

**Education Policies in Pakistan:  
Politics, Projections, and Practices (2015)**

By Dr. Shahid Siddiqui

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The author Dr. Shahid Siddiqui holds an exhaustive experience of teaching, teacher education, research and educational administration and currently holds the post of Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. His other works include *Rethinking Education in Pakistan: Perceptions, Practices and Possibilities* (2007); *Adhe Adhoore Khawab*(2010); *Education, Inequalities, and Freedom: A Sociopolitical Critique* (2010); and *Language, Gender and Power: The Politics of Representation and Hegemony in South Asia*(2014). The book under review is yet another manifestation of the author's deep insight into the educational issues which Pakistan has been facing since its inception. The author terms the book as "The first comprehensive critique of educational policy documents" (p. xx).

The book is structured in fourteen chapters, encompassing various shades of educational spectrum. The contents of the book are fully supported by relevant tabled information, educational policy excerpts, in-depth analysis followed by a detailed discussion. Almost all chapters of the book delineate different dimensions of the field of education as dealt with by the education policies from 1947 to 2009, leading to analysis and discussion along with the chapter summary.

At the very outset of the book, the author hints at the important role policies play “in the progress and development of a country” (p. xvii). The process of policy formulation, according to him, should begin with a thorough need analysis of learners and reliable data. Dr. Siddiqui has boldly questioned the actual procedure of data collection, mentioning not only lack of research skills, absence of information verification process, but also the government’s tendency to inflate numbers so as to project its efficiency and ask gains from internal as well as external donor agencies. Lack of consultation with the education stake holders is yet another pertinent issue identified by the author, which leads to unrealistic targets. The next stage of policy formation is to set goals considering the information gathered in the first step. The author aptly points out that most of our education policies have tall claims and unachievable targets leading to the challenges in the next stage- implementation.

Dr. Siddiqui unfolds the multifaceted nature of the discipline of education by discussing various topics which could create a beautiful symphony if orchestrated well. The author acknowledges that one important thread that runs across all the education policy documents is “the overarching ideology of Islam” (p. 34). The emphasis on “reorientation of education in the light of Islamic teaching” (p 35), the proposal of making “Islamiyat a compulsory subject”(p. 37), and setting knowledge of Islam as a prerequisite for hiring a teacher are some steps the author has referred to.

The author particularly focuses on the conspicuous role the teachers play in enhancing and enriching the given curriculum. The author observes that there have been many steps suggested in Pakistan education policies to bring improvement in the teaching quality like holding short- term teacher training courses, raising salaries and in-service training of female teachers

Low literacy rate of our country as compared to other countries is another topic of concern brought up in the book. The author identifies one of the causes as the changing definitions of literacy-ranging from the 1951 education policy which defines it as reading a clear print in any language to 1998 which claims literacy is “reading a newspaper and writing a simple letter in any language” (p. 65). The education policies according to the author, hint at eradication of “illiteracy within the shortest possible time” (p. 53) through the following methods: functional education, universalization of elementary education, establishment of People’s Open University (now, Allama Iqbal Open University), and making primary education compulsory.

The long outstanding language issue is termed as a major challenge by the author as he opines, “Language remained a contested issue even after the independence of the country....” (p. 133). The various questions raised by the writer relate to adopting a particular language as the state language, as a medium of instruction or as a compulsory part of the school curriculum. Referring to the drifting linguistic positions Pakistan education policies take, the author mentions that “the injurious effects of making an alien language (English) the medium of instruction” ([as stated in Pakistan Educational Conference, 1947 document] p. 134), and “the use of English as the medium of instruction at higher levels perpetuate the gulf between the rulers and the ruled ....” (Proposal for a New Educational Policy, 1969, p. 137). According to Dr. Siddiqui, “Pakistan had two main language options- English, being the ‘language of its imperial masters” (p. 147) or Bangla, being the language of the majority. He states, “Neither of the two choices were exercised...in favor of Urdu because of an emotional association with it” (p. 147); however, as Dr. Siddiqui keenly observes, “The

targets set for implementing Urdu as a medium of instruction...were also not realized....” (p. 265).

Dr. Shahid Siddiqui expresses that the promises have by and large, remained unaccomplished and he points out the main reasons for not achieving these targets: “a lack of participatory approach; unreliable data; unrealistic goals; lack of political will; lack of political stability; lack of resources and fragmented efforts” (p. 274).

The overall picture of the educational context of Pakistan that the writer has presented is quite dismal. There have been numerous ups and downs in the political and social scenario of the country; nevertheless, many individuals and organizations dedicatedly work to improve the situation and because of these unrecorded efforts, sanity has prevailed to a great extent. The book unfolds the writer’s power of expression; the diction and style he has used thoroughly matches with the content he has discussed. Dr. Shahid Siddiqui has covered his subject with a multi-dimensional approach. The underlying desire of streamlining the Pakistan education system ripples across the book.

The book under review is based on primary and secondary sources, keen observations, analytical mind, well-organized approach and an inclination towards objectivity. It is therefore, highly recommended for policy makers, researchers, students and teachers related to the fields of education research, policy making as well as for general readers.