998b). According to the latest available data, at KS 2, in 2005-6, 13% of the schools in England were below the floor target in English, a reduction of 37% (1,064) from 2002-3 baseline; and in mathematics, 19% of the schools were below the floor target, a reduction of 28% (1,015) from the 2002-3 baseline (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/aboutus>, accessed on 9-1-2007).

Inter-provincial comparisons in Pakistan show some differences and similarities. Research revealed that overall the students of Sindh province rank at the top; Balochistan and then FATA and FANA rank at the lowest; while students of Punjab and NWFP perform better, but are placed after Sindh (Multi-Donor Support Unit, 1995; Khan, Shah, Ahmad, Amin, Khalid & Malik, 1999). The girls generally perform better in languages (Urdu and English) while boys perform better in mathematics and science; in other subjects no marked difference is seen at primary and elementary levels (Perez, 1995; Saeed, Gondal & Bushra, 2005). Better performance of girls in language, and better performance of boys in mathematics also reflects international trends (Abideen & Jones, 2000).

## **Educational Inspection, Supervision and Administration**

In Pakistan, the supervision and management of school education is mainly the responsibility of district governments; the Executive District Officer (Education) is the focal person to look after all affairs of primary, elementary, secondary and higher secondary schools. Under the EDO (Education) there are DEOs (Elementary Education) and DEOs (Secondary Education). At tehsil level, there are Deputy or Divisional District Education Officers and Assistant Education Officers to smoothly supervise and monitor the public primary and elementary schools. Secondary schools are supervised and monitored by their respective DEOs (SE). Private schools are only inspected at the time of their initial registration by the respective DEO or any officer on his/her behalf, or these are visited on some special occasions or if complaint is received against any school. However, all these schools follow the same national curricula, except some school systems in the private sector like Grammar, City and Beaconhouse, which follow SSC

and/or O-Level and A-Level qualifications. To monitor the public-sector school affairs, now the provincial governments have established Monitoring Cells comprised of mostly retired military personnel, especially in Punjab which has created anxiety among teacher community, as being the non-professionals (Saeed, 2007). The overall management, supervisory and monitoring system is weak, as quoted by Bregman and Muhammad (1998) 'there is lack of accountability and sound management system' (p. 68).

In the UK, the system of school inspection is more structured, especially in England and Wales. In Scotland, SEED maintains the relationship between central and local government of education, and this is one of the partnership rather than one of the centralized authorities exerting its will where it likes (McPherson and Raffe, 1988). Scotland has no Office for the Standards of Education (OFSTED) but rather maintained Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI), as the only body which can inspect schools. On the other hand, in England the OFSTED inspections usually include so-called 'lay-people', HMI visits are always conducted by civil servants (Matheson, 2000). Scottish possesses a General Teaching Council, modelled on the General Medical Council, which controls entrance to the school teaching profession. The GTC decides who can teach what in secondary schools. Unlike England, Scotland has no Training and Development Agency (TDA). Hence GTC in Scotland enjoys more powers than GTC in England. Unlike England and Wales, Scotland has no school governors as such.

## **Teacher Education and Training**

In Pakistan, teacher education is of two types: per-service or initial teacher training, and in-service training. Induction is almost absent throughout the country. However, some private good school systems make some arrangements for the training of teachers at the time of induction, but this is not a regular practice. Pre-service or initial teacher education is the responsibility of university departments/institutes of education and research, and the teacher training colleges. All over the country two types of teacher education colleges exist: Government Colleges for Elementary Teachers (GCETs), which prepare teachers at primary and elementary/middle level; and Government Colleges of Education (GCEs), which prepare secondary level teachers. There were a total of 90 GCETs, 16 GCEs and 9 university departments/institutes of education and research in the country (Government of Pakistan, 1998). GCETs are now the affiliated colleges and GCEs are constituent colleges of the University of Education, Lahore.

In Pakistan, the universities mostly offer master, M.Phil and PhD programmes in Education; in a few universities the newly introduced four year BA/B.S (Education) is also in progress. In the three provinces – Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan, one year traditional B.Ed is offered only in GCEs, not in GCETs. In Punjab, however, B.Ed is offered at the GCETs and UCEs

since the establishment of the University of Education in 2002. Admissions in various teacher education programmes rest with the institutional test and/or interview at B.Ed level and master level. But at M.Phil and PhD levels, usually the candidates have to qualify the GRE type Test organized by the National Testing Service Pakistan.

In the UK, apart from the traditional one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at primary and secondary levels, there are four year B.Ed or BA Education with QTS (Whitty, Furlong, Whiting, Miles & Barton, 1997). Particularly in England and Wales, along with these most popular streams of teacher education, some universities introduce flexible teacher training programmes like PGCE (work-based) and even ITT is organized through HE-school partnership under title School-Centered ITT (SCITT). These programmes have been introduced to provide an opportunity to those serving persons who due to some family commitment or job can not join regular PGCE. Another reason for this is to attract the employees towards teaching profession so as to meet the shortage of professionally qualified teachers. Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is must for all such flexible routes of teacher training; the duration of these flexible routes is more or less, one and a half year. The quality assurance of the primary level teacher preparation courses rests with the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) (Reid, 1993).

In Pakistan, INSET is the function of provincial EECs (or DSD in Punjab) and the GCETs running under their administrative control. INSET is not a compulsory component, but the provincial and district governments make their efforts to provide in-service training to every teacher at least after every 3-5 years. The duration of these in-service training courses vary according to the nature of training and the trainees' level. On the other hand, in England, INSET is statutory for five days in an academic year; in other three countries, though INSET is not statutory but teachers are encouraged to attend in-service courses and seminars organized by the schools and local education authorities (LEAs).

## Conclusions

The study reveals inter-provincial little differences and marked similarities in Pakistan, but in the case of the UK, differences across the four territories are relatively more prominent than similarities. In Pakistan, with regard to educational and training responsibility, educational structure and school curricula, there seems to be similarity as policy and plan rests with the function of the federal government and hence each provincial government has to follow the national policies, plans and curricula for grade 1-12 developed or revised from time to time. The kinds of institutions, the duration of schooling at elementary, secondary and to a large extent higher education are more similar in the four provinces and other regions. In the UK, differences are more prominent across the four countries. England and

Wales relatively more resembled with each others; both these resemble to some extent with Northern Ireland; but all three resemble to the least extent with Scotland. For instance, in Scotland primary schooling lasts for seven years while in the rest three states it is of six years. Moreover, it has no such national school curricula, while it is statutory in other states with some autonomy to teachers with regard to teaching and assessment strategies. The religious-based ‘school segregation’ in Northern Ireland is not a common feature in the other three countries of the UK; although different kinds of schools do exist in these three countries, especially England. In Pakistan, different school systems also exist in the private and public sector, but these are not ‘segregated’ as in Northern Ireland, and perhaps more alike to the English schools for different communities. Some differences prevail at higher education level from university to university in the entire UK; rather more prominent comparing Scotland with other states. The one year PGCE is more popular in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Scotland, like one year B.Ed in Pakistan. In the UK, first degree (B.Ed or B.A with QTS) is of three or fours years while in Pakistan four year model (B.A/B.S Education) is in transition at the moment. Master degree is generally of one year’s duration in the UK in comparison to two years in Pakistan, which has been introduced by HEC.

National tests at different key stages are statutory in England. Such compulsory examinations can be seen at grades 5 and 8 in Punjab. Statutory examinations throughout Pakistan can be seen at grade 10, 11 and 12. Like England, continuous assessment of students at school levels can be seen in Punjab but here it is relatively less structured than England. Punjab is more likely to be resembled with England. In Pakistan, all the other three provinces and regions are almost alike with in to education and training system. The trend of relatively better performance of girls in languages and weak performance in mathematics and science is a common feature in both Pakistan and the UK.

Differences are more prominent in regard to compulsory schooling. For example, in the UK at least lower secondary education is compulsory while there is no compulsory education in the entire Pakistan. In the UK, schools are relatively more equipped with instructional resources and the learning environment is more conducive in comparison to Pakistan. Teachers’ one year induction exists in all four countries of the UK, with its statutory and more structured form in England since 1999 (DfEE, 1999), but this is almost lacking in Pakistan. In each academic year, five day INSET is statutory in England, and emphasized in other three states; in Pakistan it is not statutory in any province, but like Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, it is emphasized throughout the country. In Pakistan, INSET is either a provincial or district function, while in the UK, INSET is either school-based or managed by the respective LEA. Teachers’ mentoring is more or

less structured in the entire UK, but in Pakistan this is almost lacking in both public and private sectors, with fewer exceptions.

In view of the above discussion, it is concluded that inter-provincial differences in Pakistan are less in comparison to inter-countries differences across the four countries in the UK. Comparing Pakistan with the UK in the context of the six dimensions: education and training authority, educational structure, curriculum formulation, assessment and evaluation, supervision and management, and teacher education and training, prominent differences exist across the two countries. With the devolution of district governments in Pakistan in 2001, administrative and supervisory control of schools is decentralized to the district levels, more or less in the different countries of the UK. Both Pakistan and the UK employ formative and summative assessment at all levels of education, but relatively with more structured form in the UK. With the recent changes in regard to duration of first degree and fixing minimum standards for curriculum of various higher education programmes, the gaps between Pakistan and the UK education systems are expected to be minimized.

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