ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN’S EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN TERMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Pakistan being a developing country renders education as a survival tool of this millennium. The identity of Pakistan comprises its social, economic and political make up. In this context it becomes imperative to equip its youth with the skills, expertise and knowledge necessary to make sure the nation achieves its challenges. Thus, there is a need for credible and quality institutions of higher education so that students are equipped with the quality of education which would lead to gainful employment in the future (Iqbal, 2006).

Coming down to brass tacks, the education sector of Pakistan has been in a state of neglect since independence with a mere 2% of the GNP allocated for education in spite of the UNESCO recommendation of 4%. However, in 2003 this budgetary allocation rose to nearly 3%. In regard to higher education, the exponential growth of the budget went up to about Rs. 9 billion by 2005 which constitutes an increase by 1500%. This increase has not proved beneficial since the rise in expenditure and inflationary costs have proved detrimental in the quest for improvement in this sector (Saiyid, 2006).

Returning to the point of the social and economic aspects of national development along with the aspects of intellectual and cultural development, according to Ravitch (2006), if these aspects are not attended to, the standard of living of the population will be kept from growing. Therefore, a significant portion of funds should be allocated for the development of universities. In this way it will be possible to provide education to all levels of society and talented youth will benefit and contribute to nation building. Keeping in mind its priorities Pakistan must consider the case of education, since it is the conduit to the resolution of other problems faced by the country, and when the number of educated youth grows this goal will become achievable.

Higher Education Scenario in Pakistan

Higher education in Pakistan functions at three levels. First of all, there are degree colleges which are affiliated with universities for the awarding of degrees. Secondly, there are institutes with a degree awarding status and finally, there are universities in both the public and private sectors (Khan, Siraj & Sultana, 2010). The numbers of students in institutions of higher education constitute a mere 3% in comparison to the 50-75% in developed countries and fall in the age bracket of 17-
24 years. Of these 75% of graduates are from the public sector and mainly in science and technology. The quality of these institutes is hardly commendable since quality education emerges from the private sector institutions which are operating for profit and the fee structure is beyond the reach of the common man. Only the upper class youth have access to this education (Ravitch, 2006).

Turning to the education policies and plans since independence, it cannot be denied that efforts were made at different periods to give direction to education. The founder of Pakistan envisioned character building through education wherein students would develop honor, a sense of integrity and responsibility to render selfless service to the country. Thus, initially education plans were made on a five year basis.

A notable event at the advent of Pakistan’s independence was the First Education Conference in 1947. Bring honor and contributing to nation building were the aims of education which at that stage was of a poor quality since colonial education thus far did not seek to inculcate any ideology on literacy for that matter. These issues aside, the Conference considered the need of the hour, that is, to empower youth with scientific and technical skills. Another point was to ensure that the educational goals conformed to the intellectual ability and aspirations of the youth. The Conference also planned for education to promote democracy and this would be through expansion of higher education aimed at moral and intellectual human development. Despite the lofty aims of the Conference, the suggestions could not be implemented and therefore, another commission followed aimed at preparing education objectives for the new nation. This commission’s objectives also failed because there was no strategy accomplishing these objectives. However, financial planning was done on a yearly basis and varying financial commitments were made by the governments that followed.

To examine the five year plans, the first one was the Plan 1955-1960. This catered to the 6 universities existing at that time with 16% of the budget for education. The Plan 1955-1960 called for better management of tertiary education through the provision of autonomy and accountability. The proposal for a University Grants Committee for every province was made to improve coordination with the University Board and the Government. Other areas included in the Plan were research, faculty exchange programs and merger of professional colleges with universities in the form of constituent bodies. Unfortunately, this plan failed to achieve its objective and only 69% of its budgetary allocation was availed.

The failure of the First Plan led to the appointment of the National Commission on Education in 1959 through a resolution. The policy emerging from this commission was to come up with a policy to meet the needs of a new nation and mirror the values required by the population. The policy fell short since it was not based on an evaluation of the reasons why a new policy was required and also lacked the perception regarding strategy for implementation of the changes in attitude required by the people about their country and
government. In this context it became the responsibility of higher education to build character and promote a love of knowledge among the youth. Other objectives of this policy were to establish standards of equality in society, democracy, values relating to morality and spirituality which would aid in developing the need for knowledge of science and public service as a step to national development. However, the policy failed due to lack of funds and political will. An example of this was that the government bowed down to student pressure and withdrew the 3 year Bachelor’s program proposal. The policy was effective in the achievement of agricultural and industrial education objectives but not in higher education per se.

In order to get a holistic view of this policy it is important to view the 5 year plans of 1960-1965 (Second Five Year Plan) and 1965-1970 (Third Five Year Plan). The Second Plan targeted the reliance of all levels of education on one another and emphasized vocational and technical education. This Plan saw the establishment 3 engineering colleges, upgradation of 2 engineering colleges to universities, postgraduate programs in engineering, construction of 3 universities and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of seats of higher learning. Funding also increased during this period and provision for merit scholarships was made.

As regards the Third Five Year Plan, its objectives included the formation of the University Grants Commission, emphasis on quality education, further spread of scientific and technical education and infrastructure, and research and development for faculty. In terms of higher education this plan achieved the establishment of 2 more engineering colleges, 5 degree colleges, 2 universities, start of degree classes in 25 colleges, and increase in scholarships.

In the year 1970 the National Education Policy was formulated since national cohesion had failed to come into effect and separatist feelings were rife which subsequently, led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. Apart from this education standards continued to remain poor and unemployment was widespread. The new policy aimed to inculcate Islamic cultural values, increase literacy and promote technical manpower leading to workers with skill sets enabling them to secure employment. In the quest to increase literacy a program of mass adult literacy was planned and the administration of education was decentralized. The reality, however, was different since the policy was not implementable and was only a political show.

The education policy 1972 was envisioned by the democratic government of Bhutto and focused on higher education through the establishment of 6 new universities, 2 new engineering colleges, nationalization of private institutions, and increase in university enrollment by 56 percent. The downside of the policy of nationalization was that the government faced financial constraints and increased development expenditure considerably.

The Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans of 1970-1975 and 1977-1983 followed this policy. In the Fourth Plan the nationalization policy continued and the treasury was burdened further. The achievements were that the University Grants Commission was established, as well as centers of excellence, 7 new universities, increase in agricultural
education, scholarships and enrollment in higher education. The downside was that education was politicized and jobs were given on a political basis. The Fifth Educational Plan sought to balance access to education, improve teaching quality, improve institutions and research facilities and make higher education possible for youth in distant regions of the country.

The National Education Policy of 1979 followed and the main features here were the promotion of Islamic ideology and the continuation of development efforts in higher education tending to vocational and scientific education. It appears that all previous and subsequent policies were political in nature and the features were merely variations of the same.

The Seventh Five Year Plan 1988-1992 saw increases in engineering education, the setting up of the National Education Testing Service and some efforts in the area of faculty and research development.

The National Education Policy 1992 which followed was the product of democratic governments where education was not a priority; however, efforts were on to make education modern. Higher education became demand driven and research and community development were also prioritized to bring about social change in the country. Like previous policies it failed to be fully implemented due to a change of government. It is interesting to note that no assessment has ever been made to determine the causes of failure of these policies. As a result higher education suffered the most.

Following this policy was the Eighth Five Year Plan 1993-98 which provided 4100 million for higher education. Here again the focus was engineering education and the 3 year Bachelor’s degree. Additionally, linkages with universities abroad, increased tuition, generation of funds by universities and research improvement were envisaged. This plan saw burgeoning private sector higher education and evening programs in universities.

Coming to the National Educational Policy 1998-2010, it can be said that it was the product of a democratic government which had been elected with a stable majority. The policy realized that higher education was limited to a few, was beset with politics, the curricula was not relevant and relevant, the system of assessment was not adequate and fair, the infrastructure needed up gradation, and inefficient and corrupt administration. The policy goals were specialization in higher education which was demand driven and of a superior quality comparable to international benchmarks with a strong research-oriented faculty. To achieve these goals efforts were made in the right direction with all pertinent recommendations. Higher education became more autonomous and the social implications were enormous. It would be pertinent to say that this was a period when foreign donors were involved in efforts to turn the economy around, thus monitoring of higher education was extremely necessary if the system was to be reformed. The reform agenda continued with the Education Sector Reforms, Strategic Plan 2001-2004, which basically ensured continuation of this policy in terms of the liberal policy for the education sector, and increased enrollment in higher education institutions (Jahangir, 2008).
Regarding the Education Policy of 2009 much has already been said and written, therefore, this paper will not touch upon it.

**Conclusion**

1. It is evident throughout all policies, plans, and reform effort, that there has been dissatisfaction with the quality of higher education and an urgent need for reform.
2. In addition, finances allocated for higher education have also been inadequate and a major constraint in the way of alleviating problems associated with higher education.
3. Inability to extend Bachelor’s degree programs subsequently led to graduates entering two types of Masters Programs namely, the one year program and the two year program.
4. As regards the quality of education which was given importance in several plans, unfortunately, it declined instead of improving because funds favored the quantitative expansion of the higher education sector rather than focusing on quality, thereby not fulfilling the need for professionally trained human resource.
5. Funds were not the only handicap in improving higher education for national development but it was the lack of government support.
6. The nationalization of institutions was ill planned because the government could not take on the financial burden leading to increase in non-development expenditure which became a precursor of political unrest in universities.
7. The fostering of private institutions led to the creation of two systems, one for the common man and one for the elite which did not benefit social cohesion in the country.
8. The formulation of education policies was not based on any implementation strategy and this led to the failure of policies in terms of achieving their objectives of higher education.
9. Each government rejected the policies of the previous government which resulted in higher education becoming embroiled in politics doing no service to nation development and social change.
10. Politicization of institutions of higher learning led to the destruction their credibility and the public becoming indifferent to learning.

All in all, it can be said that the policies were good but a lack of funds hindered their implementation so the desired results were not forthcoming

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered for different areas:

**Planning**

1. In order to improve higher education, faculty from both sector colleges and universities should formulate a plan aimed at outlining procedures and transparent systems of accountability which are fair and equitable.
2. The HEC should have an external advisory board for decision-making process guidelines and to make sure these decisions are transparent.
3. The external HEC board should find out what plans and procedures were implemented and with what degree of success.
4. Universities which receive funds from HEC must use these after approval from their Board of Governors and submit a report to HEC regarding their usage. In case of satisfactory feedback from HEC these funds may be disbursed again.
5. National accreditation bodies must aspire to evaluate institutions according to international standards and certify institutions more rigorously.

Administration
1. Guidelines for decision making should be set.
2. Research should be strategized for the entire nation.
3. Costs of education for each student should be calculated carefully so students can arrange funds accordingly.

Fund Allocation
1. HEC funds for universities should be based according to degree programs and faculty ranks.
2. Private sector university students should also be eligible for stipends and scholarships.
3. The corporate sector should be encouraged to give grants for education.

Faculty
1. Faculty remuneration should be improved.
2. More faculty training and development programs should be organized.
3. Faculty should be encouraged to upgrade teaching methodology and curricula using critical thinking and problem-based learning philosophies.

Quality of Institutions
1. Resources should be state-of-the-art.
2. Physical infrastructure should be technically sufficient.

Public/Private Partnership:
1. Private sector institutions should share their faculty expertise with public sector universities.
2. Private sector universities should provide education to students from less-privileged strata through need-based scholarships.

References


