

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN PAKISTAN

Some Aspects & Prospects

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Birf—Al ways a Step Ahead

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EXISTING EDUCATION SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

Education has always been the key phenomenon of a human society. Man always yearns for knowledge. And we thus use different techniques for the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. Education is the most efficacious tool or technique towards the acquiring of knowledge. Man is inherently ignorant, for his innate is empty of any preexisting information. His state is of no worth without being gifted rationality and knowledge. Allah made Adam and gave him from His own knowledge, thus Adam became the father of a wise creature namely “mankind”. It is but a fact that man is no better than animals in case he lacks the faculty of knowledge.

We normally have two ways of getting knowledge i.e. i. formal education and ii. informal or daily experience-based education. What we are supposed to discuss in the current discussion is the “formal education”. We further particularize the subject and set it under the heading of “Reform of Educational System in Pakistan.” The subject is exhaustive and attention demanding. Many books, theses, and research papers have already been written on this subject, and therefore, my contribution in the form of this small piece of writing is no worthier than an addition of another drop in the sea.

Numerous factors are involved in the low performance of Pakistani educational system. I do not want to blame one; I would rather point to lapses on all major sides.

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON THE SYSTEM

I am going to propound a few suggestions on the improvement of the system, which may, to a few people, sound harsh or impracticable. However, these are my suggestions, after all, and that is why my words must be given respect as an individual opinion on the subject.

To achieve a radical transformation, we need to nationalize the whole educational structure immediately. The state should put an immediate ban on the private school systems. This is to secure a national unity. In the presence of a plethora of private schools with no staff coaching and low qualification, and mutually exclusive syllabi, the talent of new generation is not only being undermined, but a culture of class distinction is being fed in Pakistan. In case it seems impossible, the whole private sector should be rendered as semi governmental to enact a “national accreditation policy”. This will allow only those private schools that, at first, come up to, and secondly maintain the prescribed standard of education and facilities. It is interesting that we have a minimum of 3 educational structures. First, the system that is for the elite exclusively, a totally English medium, westernized system with a strict ban on the use of Urdu; second, the system of private schools that serve upper middle class; lastly, government schools and charity institutions serving all and sundry, particularly the poor. I personally appreciate the step taken by our late Prime Minister Zulifqar Ali Butto that he nationalized all educational institutions.

The Punjab Government should have a long-term policy concerning the education department and such a policy should be implemented and regulated by the judiciary, so

that no following government may dishonor the ruling of Supreme Court. Allowances, facilities, and similar offers for the teachers should be regulated and made more frequent. Refreshing courses to meet the latest developments must be conducted once a year. However, the teachers must not be given too much relaxation and their induction and inspection should be restructured and regulated. We have a better structure of teachers' inspection at district level since the introduction of devolution plan in 2002. Now most affairs of the schools are dealt by Executive District Officers (Education), who are further assisted by District Education Officers. The very system, if enhanced, can produce higher performance.

In accordance with the concept of a modern welfare state, education should not only be free but compulsory for all. The minimum level for compulsory education should be high school education. Instead of using English as medium of education, we must promote our national language and the medium throughout the country should be Urdu. English, alongside all other languages including Arabic, Persian, and the regional ones should be declared only a secondary subject included in the curriculum. If English seems too necessary, it should be given a value equal to Urdu, not more.

SUGGESTIONS ON EXAMINATION SYSTEM

First of all, I have serious problems with the whole structure of examination. It is full of slips. Internationally, the system of examination is called "assessment and evaluation system". But what we have in Pakistan is neither assessment nor evaluation, but simply a test of students' ability to memorize things.

The deployment of regular teachers on examination centers involves several problems. Instead of the teachers, each board of secondary education and university should appoint regular invigilators with the exclusive function of conducting examination. They should be coached for this given end of their jobs. Secondly, the months from May to mid-August should necessarily be declared examination free because the temperature goes to extreme heights in these months. Since Pakistan does not have a very good air conditioning or cooling system in summer, it is always terrible state of mind for the students to sit in examination in scorching heat. Accordingly, the time duration for hundred mark paper should be extended to three and half hours. Since student has to mark his attendance, sign different sheets, and some other similar activities are performed inside the examination center, the time is consumed with no profit of the student. The added half hour will greatly help the participants. The schools should conduct only one mid-term examination instead of a first term and second term examinations. This mid-term should be conducted 4 months before the final.

The most potential suggestions in regard to the examination system go herein. The secondary school certificate should not be based merely on the exclusive examination of matriculation. The whole record of all previous results should be registered with the school. At least 40% of the total marks of matriculation examination should be awarded on the basis of a student's previous performance in the high school career, code and conduct, discipline and the similar.¹ The right of awarding these 40% marks should be

¹ 340 marks out of the total 850 marks should be awarded on these bases.

given to the concerned school and a jury of senior teachers should decide to give marks to a student with full independence. Computer labs should properly work in schools and the annual result of every student must be registered with the school. Similarly, the 60% remaining marks of the matriculation examination should be distributed in two categories i.e. subjective and objective categories. Subjective examination will help us evaluate a student's ability to create and write, whereas the objective method will help us check the accuracy of his memory. Only in this way, we can get rid of the famous cramming system in Pakistan.

IDEAS ON PAPER-SETTING

In case of a totally theoretical, subjective paper setting, the maximum number of the questions asked to be attempted must be no more than 4. The choice level should drop by 25%, coming down to only 25%. This is to suggest that a candidate will have to attempt 75% of the question paper instead of only half of the total question, namely 50%. Hence, the total number of questions will reduce to six and the candidate will be asked to attempt only 4. Every question should consist of two parts and both parts should have different context of writing, although bearing the same theme. Furthermore, we must now get rid of putting traditional type of questions in the question papers. Our question paper setting is extremely monotonous with nothing new whatsoever. This system must be systematized now, because it is a big need of the hour. We always place such questions in the question papers that are readily available in guide books and test papers for students' cramming (*Rattaa*). Due to this easily available material, the inspiration of working hard and writing creatively have died out. You will not be able to find a single student today who is capable of writing something on any given subject from his own. The fact is that this is not a student's deficiency, but the fault of the system.

Secondly, the objective type will be the second part of this examination system bearing the half of the total marks. As it is already in vogue, there should be no choice in such a type of examination. But, what I propose in addition is a verbal test or viva voce to be included in the objective type. This will greatly enhance the standard of our objective type questions.

A FEW WORDS ON MARKING SYSTEM

Marking of papers bears identical problems. There are, observably, a goodly number of lapses beginning right with the dispatch of answer sheets to the awarding of final marks. For instance, per paper allowance is far below the standards. The amount varying from 2 to 8 rupees is a mockery of the skills of a professional teacher. Education department needs to employ expert paper checkers/markers with the sole responsibility of assessing and evaluating the answer sheets. Regular stipends need to be granted to these professional checkers, whereas they should be given sufficient time within which they are made responsible to spend equal time on every paper. Paper checking should get on in fresh, early hours of the day.

The dispatch of the papers to markers' homes is the core problem of marking downturn. After having received answer sheets at home, markers distribute them among their friends and relatives to reduce the burden. Moreover, some corrupt markers seek a

source of income in this procedure. Many a talented students are outclassed by dull and bankrupt students through bribery. Further, extra award for good handwriting is, in my opinion, destructive to industrious students, as it has nothing to do with the mental ability. Therefore, such a concept must be abrogated.

The marking of the scientific experiments (practicals) demands our immediate attention. The ratio of bargaining in this category is very high. Neutrals are supposed to assess students' ability, but what is done is diametrically opposite.