

Critical Analysis of Problems of School Teachers in Pakistan: Challenges and Possible Solutions

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Abstract

The education system of Pakistan, in terms of quality teaching and learning, stands in the lowest rank in the world. Numerous reasons can be held responsible for this state of affairs. Teacher is one of these factors. Teacher is an important part of the teaching and learning process, who faces various problems due to which they cannot play their roles effectively in the education process. This paper, based on a thorough review of the existing literature, critically analyses the problems faced by school teachers in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Findings of the study revealed that teachers are less motivated towards teaching profession, because their appointments, transfers, placements and promotions are decided on nepotism, corruption and political affiliations rather than on merit. In many cases teachers are posted in remote areas, faced with accommodation and transportation problems. The study further found that teachers are overburdened with more classes due to shortage of staff in schools, teachers face shortage of teaching and learning resources in schools, there are fewer professional development opportunities for teachers, servant-master environment and a culture of leg-pulling and flattering prevails in schools, and that teachers often rely on other activities such as property business, shop-keeping etc for living. This has gravely affected the process of teaching and learning in schools. This study recommends that the problems of teachers could be solved by creating an environment of trust and strengthening the mechanism of accountability, providing teaching and learning resources to schools, providing ongoing professional development opportunities and incentives to teachers, making appointments and promotions on merit, providing enough staff to schools and eradicating the evil of political interference.

Keywords: education, problems of teachers, critical analysis, possible solutions, quality of teaching and learning

Introduction

Education is development and a key to success. Existing scientific and technological development can only be attributed to education (Bregman and Muhammad, 1998). The standard of education of a country intertwined and determines its position among other nations of the world. In this regard countries with high achievements in the fields of education and research lead the world. Education influences living standard as it turns the population of a country into useful human capital and works as an agent of positive change (Hoodbhoy, 1998). However, it is worth noting that teacher(s), as builders of the nation, holds a pivotal role in the process of education. In this sense the quality and standards of education are strongly associated with the quality and effectiveness of its teachers. Unfortunately in Pakistan very little attention has been paid to the education sector in general and the recruitment of quality teachers in particular. Resultantly, Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rate and quality education (Farooq, 1990). This study attempts to examine the problems faced by school teachers such as, academic, recruitment and promotion procedure, administrative and power structure, financial, training, curriculum, parental relations, and examination in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

Education of Pakistan: A highly neglected and heterogeneous sector

Education in Pakistan, from the very beginning, has never remained a priority for both the military and civil governments. A very limited amount of the GDP (less than 3%) has been allocated to the education sector in

Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan has the lowest literacy rate and poor quality education compared to its neighboring countries, especially India. The education system of Pakistan, apart from the government negligence, eroded because of multilingualism, inconsistency and experimentation of the education policies and its stratified nature. Obviously the ramifications of this can be seen in the poor economic, political and social development of Pakistan.

The system of government schooling does not respond satisfactorily to the needs of the society, because, it is considered to be poorly managed, poorly financed and poorly assessed. There are reservations upon the quality of teaching and learning in government schools from all quarters of the society (Government of Punjab, 2002). The situation does not seem to be improving. Many attempts were made by successive governments to raise the quality of schooling and education to acceptable national and international standards. But it did not bring any positive results. This alarming situation indicated that the system of education is going towards a collapse (Ashraf, 1983). The system of education faces different problems. One of the critical factors which have affected the system is teacher. Although, research shows that teachers are the key to success of any education system. However, studies show that in Pakistan the problems of school teachers have multiplied with the passage of time which has exacerbated the overall system of education (Government of Pakistan, 1998). There is feeling of alienation among the teaching community. Teaching profession is considered the most underpaid, less lucrative and unattractive profession (British Council, 1988). Being a terminal stage, it is the most crucial level of education of a child. Problems faced by teachers at this level gravely affect the overall process of teaching and learning. As very little research in this area has been done, therefore, this study was conducted to identify the major problems faced by government school teachers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan and to find viable solutions to these problems. In the following we shall discuss the problems faced by government school teachers.

Problems of government school teachers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

1. Financial problems

Due to receiving less financial support, the sector of education has remained the most under paid and poor in performance. This fact has rendered the education sector as the most unattractive profession in the country. Teacher community, being the most financially poor in society, often look for other sources of earning such as going abroad for working and run their own businesses at the cost of their professional integrity (Zafar, 2003). In this regard teachers are less motivated towards and take least interest in their school duties. In many cases teachers get salaries without attending the schools because of their businesses. This has retarded the process of quality teaching and learning in schools (Shahzadi and Perveen, 2002).

2. Political interference

Education system of Pakistan is highly politicized. In the majority of cases teachers are inducted on the basis of their political affiliations rather than on merit, who often serve as political workers instead of performing their professional duties. Similarly due to political involvement in the education sector, often the established procedure of appointment is violated. These politically selected incompetent teachers become a permanent liability on the economy and a reason of the collapse of the educational system (Shah, 2003). Further, their unlawful promotions and politics in the schools impede the educational progress in terms of quality teaching and learning as well as jeopardize the spirit of coordination among the teaching community. It is also important to mention here that often teachers who do not listen to the dictations of the political actors are severely punished in social or financial terms and sometimes transferred to remote areas. This absence of professional freedom of teachers has badly affected the degree of success of their duties. They work with least interest and motivation (Saleem, 2002).

3. Social recognition

According to Rehman (2002) teaching is considered the most respectful professions in all societies of the world. In some countries teaching is taken as the most honorable and lucrative profession. In developed nations teachers are adored and occupy a reverential social position in society. However, in Pakistan teachers, particularly school teachers, in theory are exalted but the reality is the other way round. In Pakistan, teaching profession does not enjoy a great social status in the society. Teaching is considered the most underpaid and less attractive profession

as compared to other professions like medical or engineering and so on. Malik (1991) discovered that in Pakistan the social status of teachers is accepted only at the extent of Holy Scripture. For example, ideologically teaching is deemed as the prophetic profession and teachers as the promoters of prophetic job. However, in practice this does not exist. Teachers stand at the last edge of the social ladder in society. This phenomenon has decreased the self-esteem of teachers. In these conditions the profession of teaching is the most little attractive field of service for the youth. Normally teaching is the last option in the priority list of different professions.

4. Accommodation and facilities

Government does not provide any residential accommodation to school teachers. Teachers posted in remote areas or outstations face problem of accommodation and shelter. Teachers cannot afford to rent houses on the salary which is given to them and hardly make their living. Due to non-availability of official accommodation teachers do long absences and are not able to perform their duties with full attention and satisfaction (Government of Punjab, 2004; Hussain, 2001). It has been observed that teachers who are posted in remote areas are more interested in return transfer to their near stations from the time of transfer to the school. This practice negatively affects the performance of the teachers and leads to disturbance and mental agonies.

5. Frequent transfers

Teachers in Pakistani schools are always at the sweet will of education officers and school administration. The transfers are usually made on the basis of favoritism and nepotism. Due to this practice most of the teachers remain in high mental agony, disturbance and pressures (Khan, 1980). Often transfers to remote areas are made to teach a lesson to the teachers who are either disobedient or have affiliation with opposing political party. Sometimes the newly transferred teachers do not find enough time to get adjusted to the new environment. The practice of frequent transfer of teachers creates not only disturbances for the teachers, their families and children but also affects the quality of teaching and learning in the schools (Farooq, 1993).

6. Professional development

Teaching is a profession which needs continual updating. In this regard teachers should be aware of the new changes occurring in the society and around the world. Likewise they need to be continuously abreast with latest theories, research and other addition to the pool of knowledge. It has been observed that teachers who are not professionally sound and upgraded are not able to cope with the different changes and challenges in the society, country and the world at large. On the contrary teachers who acquire latest knowledge and develop their skills can effectively manage the process of teaching and learning. They teach and learn better (Farooq, 1990). Effective teachers need to be effective learners as well. However, the professional development of teachers has not been given any proper attention in Pakistan. Resultantly, teachers are found weak in solving students' academic and social problems. Further, it is observed that students graduating from the (government) schools have poor communication skills and find it difficult to deal with problems of life. As students in Pakistanis schools memorize the concepts for examination purpose, they lack analytical, reflective and critical skills like their teachers. This situation has affected the overall degree of quality of education in the country (British Council, 1988).

7. School culture and relations

Relationship and coordination among teachers and with their administrative staff is essential for creating an environment of trust and efficacy. Lack of friendly relations affects the process of effective teaching and learning. The negative effects of politics in Pakistani schools have deeply affected the cooperative spirit among teaching community. In some cases principals or head teachers give favors to only those teachers who accept their dictations without any hesitation and critique. Teachers who question them or ask for more support are intentionally ignored and disregarded. This practice has given birth to mistrust and de-motivates some of the teachers who dislike sycophancy. Normally school principals run schools like a kingdom, least encourage coordination among the staff, and have lack of vision (Government of Pakistan, 2001). In schools there is a culture of backbiting, slurring, tormenting, flattering and leg pulling among the teaching community, often leads to skirmishes. The ultimate effects of this fall on the students and quality of education. Overall, due to this the process of quality of education in the schools is deeply affected (Khalid, 1998).

8. Community involvement

Schools are community in miniature. Teachers are important change agents, mentors and academic leaders of the society. In Pakistani, government, schools the concept of parental participation is very poor. Teachers normally face negative remarks from the parents' side as any (ill) performance of the students is related to the performance of the teachers only (Muhammad, 2002). Students who fail or show low marks in the examination, the teachers are held responsible for this without realizing that the performance of the students is associated with the role of school administration, parents and teachers. It is injustice to only hold teachers responsible for the bad results of the students in examination and so on. There is lack of awareness on the part of the parents and community that parents and community is equal stakeholder in the development of the student (Illahi, 1986).

9. Political interference

Malik (1991) argues that educational institutions in Pakistan are not free from politics. The destiny of teachers is decided by the political figures in the society like other professionals working in different public institutions. Political interference has eroded both quality and integrity of the education system. In fact educational institutions work as nurseries for the majority of political parties in Pakistan. For example, in colleges and universities political parties have their student wings, actively involved in propagating the agenda of their mainstream political parties. This has badly affected the process of smooth education (Khan, 1998). Inside schools there are groupings and associations, based on political affiliations, which define the activities inside the schools. Under these conditions teachers are unable to work in peace and tranquility. In such conditions teachers have no option but to join a group. This practice has affected their professional duties. Political groupings in schools are supported by community politics. These situations in schools have created potential difficulties for teaching and learning (Khan, 1992).

11. Burden of more classes

According to Kahlid (1998) the unrealistic working conditions in Pakistani schools have added to teacher burnout. There are no procedures of work in some schools either due to the ignorance of the administration or laps on the part of teachers to find out the procedure of work. In the majority of schools, particularly in remote areas, there is lack of teaching staff. This overburdens other teachers in the schools. In view of Saleem (2002) this situation has increased more pressures on the teachers who become prone to physical discomforts. In this situation the teachers try to cover the syllabus at the cost of the quality in teaching and learning. Teachers cannot pay individual attention to many students which is a great psychological and social need of students.

12. Physical and learning resources

The lack of teaching and learning aids in schools creates difficulties in the teaching process. Some schools even do not have basic aids such as black boards, attendance registers, offices, libraries, laboratories and up-to-date books. Even the majority of schools have lack of classrooms. In the majority of schools there are no proper playgrounds for the physical development of students and teachers (Qureshi, 2002). This has created more heinous problems for teachers as they cannot provide the students wider opportunities for learning and development. Since teachers are expected to cover courses well in time, however, in the given conditions they fail to create meaningful learning environment in schools (Hussain, 2001).

13. Crisis of supervision

Rasheed (2004) has found that there is a poor concept of supervision in Pakistani schools. The process of supervision is filled with bureaucratic underpinnings. In essence the purpose of supervision is to develop and improve the performance of teachers and students. Conversely, in Pakistan the process of supervision is characterized with the notion of inspection. Supervisors create an environment of fear during the process of supervision (Mohanty, 990). The supervisors behave like kings and treat the teachers like slaves and inferiors. This trend has created mistrust as well as affected the spirit of cooperation among the teachers on one hand and teachers and administration on the other. The supervisors instead of providing constructive feedback give orders to the teachers and hence no improvement takes place (Khan, 1998).

14. Coordination and cooperation

The system of education in Pakistan lacks a mechanism of coordination. This problem has taken roots due to weak communication between the policy makers, staff, parents and the community. The state of poor coordination in the system has promoted misunderstandings between the stakeholders (Farooq, 1993). Teachers remain at the receiving end in all areas, e.g., in making of curriculum or any other education policy. Teachers participate only in the implementation not in the development part. This ends up in the creation of a culture of blame-game. There is even lack of coordination between teachers and principals (Zafar, 2003). This lack of coordination in view of Ashraf (1983) has stopped discussion on different problems in schools as well as that of teachers. In this regard no effective measures can be taken to resolve vital issues at the school level.

15. Curriculum issues

Curriculum development in Pakistan is a centralized activity. Curriculum is developed and schools are supposed to implement it without any manipulation. In this regard teachers' role is that of implementer. They cannot contribute towards the process of curriculum development and evaluation neither they are provided with refresher courses to be in line with the updated syllabi (Hoodbhoy, 1998). This tradition has left the teachers ignorant of many aspects of the curriculum which ultimately affects not only their own performance but also the process of teaching and learning in schools. In many cases teachers are not aware of the aims or goals of the curriculum for certain levels. This creates gaps between understating of the curriculum and its effective implementation. However, in developed countries teachers are invited to participate in the process of curriculum design and development. Their inputs are considered vital for the right direction of the education system (Government of Pakistan, 2001).

17. Issues of textbooks

Textbooks is a very important aspect of teaching and learning process (Farooq, 1993). Textbook development is highly specialized area in curriculum development. Teachers in Pakistani schools face problem of instruction due to non-availability of quality textbooks. There is a culture of multilingualism and medium of instructions in schools. This creates an environment of confusion, difficulty, fatigue and lack of understating both on the part of teachers and students. Besides, there is lack of training of teachers on how to facilitate or explain concepts from different textbooks (Hussain, 2001). This lack of orientation has created confusion among teachers which reflects in their poor performances. Due to this teachers as well as students are least interested in the process of learning. As teachers are expected to cover the syllabus before examination by all means, they, in order to overthrow the burden from their head and due to lack of understanding, resort to only reading and preaching the books without taking into account the vital aspects of teaching and learning such as development of various skills (communication, analysis, reflection) of students and enhancing their knowledge in an effective way (Khalid, 1998)..

Findings and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the problems faced by teachers at school level in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan through a critical review of literature. The study concluded that overall system of education in Pakistan is affected by multi-faceted issues, however, teacher occupy a central role in this state of affairs. In this regard it was noted that there is lack of motivation among teachers towards teaching profession due to fewer facilities in this career. Teachers get less salaries as compared to other professionals in the country. Besides, teachers are frequently transferred from one place to another on the basis of favoritism and nepotism, thereby making them agonized and unhappy.

The study also concluded that there are no facilities of accommodation for teachers posted in remote or outstations. Due to political interference in the process of selection, under qualified teachers are appointed who cannot effectively manage the process of teaching and learning in schools.

The study also concluded that teachers are overburdened with more classes due to shortage of staff in schools. Lack of resources in schools renders the teachers helpless while they need different aids for teaching and learning. There are no training facilities available to professionally update the teachers to improve their teaching skills.

The study further explored that in schools, principals or head master in most cases create master servant

environment which makes the teachers feel alienated from the system. Political groupings in schools have badly affected the relationship between teachers and teachers. This has also gravely affected the process of quality of education in schools.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study it is suggested that the problems of teachers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in particular and Pakistan in general could be solved through the following ways:

1. By creating an environment of trust and strengthening the mechanism of accountability in the school systems, the role and performance of the teachers could be improved.
2. To retain the interest of teachers in the teaching profession government may increase facilities for teachers. This will enhance their motivation level. It will have a positive impact upon the overall teaching and learning process.
3. For the improvement of quality of teaching and learning schools are needed to be provided with different teaching and learning resources. This measure will improve the degree of quality of learning and teaching. For this purpose more funds could be provided to schools to be used in acquiring of equipment for teaching and learning aids.
4. Schools are needed to be completely free from corruption and politics. For this purpose, it is needed to be ensured that political interference is minimized rather eradicated from schools so that an environment of professionalism and trust is built.
5. Pure selection on the basis of qualification ensures the selection of qualified people for teaching. Qualified people develop systems. Hence, it is recommended that during the process of selection or appointments of teachers merit should be followed.
6. Today's world is replete with new changes and developments. Teachers produce professionals for the future. Hence, the teachers need to be fully abreast with new knowledge, research and latest information in order to effectively train and educate the children for their future roles. For this purpose, teachers need training on continual basis. The teachers may be provided opportunities to participate in ongoing professional development programs to enhance teaching skills of teachers.
7. Teachers are the key in the process of education. Teachers' participation in the curriculum development will enhance the degree of quality of education in schools. For this purpose, it is recommended that teachers may be provided opportunities to participate in the process of curriculum development.
8. In order to retain the level of interest among teachers, the distribution of classes could be rationalized in schools by the principals or the higher authorities. To overcome this problem more teachers could be provided to schools so that teachers are not overburdened with extra classes and their energies are not exhausted.
9. In order to solve the problem of textbook, teachers could be advised to relate the knowledge to daily life experiences of the students. Instead of teaching the book, teachers may be advised to teach ideas by using other sources such as newspapers, journals and so on. For this purpose, school authorities could play a vital role. In this way teachers will be able to cope with the monotony of textbooks.
10. For effective schools effective system of coordination is essential. Teachers may be communicated properly about the different developments taking place in the system of education like policies, programs and so on. In this way, the teachers will develop a sense of care and feel to a team player rather than a fixing part in a system. This will enhance their self-esteem and they will participate in the process of teaching and learning enthusiastically.

Future research

This study focused on the problems of government school teachers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province only which could be further extended to other provinces of Pakistan. The scope of the study was limited to only male teachers. However, it is suggested that another study would be useful if conducted on problems of, female teachers, students and parents at this level. This would help in deeper understanding of the problems in education sector of Pakistan. Further study in these areas could be useful for policy makers, education researchers, academia, and educational institutions.

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