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# Educators' Perceptions about Resources Needed for Effective School Health in Government Schools in Pakistan

Parvez Pirzado

A small scale research study was carried out by the author as part of his Masters from Institute of Education, University of London, UK. Some of the major findings are being shared through this article.

Focussing Resources on Effective School Health [FRESH] provides an important and valuable framework for improving the health of children especially in the developing countries. The 4 core components of FRESH [1] Health-related school policies, [2] Provision of safe water and sanitation, [3] Skills-based health education, and [4] School-based health and nutrition services are important for every school to protect and enhance children's health, because "healthy children are happy and learn better", hence create a healthy society.

This research study aimed to understand the importance of the FRESH framework and to identify the resources for effective school

health programs in poor government primary schools. The study sought to answer the following questions;

1. What resources educators perceive to be needed for effective school health in government primary schools of Pakistan?
2. How do educators believe that these resources can be gathered?

Data were collected through a small survey, through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed and sent to the respondents by email for self-completion. The study sample consisted of educators with some health education experience. They were first contacted and asked for their willingness. Out of 35 members contacted, 20 showed their willingness. 18 [10 male, 8 female] of the respondents sent back the completed questionnaires



## Findings:

### Importance of Health Education in Pakistan

Respondents were asked to rate the statement "Health Education and Promotion is an important area for government primary schools of Pakistan" 16 out of 18 responses ticked 'Strongly Agree', clearly indicating that teacher educators consider health education and promotion important for government primary schools of Pakistan.

### Current Situation of Health Education in Pakistan

All 18 respondents rated the situation either poor or very poor on a five-point scale. Based on the non-availability of drinking water, latrines, poor hygienic conditions and lack of adequate health education material and information in the current government syllabus and the practice of corporal punishment in government schools, which affects children's mental health.

### Gathering Resources

Some of the common missing resources mentioned are lack of trained teachers for health education, lack of health education curriculum and lack of school health policy. Majority of the teacher educators feel that the situation regarding effective school health in government schools can be improved if the following resources are available.

- Trained and motivated staff for effective delivery of health education lessons
- Policy making health education compulsory for all government primary schools
- Health education curriculum
- Water and sanitation facilities
- School health services
- Strong school-community link
- Provision of healthy environment

### Conclusion

All participating teacher educators stress the importance of health education in government primary schools of Pakistan. They feel there is dire need for health education at the school level. Some of the respondents have a rich working experience with teachers and children at the grassroots level and understand the situation well. Their concerns and suggestions are therefore valuable for future policy formulations.

The views expressed by the educators show a link with the FRESH framework to improve the health education situation through sustainable interventions in Pakistani schools. The resources suggested by participants are similar to the FRESH components. Government commitment is needed to introduce school health education in a systematic and formal way. For example if the Government makes health education compulsory for primary schools and each school allocates a minimum of 30 minutes per week teachers will feel responsible and comfortable to teach health education.

The opinions of teacher educators must now be conveyed to the policy makers to develop a link between planners and implementers. It is important for policy makers to realize that people at the grassroots level recognize the importance of health education and promotion in primary schools, therefore they must think of ways to make health education compulsory for primary education in Pakistan. This will hopefully lead to a new era where our society can be transformed into a healthier society.

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## FRESH - Focusing Resources on Effective School Health

### Four core components:

- School health policies
- Water, sanitation and the environment
- Skills-based health education
- School-based health services

### Three supporting strategies:

- Partnerships between education and health
- Community partnerships
- Pupil awareness and participation

### Online Information:

UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org/education/fresh>

UNICEF: [http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index\\_7262.html](http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7262.html)