

Female Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

Education has been of central significance to the development of human society. It can be the beginning, not only of individual knowledge, information and awareness, but also a holistic strategy for development and change. Education is very much connected to women's ability to form social relationships on the basis of equality with others and to achieve the important social good of self-respect. It is important, as well, to allow women to participate in various fields so they can ensure that their voices and concerns are heard and addressed in the public forums. Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for the country's economic growth. It increases the productivity and the efficiency of individuals and it produces skilled labour force that is capable of leading the economy towards the path of sustainable growth and prosperity. The progress and well-being of a country largely depends on the choices of education made available to its people. It can be one of the most powerful instruments of change. This paper attempts to illustrate the importance of female education, and some factors which support or facilitate female education in Pakistan. The paper also highlights the challenges encountered in female education, and concludes with some practical suggestions.

1. Introduction:

Patriarchal values heavily govern the social structure in Pakistani society. Home has been defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space where she performs her productive role as a mother and wife, while a man dominates the world outside the home and performs his productive role as a breadwinner. Men and women are conceptually segregated into two distinct worlds. The household resources are allocated in the favor of sons (male members of the family) due to their productive role. Education for boys is prioritized vis-a-vis girls, because it is perceived that boys must be equipped with educational skills to compete for resources in the public arena, while girls have to specialize in domestic skills to be good mothers and wives, hence, education is not perceived as being important for girls. This gender division of labor has been internalized by the society, and girls/women do not have many choices for themselves that could change these patriarchal realities of their lives. Society does not allow girls/women to develop their human capabilities by precluding them from acquiring education. Lack of emphasis on the importance of women's education is one of the cardinal features of gender equality in Pakistan. The Human Development Report (HDR) listed Pakistan in the category of "low human development" countries with a female literacy rate of thirty percent, and Pakistan has ranked 145 in the world in terms of human development.

2. Importance of Female Education

Women are at the heart of most societies. Regardless of whether they are working or not, mothers are very influential people in children's lives. Educating girls is the important investment that any country can make its own future.

'Educate a boy, educate a human being. Educate a girl; educate several generations' (UNESCO, 2003).

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Education's importance has been emphasized by a number of international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, recognized that women's literacy is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in society and to improving families' well-being. In addition, the United Nations has articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include goals for improved education, gender equality, and women's empowerment. The MDGs emphasize education's essential role in building democratic societies and creating a foundation for sustained economic growth (UNESCO, 2003).

Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the productive capacities of the labor force. A recent study of 19 developing countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, concluded that a country's long-term economic growth increases by 3.7 percent for every year the adult population's average level of schooling rises. Thus, education is a key strategy for reducing poverty.

Moreover, educated women contribute economically in their families. Education generally leads to increase income and productivity, for individuals and for nations as a whole. Many research evidences show that educating girls generally produces greater gains in productivity and income than educating boys, and educating girls has as much or more impact on national economic growth.

In the increasingly open global economy, countries with high rates of illiteracy and gender gaps in educational attainment tend to be less competitive, because foreign investors seek labor that is skilled as well as inexpensive. Various global trends pose special challenges to women who are illiterate or have limited education. Economies export orientation and the growing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises create opportunities for women, but women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities.

A growing body of research suggests that education helps empower women to stand up for themselves and their children. It can bring benefits not only to women and their children, but to the broader community and society such as through more effective and representative governance.

Studies in different countries confirm that both maternal and paternal education affect children's educational attainments, but on the whole, evidence shows that having an educated mother helps ensure that children go to school longer and study more (Herz, B, 2004).

I agree with the above statements and from my own observations and experiences I found that female education uplifts things like children's education. In Pakistan particularly, in Gilgit-Baltistan, women who are literate take more participation in their children's school activities than the women who are illiterate. For instance, they take interest and participate actively in children's study at home, in doing homework etc. They also take care of their children's cleanliness of uniforms and prepare various handmade resources like kushans (small local mats), which children use in their classrooms particularly in winter.

In addition, some other experiences are, in one of the public schools in Pakistan where I worked with teachers. In nursery class a child was reluctant to come to school, whenever he came, he cried and did not participate in any activities in the class. This practice continued; the teacher was worried about him and shared the whole scenario with me. We both (teacher and myself) planned and invited his mother who was a literate (12th grade pass) lady. She shared the same experience with us, "In the morning when school time comes, he starts crying and refuses to go to school and we (the parents) are worried about the child too (discussion on march, 2013)." With support of the head teacher, the teacher and myself asked the mother, is it possible for you to come with your child and give time in the class unless and until he adjusts in the environment. She agreed and came with the child frequently and sometimes taught in the class with the teacher. We observed, gradually, the child participated very well in different activities, and at the end of the academic year he was one of the best students in the class. This all improvement was because of his mother's interest and encouragement. We have seen such several examples that literate mothers have a great role in their children's education.

In addition, education has a profound effect on girls' and women's abilities to claim other rights and achieve status in a society. Having education can make an enormous difference to a woman's chances of finding well paid work, raising a healthy family and preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

3. Factors Which Facilitate or Support Female Education

Participation of female at policy level

One significant point is that if the government wants to improve female education in Pakistan, it is important to encourage female to participate at policy level but the question is 'are women capable to work at policy level? Do they have abilities to work at high positions? In this stage government needs to think about how to support female to come front and work? If female will work at that level, which could be more helpful to develop female education and they can address female related issues particularly.

Safe and secure learning environment in educational institutions

During the past few decades, Pakistan is insecure condition and especially insecure environment in educational institutions which has a huge affect on education, and particularly, on female education. If the government and international agencies are interested to improve female education, they require establishing a secure environment because most of the parents are reluctant to send their daughters in insecure educational institutions and in some parts of Pakistan security is still a big issue.

Mostly in the country, parents expect their children to be safe at school. In some cases however, cultural requirements for privacy must also be respected. These entail separate schools for girls, boundary walls for girls' schools, female teachers, and the like.

Community and parental support

Parental support is important because if individuals do not have a parent to encourage them. They are not motivated at that level which is required. In most rural areas of Pakistan, parental involvement is more important to send their girls to schools. If parents do not permit their daughters for schooling, then how can somebody expect that girls will learn and improve education because education is something which requires community, parents and teachers' support. Without parental support, it is impossible to expect for girls to come out and get education in restricted societies.

Well qualified female teachers in girls' schools

During the mid-1900s and particularly at the Education for All (EFA) Conference in Jomtien (UNESCO, 1993), teachers' professional development has been recognized as an important component to improve teachers' competence and students' performance in schools. The Dakar Framework of Action (2000) also lays emphasis on the effectiveness of teacher knowledge, which they acquire through learning and professional development. The recent Global Monitoring Report (2005) highlights that in both developed and developing countries there is a temptation to lower teacher training standards. Notwithstanding,

Equal participation of female teachers (as a teacher, teacher educator and community mobilizers)

One significant issue is that there is a general preference among the men that their women not be exposed to new sources of information that might alter their perception of the female role. From many research studies it appear that for the most part women share this view.

The relatively low number of girls in the nation's schools can also be explained by the shortage of women teachers who are willing to teach in the villages. Female teachers are lesser than male teachers and some schools are co-education schools where parents do not send their daughters. In future if government and international agencies encourage female to come forward and work in different capacities, e.g. teachers, teacher educators and community mobilizers which might motivate more parents to send their daughters in schools.

4. Barriers Which Encounter in Female Education

The following significant barriers affect on female education in Pakistan.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is an additional barrier to girls going to school generally in developing countries including Pakistan. Certain groups of girls are more likely to be excluded from school on the basis of caste, ethnicity, religion or disability. Disabled children and among them disabled girls in particular, constitute a significant group that is denied access to education. In a recent World Bank report, it is estimated that only about

1-5 percent of all disabled children and young people are attending schools in developing countries.

The cost of education

The education of girls is seen as economically and socially costly to parents. It can incur extra direct costs, such as special transport or chaperones for safety and 'decency'. Education may actually reduces girls' marriage prospects and raise dowry payments to unaffordable levels. Investing in sons, rather than daughters, is perceived as bringing higher financial returns for families as boys are more likely to find work and be paid a higher salary.

In addition, many of the girls' schools do exist that their students wear a school uniform, and parents balk at this additional expense. The solution is often to send just one daughter to school, and this will continue to be the pattern until attitudes change and more human and physical resources become available.

Lack of female teachers in schools

One significant issue in Pakistan particularly in rural areas is that, there is shortage of female teachers, where about forty four girls to 100 boys are enrolled in primary schools. At higher levels of education, women's share of the teaching force is much lower, particularly in tertiary education, where teaching is predominantly a male occupation.

The male teachers posted from outside the local community. The presence of unfamiliar or less trustworthy men often makes parents reluctant to send their daughters to school. Therefore, most of the girls are outside the schools.

To increase the number of women teacher, who often become important role models for the young women they teach, better recruitment procedures and working conditions need to be adopted. In addition, these teachers need training to be effective in supporting girls and to intervene when violence is threatened. When teachers themselves perpetrate violence, early response systems need to be implemented to prevent such violence continuing. Alongside training to combat all forms of discrimination in the classroom, there needs to be an effective monitoring and inspection system that engages teachers, especially where there are violations to teacher authority.

Lack of adequate educational institutions

We find out that lack of adequate educational institutions is the biggest factor that keeps children away from schooling. Many schools were either destroyed or severely damaged during the last few years. There is huge shortage of schools in rural areas, especially for girls.

Long distance of schools from residence

Why girls' access to education remains limited in Pakistan is the distance from home to school can be a significant barrier. Whereas most parents allow their sons to walk or use public transportation, daughters who live more than a very short distance from the school building are rarely allowed to attend.

The first step therefore is to address the supply issue by building more schools in rural areas. Taking into view the limited capacity of the newly established government, there is need for massive assistance from the international community to contribute in building new schools, reconstructing the existing schools, training teachers, and providing textbooks and other material. Although many schools in the capital are being

renovated by donor agencies, poor attention is paid to the schools in villages and distant provinces. There is a need to extend the attention of the government and assisting agencies from the capital and large cities to rural areas and attract financial resources to fulfill the need. Many donor agencies are willing to aid educational projects. However, the low capacity of government impedes its ability to allocate resources and absorb funds at a higher speed.

Joint schooling for girls and boys

Due to religious and cultural restrictions, girls are much less likely to attend school if there is a combined schooling system for boys and girls. In many rural and urban areas of Pakistan combined schools as the main reason deterring the children from attending school. This is the second largest cause after distance. Establishing separate schools for girls will therefore increase the female enrollment rate. In rural areas particularly, the number of girls' schools is quite low. The low female enrollment rate signals the same result. In many cases, girls are not enrolled in school either because of non-existence of any kind of school, or non-availability of separate schools for girls in the community.

Lack of resources and less government attention

Resources are limited in every country, but they are more limited in the poorer nations. In order to plan, all government and international agencies that work with them must therefore have resources but unfortunately they do not have.

Similarly, in Pakistan most of the schools are in extremely poor conditions. Shortage of government resources and lack of attention during the last many years have converted the schools into ruins. In many cases children sit on the ground under tents, without chairs and classrooms. Some schools in the capital have been renovated over the last few years with assistance of donor organizations and UNICEF, under supervision of the ministry of education. However, renovation of all schools will be a long process, requiring large amount of human and financial capital. At present, government and donors are investing more heavily in education. However, reaching objectives in the capital and other large cities should not be the end of the struggle, and efforts should continue to reach rural areas and villages until every child of Pakistan obtains the chance to attend schools.

Shortage of women teachers and low level of income discourage people from choosing teaching as a profession. A large amount of investment in education should be devoted to raise salaries for teachers. Further, designing training programs and their sustainability will help strengthen the capacity of the current teachers. There is an acute need to create incentives for the younger generation to join the teaching profession by offering appropriate allowances and extra benefits to them. But because of the limited capacity of the government and high dependence of the current finances upon donor assistance it does not work appropriately. Although government revenue started to grow for the last decades and the economy has achieved considerable credibility but the government's capacity still remains extremely low and dependent upon donor assistance.

Poverty

Another constraint is poverty which not only keeps children away from school, but also has severely negative impact on the overall situation of the population. Most of poor households have difficulty in sending their children to school due to lack of financial resources, cost of schooling and reliance of the family on children's income. Although different international agencies work on poverty reduction but still it is a big issue in promoting female education in most developing countries including Pakistan. It is therefore, necessary to target poor households through educational institutions by donation and aid programs to enable and attract children of poor households to attend school.

5. Suggestions & Recommendations

Some of the recommendations which might be helpful to improve female education in Pakistan are below:

- The Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the prime minister, and their international partners, should better address girls' problems in attending school. This will require leadership and political will at the highest levels and accountability at the provincial and district levels.
- The Ministry of Education should make equal access for girls and women a priority at all educational levels-not only at the primary level.
- Among other things it should condition the creation of new schools on equal access for girls in each area. Where girls and boys are offered different forms of education, such as in madrassas and home-based schools, the ministry should ensure that girls and boys have equal access to formal education credentials. Become a more public advocate for education, especially for girls.
- The Ministry of Education should do more to increase the number of female teachers, especially in rural areas. For example, it should consider developing more flexible programs to accredit women teachers, including those trained outside of the country. It should address limits in women's access to teacher training programs, for example, by providing where possible safe residences at teacher training institutes.
- The government should involve local communities to overcome local barriers that prevent children and girls in particular, from attending school. For example, the ministry should identify whether schools are available, safe, and acceptable to local cultural sensitivities; whether routes are safe; whether transportation is available; and whether individuals in the community are blocking girls' access. The ministry should hold provincial and district officials accountable for improving access for all children in their districts and provinces and reward those who do.
- The local government should arrange awareness sessions for parents about the importance of female education. So they could send their daughters to schools.
- The Ministry of Education should drastically increase the representation of women in the ministry at the national, provincial, and district levels.
- The government should ratify the Convention against Discrimination in Education, which sets criteria and standards for girls' and women's right to a non-discriminatory education.

6. Conclusion:

Finally, I can say, at the moment female education is not encouraging in Pakistan as compare to male education. However, many international donor agencies are interested to enhance female education in this country and they put lot of efforts and energies to improve it in future. Although there are certain issues which hinder female education but if the government and these agencies will work together and put efforts continuously, then there will be hope of change. According to Michael Fullan (2000), 'Change is a slow process which comes gradually'. I think similarly, this is with our education system, although it will take time but we hope that positive change will be occurred in future.

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