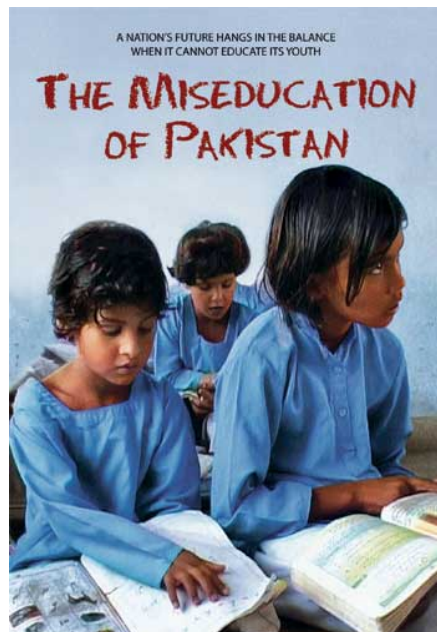




The Miseducation of Pakistan

Lesson Plan/Guidebook



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PAKISTAN



The Education System in Pakistan

At independence, Pakistan had a poorly educated population and few schools or universities. Although the education system has expanded greatly since then, debate continues about the curriculum, and, except in a few elite institutions, quality remained a crucial concern of educators in the early 1990s.

Adult literacy is low, but improving. In 1992 more than 36 percent of adults over fifteen were literate, compared with 21 percent in 1970. The rate of improvement is highlighted by the 50 percent literacy achieved among those aged fifteen to nineteen in 1990. School enrollment also increased, from 19 percent of those aged six to twenty-three in 1980 to 24 percent in 1990. However, by 1992 the population over twenty-five had a mean of only 1.9 years of schooling. This fact explains the minimal criteria for being considered literate: having the ability to both read and write (with understanding) a short, simple statement on everyday life.

Relatively limited resources have been allocated to education, although there has been improvement in recent decades. In 1960 public expenditure on education was only 1.1 percent of the gross national product (GNP); by 1990 the figure had risen to 3.4 percent. This amount compared poorly with the 33.9 percent being spent on defense in 1993. In 1990 Pakistan was tied for fourth place in the world in its ratio of military expenditures to health and education expenditures. Although the government enlisted the assistance of various international donors in the education efforts outlined in its Seventh Five-Year Plan (1988-93), the results did not measure up to expectations.

Structure of the System

Education is organized into five levels: primary (grades one through five); middle (grades six through eight); high (grades nine and ten, culminating in matriculation); intermediate (grades eleven and twelve, leading to an F.A. diploma in arts or F.S. science; and university programs leading to undergraduate and advanced degrees. Preparatory classes (*kachi*, or nursery) were formally incorporated into the system in 1988 with the Seventh Five-Year Plan.

Academic and technical education institutions are the responsibility of the federal Ministry of Education, which coordinates instruction through the intermediate level. Above that level, a designated university in each province is responsible for coordination of instruction and examinations. In certain cases, a different ministry may oversee specialized programs. Universities enjoy limited autonomy; their finances are overseen by a University Grants Commission, as in Britain.

Teacher-training workshops are overseen by the respective provincial education ministries in order to improve teaching skills. However, incentives are severely lacking, and, perhaps because of the shortage of financial support to education, few teachers participate. Rates of absenteeism among teachers are high in general, inducing support for community-coordinated efforts promoted in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1993-98).

In 1991 there were 87,545 primary schools, 189,200 primary school teachers, and 7,768,000 students enrolled at the primary level, with a student-to-teacher ratio of forty-one to one. Just over one-third of all children of primary school age were enrolled in a school in 1989. There were 11,978 secondary schools, 154,802 secondary school teachers, and 2,995,000 students enrolled at the secondary level, with a student-to-teacher ratio of nineteen to one.

Primary school dropout rates remained fairly consistent in the 1970s and 1980s, at just over 50 percent for boys and 60 percent for girls. The middle school dropout rates for boys and girls rose from 22 percent in 1976 to about 33 percent in 1983. However, a noticeable shift occurred in the beginning of the 1980s regarding the postprimary dropout rate: whereas boys and girls had relatively equal rates (14 percent) in 1975, by 1979-- just as Zia initiated his government's Islamization program--the dropout rate for boys was 25 percent while for girls it was only 16 percent. By 1993 this trend had dramatically reversed, and boys had a dropout rate of only 7 percent compared with the girls' rate of 15 percent.

The Seventh Five-Year Plan envisioned that every child five years and above would have access to either a primary school or a comparable, but less comprehensive, mosque school. However, because of financial constraints, this goal was not achieved.

In drafting the Eighth Five-Year Plan in 1992, the government therefore reiterated the need to mobilize a large share of national resources to finance education. To improve access to schools, especially at the primary level, the government sought to decentralize and democratize the design and implementation of its education strategy. To give parents a greater voice in running schools, it planned to transfer control of primary and secondary schools to NGOs. The government also intended to gradually make all high schools, colleges, and universities autonomous, although no schedule was specified for achieving this ambitious goal.

Female Education

Comparison of data for men and women reveals significant disparity in educational attainment. By 1992, among people older than fifteen years of age, 22 percent of women were literate, compared with 49 percent of men. The comparatively slow rate of improvement for women is reflected in the fact that between 1980 and 1989, among women aged fifteen to twenty-four, 25 percent

were literate. United Nations sources say that in 1990 for every 100 girls of primary school age there were only thirty in school; among girls of secondary school age, only thirteen out of 100 were in school; and among girls of the third level, grades nine and ten, only 1.5 out of 100 were in school. Slightly higher estimates by the National Education Council for 1990 stated that 2.5 percent of students--3 percent of men and 2 percent of women--between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one were enrolled at the degree level. Among all people over twenty-five in 1992, women averaged a mere 0.7 year of schooling compared with an average of 2.9 years for men.

The discrepancy between rural and urban areas is even more marked. In 1981 only 7 percent of women in rural areas were literate, compared with 35 percent in urban areas. Among men, these rates were 27 and 57 percent, respectively. Pakistan's low female literacy rates are particularly confounding because these rates are analogous to those of some of the poorest countries in the world.

Pakistan has never had a systematic, nationally coordinated effort to improve female primary education, despite its poor standing. It was once assumed that the reasons behind low female school enrollments were cultural, but research conducted by the Ministry for Women's Development and a number of international donor agencies in the 1980s revealed that danger to a woman's honor was parents' most crucial concern. Indeed, reluctance to accept schooling for women turned to enthusiasm when parents in rural Punjab and rural Balochistan could be guaranteed their daughters' safety and, hence, their honor.

Reform Efforts

Three initiatives characterized reform efforts in education in the late 1980s and early 1990s: privatization of schools that had been nationalized in the 1970s; a return to English as the medium of instruction in the more elite of these privatized schools, reversing the imposition of Urdu in the 1970s; and continuing emphasis on Pakistan studies and Islamic studies in the curriculum.

Until the late 1970s, a disproportionate amount of educational spending went to the middle and higher levels. Education in the colonial era had been geared to staffing the civil service and producing an educated elite that shared the values of and was loyal to the British. It was unabashedly elitist, and contemporary education--reforms and commissions on reform notwithstanding--has retained the same quality. This fact is evident in the glaring gap in educational attainment between the country's public schools and the private schools, which were nationalized in the late 1970s in a move intended to facilitate equal access. Whereas students from lower-class backgrounds did gain increased access to these private schools in the 1980s and 1990s, teachers and school principals alike bemoaned the decline in the quality of education. Meanwhile, it appears that a greater proportion of children of the elites are traveling abroad not only for university education but also for their high school diplomas.

The extension of literacy to greater numbers of people has spurred the working class to aspire to middle-class goals such as owning an automobile, taking summer vacations, and providing a daughter with a once-inconceivable dowry at the time of marriage. In the past, Pakistan was a country that the landlords owned, the army ruled, and the bureaucrats governed, and it drew most of its elite from these three groups. In the 1990s, however, the army and the civil service were drawing a greater proportion of educated members from poor backgrounds than ever before.

One of the education reforms of the 1980s was an increase in the number of technical schools throughout the country. Those schools that were designated for females included hostels nearby to provide secure housing for female students. Increasing the number of technical schools was a response to the high rate of underemployment that had been evident since the early 1970s. The Seventh Five-Year Plan aimed to increase the share of students going to technical and vocational institutions to over 33 percent by increasing the number of polytechnics, commercial colleges, and vocational training centers. Although the numbers of such institutions did increase, a compelling need to expand vocational training further persisted in early 1994.

Source: *U.S. Library of Congress*

LINKS

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Pakistan.pdf> - Updated Country Profile from the Library of Congress

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/pk.html> - World Factbook on Pakistan from the CIA

Discussion Questions

1. The education system in Pakistan is divided into government supported schools and private or religious schools. According to the film, the public or government supported schools are impacted by a variety of problems. Make a list of the problems explored and what their impact is on the students, teachers, and communities for each area.
2. What efforts are underway to improve conditions for Pakistan's schools? Will the push for greater accountability and improved buildings have an impact or are there larger issues that must be addressed. i.e. economy, social norms, etc.?
3. A growing trend in Pakistan is the number of children being educated in fundamental Muslim schools or madrassas. Although the film states they only account for 1% of all students, there is growing concern some of these schools may be training grounds for future terrorists. What are your thoughts on this subject? What are the pros and cons of these schools, especially considering the current state of public schools?
4. The issue of school choice is a growing one in the United States. Many would like to see a system where parents are allowed to choose where to send their children, even if it means the government provides an economic supplement so that parents can afford an expensive, private school over a free public school. What are your thoughts on this subject? Should Pakistan adopt a system that would allow more children to attend private schools? What are the pros and cons of this?
5. As the film states, many poor South Asian countries see education as a luxury. Many children are forced to work at a young age to help support their families. What alternatives can be created to help educate these students? If you were in charge of a non-profit that was hired to improve the education system, what action would you take?