

A Study Of The Rapid Growth Of “O” And “A” Levels Of Education In Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the views of students, parents and teachers regarding the rapid growth of ordinary “O” and advanced “A” level education systems and its implications for Pakistan. The main objective of study was to identify the importance of and social acceptance of “O” and “A” level education system in Pakistan. The population of the study was all “O” and “A” level schools, “O” and “A” level students, and their parents and teachers in Pakistan. The sample of the study was 45 schools, 230 teachers, 450 “O” and “A” level students, and their parents. The sample of the study was drawn from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. For the collection of data, three questionnaires, one each for “O” and “A” level students, their parents and the teachers of “O” and “A” level were developed. Three structured interviews - one each for “O” and “A” level students, their parents and the teachers were designed. Data were also collected through personal visits. For the analysis of data, percentage and chi square as contingency test were used. From this analysis, it was concluded that the rapid growth of “O” and “A” level education in Pakistan was due to better learning, fair examination system, advanced and better curriculum, easy admission in foreign universities, provision of quality education, better learning environment, knowledge based education system, status symbol for family, flexible scheme of studies, up-to-date, comprehensive and informative courses, international acceptance and recognition, better professional careers and dynamic future for students. It was also found that “O” and “A” level education was expensive in Pakistan with the majority of the students belong to the elite class.

Keywords: private education; public education; “O” and “A” Level Education; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The word “education” has many connotations. It is difficult to define. There is no single objective, which can cover the whole of life with its various manifestations. Philosophers and thinkers from Socrates to Dewey have defined education in accordance with their philosophy of life with the result that there emerged divergent concepts and definitions of education. The concept of education is like a diamond, which appears to be of different colours when seen from different angles (Sadiq, 1981).

Dewey defines education as a process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual, which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities. Education, in this sense, includes and influences deliberately planned, chosen and employed by the community for the welfare of future generations. The purpose is to modify the behavior of the child and to shape his personality in a more desirable form (Khalid, 1998).

Since 1951, the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination has been conducted at two main levels i.e. Ordinary level (“O” level) and Advanced level (“A” level) in the England. These are being offered since 1959 in Pakistan. There are many institutions in Pakistan which offer GCE “O” and “A” level courses to the pupils. An “O” level is standard qualification usually taken at the age of fifteen/sixteen. In the United Kingdom, the GCE “O” and “A” level examinations are no longer available to students. However, international students outside the United Kingdom are still able to study for this qualification through two examining boards:

- University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES).
- Edexcel International London Examination (EILE).

“A” level is an Advanced level GCE qualification used internationally as pre-university requirement. This examination is normally conducted after two years of “A” level study and is available in a broad range of subjects covering the whole curriculum. Usually, “A” level courses immediately follow an “O” level course (The British Council, 1999).

In Pakistan, there are many institutions which offer “O” and “A” level courses to the students but the recognized institutions from the British council in Pakistan are 335. No significant research work appears so far to find out the social acceptability of “O” and “A” level education in Pakistan. This study was designed to probe the issue. The teachers have foreign experience in schools. In “O” and “A” level institutions in Pakistan, many teachers are foreign qualified (Younis, 2004)

The basic amenities which are available in “O” and “A” level institutions are rarely present in public schools of Pakistan. On the whole, public schools lack of well designed and well equipped classrooms and laboratories hinder the proper delivery of the level of education appropriate to secondary and intermediate stages (Ahmad, 1986).

“O” and “A” level education system Schools offered parents a unique education opportunity for their children by combining best of both the religious and modern education. Islamic studies are compulsory for Muslims students in all “O” and “A” level institutions in Pakistan (Sabir, 2002). The “O” and “A” level institutions follow the British national curriculum on the pattern of all schools in the England and Wales (Maryum, 1993)

The assessment methods used in “O” and “A” level examinations consider better than other local examining boards in Pakistan. Pakistani students are better equipped to compete on equal terms for entrance into leading academic institutions nationally and worldwide due to high standard of “O.” and “A” level education system. Consequently, the country will evolve to a more competitive position in the global knowledge-based economy (Roehler, 1991).

The normally perception about “O” and “A” level in Pakistan is that the students of “O” and “A” level are superior than other students studying in local education system with respect to creativity, thinking and better understanding of concepts. Elite class of society in Pakistan sends their children in “O” and “A” level institutions as a sign of pride and status, but poor people cannot afford to pay for “O” and “A” level education for their children (Rana, 2004).

POPULATION

Three hundred thirty five (335) schools, two thousand three hundred (2,300) teachers and twenty three thousand four hundred and twelve (23,412) students of “O” and “A” levels and their parents in Pakistan constituted the population of the study.

SAMPLE

The sample of the study was 45 “O” and “A” level schools, which were randomly selected from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Rawalpindi, i.e., nine schools were randomly selected from each city i.e. Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. A total of 230 teachers were randomly selected from sample school to administer questionnaire and twenty teachers for interview schedule. Ten students and their parents were randomly selected from each sample school to administer the questionnaire and also twenty teachers, students and their parents were randomly selected from sample schools for interviews.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

After going through the related literature, consisting of books, journals, articles, reports, magazines, the author prepared three questionnaires using five-point Likert scale. The questionnaires were developed for “O” and “A” level students their parents and teachers. Structured interviews were also conducted from “O” and “A” level students their parents and teachers

PILOT TESTING

For the improvement and modification of research instruments, the questionnaires were administered to teachers, students and their parents of the local “O” and “A” level schools of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. In light of the respondent’s suggestions they were modified and reprinted for the administration on the whole sample.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to parents of students who were enrolled in “O” and “A” level system of education and the opinions of parents of the students of this system were invited to know why this system was acceptable to them. The opinion of parents who did not or could not enroll their children in “O” and “A” level education system will be left for future researchers who can manage the volume of work who have access to necessary resources.

COLLECTION OF DATA

Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted. The data were conducted through personal visits by the researcher to the sample schools.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data collected through above-mentioned instruments were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted category-wise compare responses of three groups (Parents/teachers, teachers/students and parents/students). To analyze the data, chi-square as a contingency test and percentage were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables may be obtained from the author at umbreenishfaq@hotmail.com.

DISCUSSION

This research was aimed at finding the social acceptance of “O” and “A” level education programme and its implication in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the formal system of education comprises elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. At the secondary level, there are two parallel systems of education i.e. Pakistani education system (Secondary School Certificate –SSC) and English education system (General Certificate of education Ordinary Level-GCE “O” level). At higher secondary level, there are also two parallel system of education one is Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) and other is “A” level.

The recognition and acceptance of this education system in fifty countries including Pakistan, is evidence of its rapid growth and social acceptance all over the world for the elitist class because the local education systems are not better. This is also supported by Shelve (2002) who was of the view point that “O” and “A” level education systems were getting more popularity as compared to any other system in Pakistan.

It was found that the “O” and “A” level institutions were equipped with all facilities like computer laboratories, science laboratories, play ground and sick bay staffed by the highly qualified teachers with positive attitude towards students who encourage their class participation. The conditions of the laboratories were tried to keep up to the mark in “O” and “A” level institutions showed supreme regard and interest toward installing new

equipment in laborites. This was also supported by Ahmad (1986) who was of the view point that these basic amenities which are available in “O” and “A” level institutions are rarely present in public schools of Pakistan. On the whole, lack of well-designed and well-equipped classrooms and laboratories hinder the proper delivery of the level of education appropriate to secondary and intermediate stages.

The researcher found that “O” and “A” level students and their parents were satisfied with examinations because according to their views examinations were conducted fairly and transparently by the Cambridge and Edexcel examination board through British council Pakistan. This study also found that the flexibility of “O” and “A” level examination systems developed more interest of students towards their studies. This was also supported by Peter (2004) who was of the view that “O” and “A” level education system was flexible and there were no age restriction for this system.

The researcher also found that “O” and “A” level institutions prepared their students with proper career counseling, which is why job opportunities for “O” and “A” level students were better as compare to other students. This was supported by Ikram (2003) who was of the view that in Pakistan multinational companies preferred to hire the “O” and “A” student as compare to other students

The researcher found that parents send their children in “O” and “A” level institutions even though it was more expensive because no other private and public schools is imparting quality and worthwhile education. This was also supported by Younis (2004) who was of the view of that the English education system provided the best education in Pakistan and that the students are educated at an international standard. The researcher found that majority of “O” and “A” level’s students belong to the elite class . To send children in “O” and “A” level institution is considered a status symbol for families in Pakistan.

Proper remuneration is necessary for all workers according to their competence and skill in every sphere of life to assure better performance. The researcher found that all teachers were well remunerated in the “O” and “A” level institutions and that they were satisfied with their pay structures and that this is a major source of motivation for the “O” and “A” level teachers. This was also supported by Rehman (1990) who was of the view that teachers of “O” and “A” level are paid better than government school teachers.

Students of “O” and “A” level schools complained that they cannot get reference books easily from the market. According to the students, educational materials beyond their textbooks elaborate concepts more clearly. Reference books should be provided with the course material by the institutions at reasonable price. Students pointed out that their “O” and “A” level course syllabi were very lengthy, which becomes a burden on the students and adversely effects the performance of the students. A lengthy syllabus should be concise. Because of that, Cambridge and Edexcel should be revise and trim their syllabi according to the intellectual approach of the students and teachers of “O” and “A” level reported lack of pre-service training. Pre-service training gives a better idea of teaching. Pre-service training should be required for all “O” and “A” level teachers. It was found that there was less focus on moral values in “O” and “A” level institutions. Emphasis on moral values in institutions is necessary for building student character at all levels of education. There should be a focus on moral values in “O” and “A” level institutions. Therefore, institutions should arrange the seminars and lectures on Islamic teachings by the religious scholars on regular basis.

According to the parents of “O” and “A” level students, fees were found to be very high compared to other education systems. Therefore the fees for “O” and “A” level education should be reduced so that students from low income groups can get admission in these institutions more easily. For that purpose a code of conduct be devised by the Government of Pakistan for the authorities of the system. Students failing classes should not be torerated.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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