Improving Quality of Education Along With Increasing Access to Education: Taking Both Steps Forward

By:

Irfan Ahmad Chatha,
Tahir Saeed and Junaid Zahid
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1. Introduction

The post 2015 development agenda seeks to put equal focus on quality of education and access to education. But in a developing country like Pakistan, which failed to achieve the education targets of Millennium Development Goals, it has become quite challenging to focus on the new development targets in tandem with the efforts being made to pursue already missed out targets. It is quite likely that the sense of disappointment at failure to achieve MDG targets will first skew the attention of policy makers towards accomplishment of missed out targets and after that they would divert their energies towards SDG target of improved quality of education. The current enthusiasm of national and provincial governments to enrol more and more students further aggravates the likelihood of quality of education being put to the back burner. But ignoring either one of both at the expense of other would lead us nowhere as we would be taking one step forward and one step backward. This policy paper aims to identify the factors affecting the students learning outcomes and propose the relevant policy actions for improving quality of education.

2. National and Provincial Enrolment Drives

With Ahsan Iqbal launching a nationwide school enrolment campaign, ‘Chalo School’ (The Pakistan Observer, 2016); Federal Minister for CADD starting enrolment drive for 11,835 out-of-school children in Federal Capital (The Nation, 2016); Punjab’s CM launching an enrolment campaign for 15,372,811 non-school going children, ‘Parho Punjab, Barho Punjab’ (Sherazi, 2016) to achieve 100% enrolment by 2018; KP’s Governor initiating education campaign in FATA (The News, 2016), Balochistan’s tribal leaders (The Daily Express, 2016) and Minister for Education (Shahid, 2016) putting their weight behind education department’s expedition to send every child to school and Waseela e Taleem Program (The Daily Khabrain, 2016) being launched in AJK and enrolment movement brooding in KP with joint efforts of National Commission of Human Development and KP’s education department (The Daily Express, 2016) – all at the start of new academic session in the months of March and April – it is quite evident that the public representatives are giving priority to address the issue of 24 million out-of-school children in Pakistan.

The bête noire to this expedition launched for enrolling all out-of-school children is that it will only help the government achieve its missed out enrolment targets set out by MDGs – that too belatedly. It will not be able to achieve the broader education targets set out by the post 2015 development agenda adopted by the global community. Goal 4 of the SDGs obligates all the signatory states to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all’ (Sustainabledevelopment.un.org, 2015). Inclusion and equity are the
cornerstones of this transformative education agenda which seek to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization in not only access but also learning outcomes.

3. **Historical Emphasis on Quality of Education**

   Incheon Declaration, the *raison d'être* for Goal 4 of SDGs, advocates that the teachers should be empowered, well trained, professionally qualified, recruited on merit and supported by resourceful and efficient governance systems if we want to provide quality education that improves learning outcomes (World Education Forum, 2015). The paradigm shift from ‘access to education’ to ‘quality of education’ is not an overnight development. It has been an underlying concern of the global community for long. In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) committed countries to improving quality of education. Goal 6 of the Education for All Goals that stemmed from the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) back in 2000 also called for improving quality of education. The 11th EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2014) highlighted the global learning crises by revealing that one third of the primary school age children were not learning the basics, whether they had been to school or not. The 12th EFA Global Monitoring Report (2014-15) reviewed the strides made in the field of education during the 15 years period of 2000-15. According to the report, quality of teachers training and scarcity of textbooks and resources remained key challenges for improving quality of education (UNESCO, 2015).

3.1. **Quality of Education in Pakistan’s Education Policy**

   In the context of Pakistan exclusively, two policy documents i.e. National Education Policy (Govt. of Pakistan, 2009) and National Plan of Action 2013-16: Achieving Universal Primary Education in Pakistan (Govt. of Pakistan, 2013) contain explicit mention of the government’s commitment towards improving the quality of education. The tools identified for ensuring quality education by both the documents include qualified and trained teachers, better infrastructural facilities, up-to-date curriculum and regular assessments of the students. The Pakistan Education for All Review Report (UNESCO, 2015) acknowledged little progress in the learning outcomes during 2000-15 and laid the onus of it more on scarce infrastructural facilities than on teachers.

   Considering the higher social rate of return for students studying in high quality schools than the students studying in low quality schools in Pakistan (Behrman et al, 2002), it is imperative upon the state to improve the quality of education in all the schools.

4. **Factors Responsible for Improved Quality of Education**

   The coming sections will explore the linkages of learning outcomes with academic qualifications of teachers, professional qualification of teachers, trainings of teachers, class room activities, quality of assessments and infrastructural facilities and will identify the rooms for improvements.
4.1. Teachers’ Qualifications

For linking the learning outcomes with teachers’ qualification we will make use of data in the National Education Assessment Study Report (2014). NEAS Report shows explicit linkages between learning outcomes of Grade 4 and Grade 8 students and academic and professional qualifications of teachers and head teachers. At the outset, it reveals a bleak picture of learning outcomes of Grade 4 and Grade 8 students. The scaled mean scores, on a scale of 0 to 1000 were below the 500 mark except in the case of Urdu reading scores of Grade 8 students. On the whole, Grade 8 students had better scores in the areas they were tested for than the scores of Grade 4 students. This shows that the learning outcomes improve with the level of education.

Then the report gives results about the differences in learning outcomes according to the differences in academic qualifications of teachers and head teachers.

58% of teachers of Grade 8 have Masters degree, 31% have Bachelors degree, 3% have MPhil/PhD degree, 8% are Intermediate qualified and 1% are Matriculate. Masters qualified teachers produce the best results in all the areas tested. The qualification of teachers had mixed effects in the case of Urdu reading and writing. But the scores in Mathematics show positive link with higher qualification of the teachers.
53% of the head teachers were Masters qualified, 20% were Bachelors qualified and only 7% had MPhil/PhD degrees. The graph below shows that effects of higher academic qualifications of head teachers are more pronounced than the effects of higher academic qualifications of teachers. Students produced best results if the head teachers were MPhil/PhD qualified.

53% of Grade 8 teachers were B.Ed. qualified, 15% were CT qualified, 4% had diploma in education and 1% had M.Ed. If the teachers possess professional qualification of B.Ed. then their students show better results. Ironically, M.Ed. qualified teachers underperform than B.Ed. qualified teachers.
57% of the Grade 8 head teachers possessed M.Ed qualification and 38% has B.Ed. qualification. Higher professional qualifications of head teachers did not yield better results. Thus it can be inferred that the higher academic qualifications of head teachers usually yield better results at Grade 8 level as compared to higher professional qualifications.

53% of Grade 4 were Masters qualified, 27% were Bachelors qualified, 11% were Intermediate qualified, 6% were Matriculate and only 3% had MPhil/PhD degrees. Higher academic qualifications of teachers affected the scores of English writing the most. Higher academic qualifications did not affect the scaled mean scores of English reading and Science. Quite interestingly, the students of matriculation qualified teachers produced satisfactory results. A possible explanation for this anomaly is that the matriculation qualified teachers are those which were mostly recruited in the 1990s. So they are the most experienced teachers according to the duration of their service. Probably, this is the reason they produce good results.
Professional qualifications of head teachers had mixed effects on scaled mean scores of Grade 4 students. Head teachers with PTC, CT and Diploma in Edu. showed better results as compared to the teachers having B.Ed. or M.Ed. 44% had B.Ed certifications and 24% had B.Ed. certifications.

Professional qualifications of teachers had significant effects on the scores. Teachers with MPhil/PhD qualifications showed the best results in case of English reading and writing. Teachers with Diploma in Edu. showed better results in Science. 49% had B.Ed. certifications, 13% had M.Ed. certifications, 27% had PTC certifications and 9% had CT certifications.
The graph below shows that the higher academic qualifications of teachers had significant effects on scores in English reading. 46% had Masters degrees, 36% had Bachelors degrees, 10% had Intermediate degrees, 6% were just Intermediate qualified and only 2% had MPhil/PhD degrees.

The combined analysis of results of Grade 4 and Grade 8 scores reveal that at Grade 4 level the role of professional qualifications of teachers was more significant and at Grade 8 level the role of academic qualifications of head teachers was more significant. But the fact that in some cases higher academic or professional qualifications of teachers or head teachers didn’t yield any improvements in the scores leads us to conclude that the correlation between higher qualifications of teachers or head teachers and higher scores is not very large in all the cases. It varies from subject to subject and from teacher to teacher.
4.2. Teachers’ Trainings
This non-conclusive evidence about effect of teachers’ qualification on students’ learning outcomes leads us to another important factor that contributes towards learning outcomes i.e. teachers’ trainings. Both frequency and quality issues prevail in teachers’ trainings. Only 57% of the government school teachers and 21% of the private school teachers achieved trainings during the five years period preceding the year of a survey conducted by Alif Ailaan (2014). Almost one third of the teachers felt that the trainings were not relevant to the classroom realities.

Relevance of Training to Classroom Realities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To a great extent</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Voice of Teachers, Alif Ailaan, 2014*

Still majority of them felt that the trainings were beneficial for them in teaching. More females found the trainings to be beneficial as compared to the female teachers.

Benefits of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Voice of Teachers, Alif Ailaan, 2014*

The low frequency of trainings and better learning results of the private schools are somewhat contradicting which also raise questions of efficacy of teachers’ trainings in improving the quality of education. But the literature suggests that better performance of private schools students are not only due to the schools themselves but the social, economic and education status of their parents also contribute towards their learning scores (Andrabi et al, 2010). Normally the private schools students also avail the facility of private tuitions. This is an added advantage for them (Amjad and Mac Leod, 2013).

As we are discussing the public-private learning differences, it is worth mentioning that there is a very strong need for categorizing the private and public schools on the basis of uniform quality parameters. Punjab government took the initiative of categorizing the schools on the basis of security arrangements in the wake of attack on Bacha Khan University. Similarly, it also categorized the private schools for rationalizing their fees. Such initiatives need to be expanded to all across Pakistan. There should be an independent body that categorises the private and
public schools according to similar benchmarks of quality ideally at the tehsil levels and specially at the district levels. This would streamline the enrolment trends according to the quality of schools rather than socio-economic status of the parents.

4.3. Curriculum/Textbooks
Moving on from teachers, the next important factor in improving the education quality is curriculum/textbooks. In Pakistan, the textbooks are designed according to the National Curriculum Policy 2006. The policy outlined appropriate learning goals but failed to guide about teaching methodologies and teaching materials which resulted in its failure (Asghar, 2014). Similarly, the content covered in the textbooks is not directly in line with the content scope manifested in the curriculum (Mahmood, 2010), and also does not cater the current needs (Shah et al, 2015) and desirable characteristics (Mahmood, 2011). The textbooks have also failed to incorporate the curriculum reforms envisaged in the National Education Policy 2009. For example, it was decided that human rights related content would be included in the textbooks. But, no success has yet been observed in this regard.

The timely provision of free textbooks is the responsibility of state. Provincial textbooks boards usually take that responsibility. But they normally get late in providing the textbooks at the start of new academic year. This year, new academic sessions began from the start of month of April. Not to speak of other regions, students of Islamabad faced much difficulties in getting the new textbooks. Hardly 20% books were available in the markets by the end of April (The Dawn, 2016). Punjab’s textbook board also failed to provide the books in time. The books contained mistakes and the binding quality was below standards. The 10th class English book is not having the 7th and 8th chapter in it and many of the middle level books are missing some pages (The Daily Pakistan, 2016).

4.4. Basic Facilities
The next important factor for improved education quality is the presence of basic facilities. To establish the link between learning outcomes and basic school facilities we compare the learning scores of students of rural government schools with urban government schools and rural private schools with urban private schools. The comparison is made between the students of similar grades. The rational for doing so is that we can take the leverage that since the management practices and other factors are somewhat similar between rural government schools and urban government schools and between rural private schools and urban private schools; any difference in the learning outcomes can be exclusively attributed to the differences in basic facilities. We use the data of Annual Status of Education Report (2014) for this purpose.

The graph below shows learning differences between students of rural and urban government schools. Urban students outperform the rural students.
The table below shows clear under availability of basic facilities in rural government schools as compared to urban government schools. On average, only 2.5 rooms are used as classes in rural government schools as compared to 5.6 rooms being used as classes in urban government schools.

**Rural-Urban Differences in Government Schools According to Basic Facilities (at Primary Level)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural government schools</th>
<th>Urban government schools</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rooms used for classes (avge.)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable water</td>
<td>57.40%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable toilet</td>
<td>50.50%</td>
<td>83.70%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>45.10%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary wall</td>
<td>61.20%</td>
<td>90.80%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity connection</td>
<td>50.30%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like government schools, learning differences were also found between the rural and urban private schools.
The table below shows better availability of basic facilities in urban private schools as compared to the rural private schools.

### Rural-Urban Differences in Government Schools According to Basic Facilities (at Primary Level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural private schools</th>
<th>Urban private Schools</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rooms used for classes (avge.)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable water</td>
<td>78.80%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable toilet</td>
<td>74.90%</td>
<td>98.80%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>41.90%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary wall</td>
<td>72.50%</td>
<td>96.50%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>17.20%</td>
<td>25.60%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity connection</td>
<td>70.70%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quantification of differences between learning scores and basic facilities further strengthen the argument. The differences between the rural and urban government schools’ students learning scores are larger than the differences between the rural and urban private schools’ students learning scores. Similarly the differences between the basic facilities in rural and urban government schools are also larger than the rural and urban private schools. This leads us to conclude that basic facilities have direct impact upon the learning outcomes.

The last factor to be accounted for the improved education quality is the quality of learning assessments themselves. In Pakistan, nine learning assessments are being used by various
departments. Those are: Annual Status of Education Report; National Achievement Test, Diagnostic Assessment, PEACe Balochistan; Continuous Professional Development; Punjab Examination Commission’s Exam; Kashmir Achievement Test; Provincial Education Assessment, Sindh; Provincial Education Assessment, KP and Students Achievement Test.

Learning Metrics Task Force has identified seven learning domains which should be part of every learning assessment. Those include:

1. Literacy & communication
2. Numeracy & mathematics
3. Science & technology
4. Culture & arts
5. Social & emotional
6. Physical Well Being
7. Cognition

None of the learning assessments in Pakistan covers the last three domains. They assess only the basic learning domains. They generally ignore the private schools except ASER. Lastly, they fail to coordinate assessments with other major functions of the education system (ITA, 2015). This low quality of learning assessments provides a possible explanation for the anomalous effects of teachers’ qualifications on the learning outcomes that we identified in the section 4.1.

Another disappointing fact is that the learning scores of different assessments are not comparable with each other because they do not normally cover the same grades and use different parameters/subjects for assessment purpose. In this policy paper we have made use of two learning assessments for the purpose of analysis i.e. NEAS Report, 2014 and Annual Status of Education Report, 2014. Both cover different grades and both assess differently.

5. Conclusion

Pakistan’s commitment to Sustainable Development Goals and higher return to good quality education necessitate that equal focus should be given to quality of education and access to education. Quality of education does not find that much space in our national discourse as the access to education enjoys.

Analysis of the available national level data indicates that learning outcomes are affected by the academic and professional qualifications of teachers and head teachers. Teachers find trainings to be crucial for enhancing their capabilities. There are issues with provision and quality of the textbooks. Basic infrastructural facilities have large effects on the learning scores. Rural area schools, either government or private, are lagging behind the urban schools in terms of facilities which is reflected in the poor scores of their students. The quality of learning assessments of Pakistan is below the international standards. They only assess the basic learning domains.
Improving the access to education at the expense of enhancing access to education amounts to taking one step forward and one step backwards. There should be a balanced approach to address both the issues of quality and access.

6. Recommendations:

1. First of all, there is a need to improve the quality of learning assessments. They should cover the cognitive, social, emotional and physiological learning domains too.
2. All the learning assessments should be harmonized so that they may be compared for better understanding of the learning status of the students.
3. Head teachers should have high academic and professional qualifications because the learning outcomes are more affected by the higher qualifications of head teachers than of staff teachers.
4. The training modules should be revised according to the modern needs because the teachers realise that trainings are important but the trainings being given to them are of very little or no relevance to the classroom realities.
5. There should be combined trainings of public and private teachers. Their joint interactions with the trainers will clearly bifurcate their respective strengths and weaknesses. This will help the policy makers to formulate the most appropriate training courses. Teachers would also get the opportunity of learning from each other.
6. Textbooks should conform to the content scope and curriculums reforms envisaged in the National Curriculum Policy, 2006 and the National Education Policy, 2009.
7. Timely provision and good standard binding of textbooks should be ensured. Punjab government is already working on establishing digital libraries in Punjab’s government schools. Such initiatives should be taken in other provinces too. The digital libraries should be interconnected at the provincial level. They should also be linked with respective provincial textbook boards. Consistent liaison between library departments and textbooks could mitigate the problem of delay in provision of textbooks.
8. Basic facilities should be provided in all the urban and government schools where missing because the learning scores have direct link with the status of infrastructural facilities in the schools.
9. Independent bodies should be established at the provincial levels for categorising public and private schools according to uniform parameters of quality of education.

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