

## **Universal Primary Education in Pakistan: constraints and challenges**

**Muhammad Zakria Zakar**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

**Shazia Qureshi**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

**Razza-Ullah**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

**Rubeena Zakar**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

**Nauman Aqil**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

**Riffat Manawar**

*University of the Punjab, Lahore*

### **Abstracts**

This paper addresses the issue of universal primary education (one of the MDGs) in Pakistan. It is unlikely for Pakistan to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. The main assumption in this study is that existence and proper functioning of a school in a locality need its integration with the community and other local institutions by making them the stakeholders. It also intends to identify the problems in the way of universal primary education in Pakistan. An all-encompassing approach (that addresses all the constraints) to this issue may be useful to achieve the goal of Universal Primary Education in Pakistan. The study draws on secondary data such as review of government reports, scientific published material and other relevant literature. We found that the issue has multiple dimensions, such as insufficient educational services, especially in rural areas, incompetent and untrained teachers (mostly recruited on the basis of political recommendation) and poor quality of education. We also identified other constraints concerned with the UPE, such as poor physical and educational environment, poverty, lack of community participation, illiterate parents and lack of political commitment and good governance. This situation, with regard to primary education, creates doubts about the utility of schooling among the resource constrained parents. Additionally, inadequate and insufficient technical and vocational training institutions for those students who successfully complete the primary education are also an inhibiting factor. It is important that the school is made a part of the larger social structure and ought to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of students, parents and the community at large.

Keywords: Universal Primary Education; Pakistan; National Education Policy; constraints; challenges; community participation

## **Background**

Globally, Universal Primary Education (UPE) as part of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has demonstrated progress. Worldwide integrated efforts have resulted into an improved access and increase in global net enrolment ratio from 82% in 1999 to 90% in 2010. Nevertheless, there were still 29 countries with net primary enrolment ratio below 85%. Most of these countries belong to Sub Saharan Africa, South and West Asia.

Data exhibits that almost one half of the out of school children belonged to only 12 of the countries in which Pakistan stood second in order from top, with 5.1 million out of school children in 2010. The progress of Pakistan towards the achievement of MDG 2 reflects a global trend where the improvement in net primary enrolment ratio has procrastinated since or around 2005-2006. Net primary enrolment ratio in Pakistan was 42% in 2001 which rose consistently to 56% in 2006-2007 only to halt at this point during 2011-2012 (PIHS, 2001-2002; PSLM, 2011-2012). This means that the initiatives undertaken globally and in Pakistan to address UPE gradually lost their momentum, and as a result the most vulnerable segments of population appear to have suffered.

Pakistan committed itself to UPE in the Jomtien Conference (1990) which was reiterated with the stipulation of its achievement by year 2015 in Dakar Framework of Action for Education For All (EFA) (2000). In this context, two major policy prescriptions were made by the National Education Policy (NEP, 2009). While making these policies, an elaborate consultative process was initiated by the Government of Pakistan in the form of NEP (1998-2010) and included broad range of stakeholders, and covered a spectrum of agendas in the light of the global drive for EFA goals. Despite all these policy prescriptions, Pakistan educational landscape has to go a long way to attain the desired goals.

The National Education Policy (1998-2010) focused on community mobilization, quality improvement and higher budgetary allocation to improve the enrolment in public schools. Following the policy, Education Sector Reforms (2001-2005) were developed in rigorous consultation with all the key stakeholders of EFA. In this context, a National Conference on EFA was held to discuss and develop viable frameworks for implementation of the objectives outlined in the policy under reference. Consequent upon the conference recommendations and series of dialogues among the principal stakeholders, the National Plan of Action (NPA, 2001-2015) was developed. The NPA was discussed and presented at various forums, including International Development Partners EFA Forum, South Asia EFA Ministerial Meeting in Kathmandu-Nepal, meetings of bi-lateral and multilateral agencies. Consequently, it was amended in the light of suggestions from stakeholders. The implementation plan was supported by the analysts and

affirmed by the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2003-2006). However, the plan could not be implemented primarily due to lack of funds.

National Education Policy (2009) was formulated firstly for the reason that the previous policy (1998-2010) was not addressing the lags in education sector, and the performance regarding the improvement in key indicators had halted. Secondly, it was realized that international commitments and challenges like Jomtien Conference, Millennium Development Goals, Dakar Framework of Action Education for All could only be addressed by reinventing policy in wake of globalization and devolution pressures. The policy focused on the need for enhanced public-private partnership, promoting equity in education, and rebuilding trust in public sector education. The policy document reiterated the government's commitment to achieve UPE by 2015, improving service delivery, and envisioned a greater role for provincial and area governments in addressing these issues. NEP (2009) included a comprehensive framework for implementation and stressed the Federal-Provincial collaboration.

## **Challenges**

Universalization of primary education is the bedrock of development and progress of any society. According to Article 25-A, of the Constitution of Pakistan, it is the responsibility of the state to provide free and compulsory education to all the population between 5 to 16 years of age (UNESCO, 2011). Universal primary education cannot be achieved without the concerted efforts of all the social institutions and stakeholders. Pakistan is highly likely to default on EFA by 2015 (Khan, 2011). It is also important to understand the barriers and bottlenecks to achieve the goal of universal education especially for girls.

In order to achieve the goal of UPE, it is pertinent to note that much debated issues of availability of teachers, teacher-student ratio, availability of schools in rural areas and existence of the ghost schools seem to be overemphasized in view of statistical evidence. According to Punjab Millennium Development Goals Report (PMDGR, 2011), teacher-student ratio in public primary schools was 1 to 42, and availability of public primary education facility within 2 kilometers radius in Punjab was 93% and 91% for boys and girls respectively. Moreover, 50% of the villages in Punjab had at least one private school in its locale. The number of non-functional public primary schools was high in districts where the key indicators were relatively better (PMDGR, 2011). These statistics indicate that mere existence and functioning of school does not guarantee students' enrollment and retention. The real functioning of a school depends on its ability to earn community ownership and get integrated with local institutional structures.

Universal Primary Education as part of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has demonstrated truncated progress in Pakistan. As part of the globalization process, Pakistan and its provinces are committed to the achievement

of UPE. As part of symbols of achievement, national education policies have been formulated, national action plans designed, and other strategies stipulated. However, the progress in the achievement of UPE has been limited. With the changing scenario under the 18th amendment in the constitution, the provinces have to work out the strategies according to their suitability. Government of Punjab has shown keen interest in the UPE goals, hence its School Reforms Roadmap envisions the target of providing equitable access to quality education across the province. Notwithstanding such commitments, there is always scope for looking into varying subtle ground realities and envisioning some policy recommendation. The present efforts are in that direction.

At the provincial level, Net Primary Enrolment Rate (NPER) for Balochistan is lowest at 39% while Sindh and KPK have NER of 50% and 53% respectively. Province of Punjab leads other provinces by far with NER of 64%, well beyond the national average of 57%. In view of achieving the goal of UPE in Pakistan, Punjab's contribution is significant since it embodies 60% of the total population of the country, and indicators of Punjab affect the national indicators. After 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, federating units passed a Joint Declaration on Education in September, 2011. Besides other goals, this declaration committed the provincial governments to develop an action plan to set the priorities and raise budgetary allocation in view of time limit challenges like MDGs and EFA.

According to PSLM (2011-2012), there were notable variations in the literacy and enrolment rates in Punjab across different factors. For example, by gender, males were still more likely to enter school and NER for males was 65% compared with 62% for females. Disparity between rural and urban areas was more visible. Urban Punjab had NER of 72% where rural areas lagged behind with NER of 61%. Primary Completion Rates (PCR) also varied across the districts ranging from 20% PCR for Mandi Bahauddin and 40.9% PCR for Rajanpur. However, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data showed that transition rates from primary to middle level in public schools was over 90% in most of the districts. Therefore, it can be ascertained that enrolment and retention in primary schools was a priority concern than transition.

According to the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment which became an act of parliament on April 19, 2010. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment devolved the education to the provinces which resulted in the abolition of Federal Ministry of Education. Consequently, policy issues, implementation of programs and coordination became the sole responsibility of the provincial governments.

Government of Punjab (GoPb) has shown keen interest in the EFA goals; hence, its School Reforms Roadmap envisions the target of providing equitable access to quality education across the province. Daanish Schools, Punjab Education Endowment Fund (PEEF), Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme (PESRP) have been the leading initiatives taken by the government. PESRP deals with the donor funded projects through Program Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU), and aims at improving governance, access and quality in education. PEF primarily keeps

liaison with and supports private sector education institutions; whereas, PEEF concerns with providing financial support to the underprivileged especially from the southern side of province. It is noted that the objectives of these programs are not sharply defined, and there is frail coordination. Mechanisms for systemic institutional arrangements between line departments are not efficacious. There is an immediate need for decentralization of these programs to ensure the participation of community, civil society, donors and education activists for effective implementation and culturally adaptive strategies.

Keeping in view the existing circumstances, Pakistan can not achieve the UPE by 2015. There are serious problems of governance, access, equity and quality. According to the World Bank literature, demand of education for both boys and girls is high even among the poor families in Pakistan (Gazdar, n.d).

One-third of the total school going age (5-9) are not going to school. Even if all the out of school children try to get enrolled, the existing public schools can not accommodate them (UNESCO, 2011). Although, a variety of private schools emerged with the motives of earning money yet a large number of parents can not afford to send their children even to the low fee private schools. Additionally, many remote rural areas lack the public and the private schools, let alone the quality of education and other socio-cultural impediments.

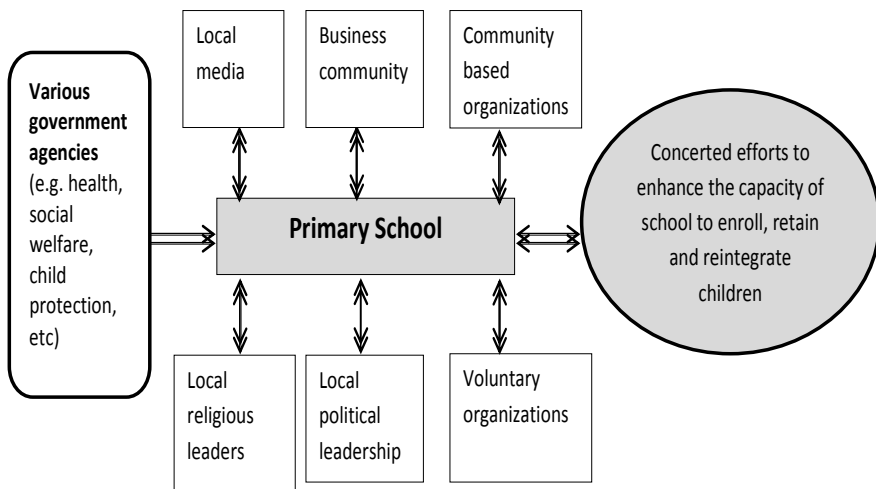
For effective formulation of policies, a multipronged approach encompassing three fundamental aspects of Universalization of Primary Education (UPE) i.e. enrolment, retention and quality need be considered. The derived policies must be linked to effective feedback mechanisms to ensure adaptability. In order to achieve this, better coordination between the state institutions, public-private partnerships, democratic approach towards decisions making and need assessment through quality data collection are required to provide service delivery to the communities. Research has demonstrated that just constructing schools and recruiting teachers is not enough to ensure enrolment, retention and quality education for children in schools. World Bank studies show an association between the quality of schooling and community support, evidenced in Balochistan in the form of community's support to education (Gazdar, n.d). Children's enrolment and retention in school is not just a technical or isolated issue; rather it needs a concerted support of the whole social, political and normative systems of the society.

Local government institutions such as education officials, basic health units, social welfare department, child protection institutions, etc. need to play a main role to develop a pattern of coordination with the existing local social structures in the community to make a collaborative effort to enhance the enrolment and retention of school-going age children. This collaboration and coordination can also be useful to enhance the quality of the education. These government agencies can use local media to bring about awareness in the community with regard to the usefulness and importance of primary education.

Government agencies can mobilize the communities and work in coordination with the religious leaders, local political leaders, businessmen and other volunteer

organizations to enhance enrolment, retention and quality of the education. Strong political will and well coordinated efforts to mobilize the community by spreading awareness about the importance of the education can be effective with regard to school enrolment, retention and quality. Once community realizes the importance of the education for their children then it will take care of the teacher-attendance, physical environment of the school and many other things that influence quality of the education and retention. However, some parents, in spite of being aware of the importance of education can not afford to send their children to school due to financial constraints. Government needs to provide some financial support to enable the parents to send their children to school for education. The community may be made the main stake holder by helping it realize the importance of education and its long-term benefits (see Figure 1). All this requires high level of political commitment to involve the local community in improving enrolment, retention and quality of education.

Figure 1: Centrality of school within the institutional and social system



primary education universal in the spirit of article 25-A of the constitution. Subsequent legislation with regard to Article 25-A has yet not been made by the provincial government (Malik, 2011).

Lack of political will may be one of the causes of legislative vacuum. For getting legal legitimacy, persistent and effective advocacy efforts are required to persuade the legislators and policy makers to fill the existing legislative vacuum.

## Education as an Indicator of Political Achievements

In electoral politics, politicians prefer to spend money on short-term high visibility targets such as construction of bridges, expensive motorways and speedy trains. Though extremely important for social development, educating the poor children

may not be very glamorous and politically visible. It is therefore important that primary education may be placed at the center stage in the development initiatives. Lack of political will and commitment to improve the condition of the government schools (mainly, by forming parent educational committees) is often regarded as the main cause for the failure of the government schools (Gazdar, n. d).

## **Governance of Education System**

The provinces have been entrusted to run the education system on their own. But there are many financial, procedural and capability issues the provinces are facing. In National Educational Conference (2011) held under the auspices of Federal Government, the provinces committed to enhance budgetary allocations and to develop an action plan accordingly. Nonetheless, no significant increase has been made, and Punjab budgetary allocation for education witnessed a percentage increase of approximately 7% i.e. 195 billion (2012-2013) to 210 billion (2013-2014). Of this allocation, primary school budget constituted only 2.44 percent, which arguably cannot cater to the needs of 3.8 million out of school children (PESRP-PMIU, 2010-2011) with a fast growing population. It appears that no lesson has been learnt from the failure of education policy 1998-2010 which collapsed generally due to financial constraints.

It is reported that provincial financial procedures are very slow and inefficient. Usually the donors expect efficient and time bound financial transactions. When provincial financial bureaucracies fail to meet the deadlines, the funds get lapsed and the plans flop. Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of World Bank considered the complexity of disbursement mechanisms as a major cause of their relative failure in both Social Action Program (SAP) Project and post-SAP phase.

## **School Management Committees (SMCs)**

The idea of School Management Committees (SMCs) consisting of parents, teachers and notables of community is already under active consideration of the policy makers. In fact it is in place in some places and has borne appreciable results. Nonetheless, this idea has not yet been implemented in letter and spirit. This approach of involving the local community in the management of local schools is particularly significant in Punjabi society where intra community social cohesion is very strong and pressures from within the community are anticipated to draw desired results. Once SMCs are in place, they, in addition to helping in managing the school affairs, can identify the families which do not enroll their children in school and the reasons thereof. They can also trace the underlying variables for frequent absenteeism of some students, and can take remedial measures to ensure that there are no drop-outs.

## **South Asian Studies 28 (2)**

School Management Committees may be properly constituted and the nexus of these committees may be extended from school to union council and ultimately to district level for its ultimate coordination with provincial education department through effective network linkages. SMCs can keep tight liaison with District Management Committees (DMCs), and later can develop a mechanism for the recruitment of its members based on the principles of accountability and merit.

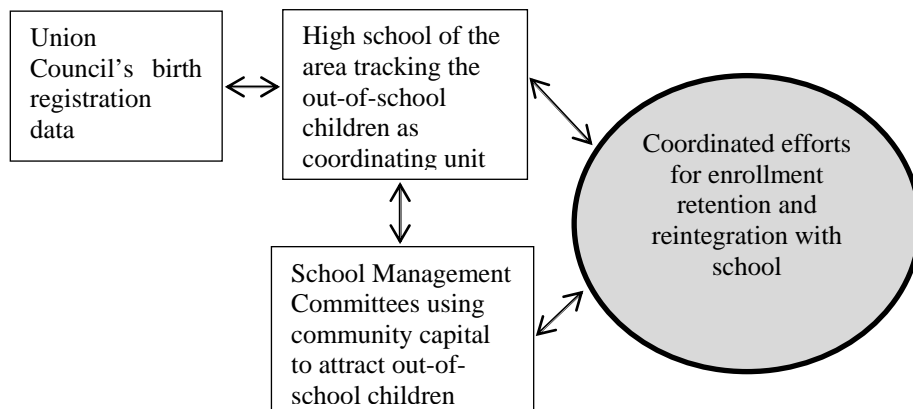
### **Child Tracking System**

Getting children to schools is a serious policy issue for Punjab where annual increase in net enrolment rates has virtually stalled since the last five years (PSLM, 2011-2012). It is noted that data regarding enrolment of primary level students in Punjab are school-based. The nature of the data makes it difficult to develop an efficient system of child tracking and it only tells us about the number of children that are out of school. The questions about socio-cultural environmental forces constraining the children to remain out of school remain unanswered. In order to locate the out of school children as well as the constraining forces for such happenings, village based data in rural areas and union council based data in urban areas is imminent. To do this, Union Councils may be engaged with schools and a coordination system may be established.

In this way, Secretary of Union Council may forward the birth registration data of primary school children to the Public High School of the area which may serve as a coordinating unit for other public and private schools within its jurisdiction. Tallying the birth registration record with the enrolment record at union council level will help to track the child without additional financial implications. In this way local data banks will be created revealing why local children are not enrolling, and identify the specific issues and consequent solutions. Experiences of various stakeholders working on model villages suggest that once identified, community mobilization and some advocacy efforts may be sufficient to get children to schools. This function may be performed by SMCs or any other body deemed appropriate.



**Figure 2: Out-of-school child tracking system by using birth registration data**



## **Emphasis on Quality of Learning**

National Education Policy (2009) emphasizes on the quality of learning but an effective implementation strategy is missing. Harnessing the cognitive skills of students against rote learning may require broad based changes ranging from the teaching methods to the examination system and curriculum content. Curriculum development and textbook reforms are politically sensitive issues and would require a lengthy collaborative process to initiate. However, an effective and workable solution could be to change the questions at the end of each chapter in a textbook. It is noticed that the exact answers to each question may be found in the content of chapter. This encourages rather compels the student to rote the passage given in the chapter as the answer to the question. Therefore, changing the questions to require some interpretive and analytical skills will help to improve the quality of education.

## **Teacher Training and Development**

Teacher training and capacity building is important to all the aspects of UPE indicators. Capacity enhancement of teachers has a direct impact on student retention and their quality learning, building an image of school friendly environment, and having an ultimate bearing on school enrolment of out of school lot. It is reported that the primary level teacher training is highly focused on certain pedagogical techniques; and as a result the teacher's actions remain too technical in dealing with the students. Advanced research in primary school education has shown that while in the class room a primary school teacher is

## **South Asian Studies 28 (2)**

confronted with many challenges such as: identity formation of the child, discrimination on the basis of status of parents, violence against the marginalized, implications of physical impairments. For example, if a student is absent from school and is punished by the teacher as a “standard practice” inclusive of corporal punishment, shouting, naming, stigmatizing, labeling. But the absence of the student could be because of his/her parental ailment or because of any other reason beyond the student’s control. But such a treatment of the teacher often has negative implications for the “self-concept” of the child, his/her denigration among the peers, his/her silent exclusion from the mainstream students, and ultimately leading to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the teachers. Resultantly, the student will consider him/herself as worthless and will try to escape from school and ultimately be dropped out.

### **Teacher’s Health Literacy**

A child spends a substantial time in school and the role of teacher is not restricted to imparting knowledge alone but also to monitor the health and wellbeing of the child. The teacher is supposed to have basic health information in order to make judgments and take decisions in everyday life concerning health care, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life of a child (Kickbusch et al 2013). Students’ attendance is associated with academic performance; therefore, frequent absences affect the learning process and academic achievement (Judith et al., 2007). Usually, student learning impairments and physical disabilities are not readily recognized by the teachers and coercive means of instruction are adopted to improve learning. In other cases, students are stereotyped as ‘failures which result in self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **School environment, psychological health and role of teacher**

Punjab is a multi-ethnic province with people having diverse subnational identities. The legacy of discrimination based on the caste, gender and social class is still prevalent and overshadows the impression of equality which the modern societies entail. This social reality is often reflected in schools where peers and sometimes teachers discriminate against the students belonging to minority group based on their class, language, occupation, area of residence and disability. Such treatment is detrimental to the self-respect of the discriminated child resulting in his/her silent exclusion from the mainstream students and the resultant frequent absenteeism from schools, and the ultimate drop-out.

Therefore in the school environment, it is very pertinent for the teachers to understand the dynamics of learning, psychological and physical needs of children. In this regard, teachers should have a basic understanding of how the

disabilities and stigmatizations of child affect his/her psychological health and learning achievements.

## **Re-enrollment/reintegration of the Dropout**

Retention of students in primary schools is directly linked to the ongoing enrolment efforts. Drop-out in primary schools is detrimental to the goals of UPE because it is extremely difficult to re-enroll a child who has left the school. Retention is not a pedagogical or technical issue, it is a social issue rooted in the local context. Primary Completion Rates in Punjab is 78.2% (MICS, 2011) which is quite low by international standards.

School drop-out is a cross cutting phenomenon but it is an accepted fact that absenteeism is a preface to drop-out. Absenteeism may be due to health related issues, hostile school environment, learning pressure and economic deprivation. As a policy measure, prior intimation for being absent may be made an integral part of school rules and regulations. Any case of prolonged absenteeism without intimation may be dealt with administratively as a prospective drop-out. A standing committee in each school consisting of concerned teacher, Head of School and local leader may be established to prevent drop-out. In this context, peer persuasion may also be an effective tool among other mechanisms such as parental advocacy.

## **Poor Health and Silent Exclusion**

Health issues are an important determinant of students' retention in school. Students suffering from vision and hearing problems find it very difficult to learn in the classroom environment. Similarly, bad dental care and skin related issues may damage the self-esteem among students. Because of health disadvantaged condition, which may attract stigmatization and discrimination, a student may not withstand the punitive sanctions by teachers and peers and as a result go for "silent exclusion".

Health promotion programs have been successful in other parts of the world. 'CHERISH' in Singapore and 'Fit for School' in Philippines have yielded results which outweigh the associated costs. For similar practice in Punjab, student health program could be launched on the lines of National Integrated Health Screening program by Iran. In this connection, public health institution could coordinate with the school education department in providing health care services and institutionalized mechanisms may be established to ensure effectiveness.

## **Meals in Schools**

Since there is remarkable disparity between the north and south of province, Midday meal to all primary school children has manifold advantages. It includes preventing hunger, malnutrition, and thereby increases enrolment and retention. Particularly for most disadvantaged districts, provision of food in schools can be an overwhelming incentive for both parents and children to enroll and retain in schools.

Indian State of Tamil Nadu pioneered Midday Meal Scheme Program in India. Despite the labeling of this program as populism, it generated spectacular increase in NER and PCR. As a result, the program was expanded to other states of India. Moreover, Supreme Court of India directed the government to ensure provision of meals to all primary school children and hence the scheme was universalized.

In order to provide meals to primary school children in Punjab and keeping in view the budget constraints, institutional collaboration with private business enterprise and World Food Program (WFP) is significant. The principle of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may be used as an instrument of advocacy with corporate sector. The feasibility may also be increased by initially targeting the most vulnerable districts and directing the local philanthropy to schools.

## **Congenial School Environment**

Despite all infrastructural facilities, school could be an unattractive place for the child. It is learnt that joyful learning is a prerequisite to retention especially at primary school level. In addition to acquiring friendly methods of instruction, strategic partnership with sports department to conduct regular sports event at schools could be a viable course of action. In addition to the school interior, school surroundings may be important to create a congenial learning environment.

## **Physical Environmental Issues**

It is noticed that throughout the province of Punjab, vicinities of several schools are hazardous. Garbage dumping, noisy transportation, commercial activity stagnant water, poor sanitation and open drainage are common activities around schools. While these affect the health status of children, they make school going an unpleasant experience. Moreover, such activities distract the students' concentration and affect the learning outcomes.

## **Local philanthropy**

Philanthropic activities contribute significantly to the provision of welfare services in the province of Punjab. It is reported that local philanthropy is highly tilted towards supporting religious education (Madrasas). While religious education serves important function in existing social context, formal education is also important and requires favorable consideration from philanthropic organizations. Initiatives may be taken to ensure that resource mobilization is directed towards formal primary education. Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) is already working on raising funds through donations, grants and subscriptions. Enhancing its role to involve the local organizations may harness the financial capacity of local educational facilities.

## **Discussion**

It is highly likely that Pakistan will default on EFA 2015 Targets (Khan, 2011). Generally, schooling of children in developing countries, especially in Pakistan, often competes with their economic contribution (e.g. household tasks, paid employment) in low-income families. The competition has become even more intense due to high inflationary pressure in Pakistan. A great majority of population in Pakistan lives in rural areas. There is dearth of both educational and employment opportunities in the rural areas. Most of the people in the rural areas are dependent on agriculture. Population growth rate is also higher in rural areas compared to the urban areas, leading to greater pressure on the available resources. Resource constraints and unavailability of adequate education, increase the opportunity cost of the education. Resource constrained parents, for whom immediate economic contribution from their children is critically important, may perceive the general education to be of little use because it does not equip their children with employable skills. There is also a shortage of educational institutions in rural areas of Pakistan. Greater distance (from home to school) coupled with poor quality of education reduce the likelihood that parents will send their children to school. The issue of quality of education can be dealt with the community involvement and support to the schooling; results of the World Bank studies show close association between community involvement and the quality of schooling (Gazdar, n.d). However, access to schools still remains a serious issue especially in remote rural areas and urban slums (UNESCO, 2011). The implementation of Article 25-A requires free and compulsory education up to secondary level. This requires more infrastructure and teachers. The problem of distance becomes even more sensitive in cases of female education. Many girls drop out of school due to long distance and the security reasons (Khan, 2011). Greater drop out rate among the female students is also attributed to lesser number of female-only schools and shortage of female teaching staff (Khan, 2011). Cost benefit analysis may lead the

parents to send their children to workshops (to learn skills) or to some paid work. Proper campaign at the community level to educate the parents about the long-term benefits of education may be helpful to change their ideas with regard to usefulness of education (Siddiqui, 2007; p. 44).

Parents take school quality into account while sending their children to school. Buchmann (2008) found that parents' perceptions of the value of education were important determinant of children's school enrollment. This can be addressed by improving the quality of education and by reducing the cost of education to parents (ILO, UNICEF, and UNESCO 2008). Primary education needs to be provided to the students free of cost by the government. Provision of food to the school children during school hours can be another incentive for the poor parents.

Basic infrastructure of government schools exists all over Pakistan. However, it needs serious attention from the decision makers. Physical as well as educational condition of these schools is deplorable. A large number of schools do not have clean drinking water, washrooms, appropriate buildings, electricity and appropriate number of teachers. (Siddiqui, 2007). Serious attention to these public sector schools by the government can improve the situation considerably. Proper attention and allocation of funds can bring about a great deal of improvement in the infrastructure and the quality of education in the public sector schools. In Balochistan, government with the help of local communities and NGOs is successfully providing primary education in the far flung areas (UNESCO, 2008). Participation of the local community can be useful for improvement in school infrastructure and quality of schooling. No serious attempt has so far been made to enhance the functioning of the government schools. Parent educational committees are suggested to be formed to monitor the day to day performance of the government schools (Gazdar, n.d). Due consideration is not given to the appointment of teachers according to the number of students in the schools. There may be many teachers in a school which has a small number of students. On the other hand, there may be a few teachers in a school to teach a large number of students. According to UNESCO (2003), there are 2.35 teachers, on average, for each government primary school. The average is even low (1.3 teachers per mosque school) in case of mosque schools. The qualification of the teachers and their recruitment is also questionable. The National Education Policy 1998-2010 recognized the importance of teachers in bringing about reforms in education. Teachers can provide the students learning experiences that enhance their interest and engagement with the learning. Due to inappropriate monitoring system, teacher absenteeism is frequent in these schools. In such circumstances, parents may perceive schooling as wastage of time and resources.

Academic environment in the schools is worse than the physical environment. Recruitment of teachers for the elementary schools generally takes place on political recommendation instead of merit. The selected teachers normally do not undergo teaching training before starting the job of teaching. Those who get opportunity to have some teaching training during service are taught about the pedagogical skills. The training is not meant to change their conceptions of

teaching and learning. Conceptions of teaching and learning are based on the transmission and acquisition of information. Teachers emphasize rote learning of knowledge. Understanding of the content and describing it in one's own words is not generally appreciated by the teachers, rather it is discouraged. Learning in such an environment is defined as absorption of maximum information. The students are assigned heavy homework that generally consists of reproduction of material from books to the notebooks.

Financial constraints, greater distance from home to school, failure in examinations, parents' perceptions of quality of education, incompetence of teachers, teachers' absenteeism and unpleasant physical and academic environment are the most common causes of drop out. Physical punishment is practiced frequently that makes the school highly an unpleasant place, and is responsible for student absenteeism, low academic performance and consequently drop out of the students (Siddiqui, 2007). State can provide financial incentives to the resource constrained parents and free elementary education to all the citizens in the public sector schools. A strong political will is required to identify the bottlenecks in the way of literacy and to remove them.

Three things are considered to be very important with regard to the Universal Primary Education: enrollment, retention and quality of education. Almost two third population in Pakistan live in rural areas. There is still scarcity of schools in the rural areas. There is great demand of quality education, and government has failed to provide educational services according to the demand, especially in remote rural areas. Although, private sector schools can accommodate a sizable number of school going age children yet a great number of parents can not afford to bear the cost of even the low-fee private schools (UNESCO, 2011). All Pakistan Private school Association claims that the private-sector schools are greater in number in the Punjab than the public-sector schools in the Punjab. (UNESCO, 2011). In such circumstances, public-private partnership may be a way out to provide access to all the school going age children. Moreover, the government needs to provide financial assistance to the poor parents for the primary education of their children.

A number of factors influence the retention or drop out of children. According to PSLM (2010-2011), 52% population completes the primary education. There is a high drop out rate with regard to primary education in Pakistan. Higher teacher absenteeism, untrained and incompetent teachers, physical punishment, poor physical and academic environment and low quality of education are regarded responsible for the higher drop out rate. Additionally, lack of post-primary technical and vocational educational services further aggravate the situation in the wake of wide-spread poverty in Pakistan. A strong political will and good governance (committed to remove all types of constraints and obstacles) are prerequisite to achieve the universal primary education in Pakistan.

Deeni madrasas are also being run by different religious sects in Pakistan. They provide free deeni education to the children of generally the poor people.

## **South Asian Studies 28 (2)**

They also provide free boarding and meal to the Madrassa students. Along with the religious education the students also learn literacy skills of reading and writing. They indirectly, share the responsibility of increase in literacy with the government. However, the madrassa education can be reformed by introducing social sciences, natural sciences and computer literacy programmes to enable them to get reasonable employment after completing the education. NEP 2009 advised the concerned authorities to introduce market-oriented and skill-based subjects to prepare the madrassa graduates for reasonable employment (UNESCO, 2011). The total number of madrassas in Pakistan is estimated to be 28982. According to the estimates of interior ministry, there are 20000 madrassas where 3 million students are enrolled (UNESCO, 2011). Intervention from the government to introduce reforms in madrassas to integrate them with the mainstream education can be very useful to improve literacy and to develop human resource for the country. The reforms by introducing modern education subjects in madrassas can also be effective to produce enlightened moderates and useful citizens. The involvement of community can be handy to bring about improvement in enrolment, quality of education, to reduce the drop out rate.

The availability of qualified, satisfied, competent, honest and motivated teachers, accountable to the school administration is important for quality education. The incentive-based salary structure linked with the performance is a solution for many shortcomings in education system (UNESCO, 2011). Adequate infrastructure, trained and accountable teachers, recruited on merit, active electronic media campaigns (to educate the people about the importance of the education), provision of post primary technical and vocational education (especially for the resource constrained parents) along with financial assistance to the poor parents can be helpful in achieving universal primary education.

## **Conclusion**

Keeping in view the statistics relating to budget allocations, enrolment, literacy rates, gender-based and rural-urban differences in literacy, it seems highly unlikely that Pakistan can achieve UPE by 2015. In the wake of great advancements in science and technology and emergence of knowledge economy, it does not seem possible for a society to progress with 50 % literacy rates and without a quality education. Pakistani government has to show a high level of political will and commitment to make both quantitative and qualitative progress, not only with regard to basic education but also higher education. There is a plenty of evidence (documented in this paper) that literacy and primary education can be improved by involving parents, community and local institutions in the efforts to make progress in this regard. However, all these goals can only be achieved with political stability and good governance. We need to construct more schools, in addition to improving the existing ones. According to the review of literature, we need to focus on enrolment, retention and quality to achieve UPE in Pakistan. Teachers



need to be appointed on merit, and be trained to promote understanding, creativity and critical thinking among the students. The teachers need to be trained according to the modern teaching-learning techniques. They should provide the students learning environment and the learning experiences which encourage their greater participation in the teaching learning process. The teachers should also be trained to provide a pleasant and an attractive learning environment to the students to reduce their drop outs.

## References

- All Pakistan Private School Association June Bulletin 2011.
- Asian Development Bank (2010), Public Private Partnerships - Lessons Learned from Punjab
- Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 25-A: Right to education: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law".
- Education Foundation <http://www.adb.org/documents/reports/ppp-education-punjab/ppp-education-punjab.pdf>
- Gazdar, H. (n.d). Policy failure, political constraints and political resources: basic education in Pakistan. Asia Research Centre Working Paper 5.
- Govt. of Pakistan and UNESCO. (2003). Quality of primary education in Pakistan. Islamabad: Ministry of Education.
- Judith, A. V., Sherwood, J. J., Warner, D., & Clark, D. (2007). Comparing hand washing to hand sanitizers in reducing elementary school students' absenteeism. *Pediatric Nursing*, 33(4), 368-370.
- Khan, G. A., Azhar, M., & Shah, S. A. (2011). Causes of primary school drop out among rural girls in Pakistan. Working paper series No. 19. Islamabad.
- Khan, S. B. (2010). Problems in universalization of primary education in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce Soci*, Pakistan Journal of Commerce Soci Science, 4(2), 147-155.
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Punjab. (2011). Bureau of Statistics, Punjab.
- National Education Policy. (2009). Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.
- National Education Policy. (1998-2010). Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 1998.
- Siddiqui, S. (2007). Rethinking education in Pakistan: perceptions, practices and possibilities. Karachi: Paramount Publishing Enterprise.
- UNICEF, ILO and UNESCO. (2008). Child Labour and Education in Bangladesh: Evidence and Policy Recommendations.
- UNESCO. (2011). Policy analysis of education in Punjab province. Islamabad.
- UNESCO and Government of Pakistan. (2008). Need Assessment report on literacy initiative empowerment. Projects Wing, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 1-106.

## Biographical Note

**Prof. Dr. Muhammad Zakria Zakar** is Dean, Faculty of Behavioral & Social Sciences and Director of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab-Lahore-Pakistan

**Dr. Shazia Qureshi** is Assistant Professor at the University Law College, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

## **South Asian Studies 28 (2)**

**Dr. Raza Ullah** is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan

**Dr. Rubeena Zakar** is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan

**N Aqil** is MPhil scholar at Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab.

**Dr Riffat Manawar** is Associate Professor at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan

---