

EDUCATION POLICIES IN PAKISTAN - PROCESS & FOCI OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

To achieve highest pedestal of civilization knowledge is the key driver which is a product of education. All the independent states like Pakistan are under obligation to recognize education as a right of citizen. To embark on a path of progress and realize the potentials of a nation every state invests in education to address the needs and aspiration of the people and society. Since independence it has been recognized that the future of the nation depends on the pursuit of knowledge through education. Pakistan formulated education policies in 1947, 1951, 1959, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1979, and in 1998. In every case the process of policy formulation was initiated by the Government of Pakistan and adopted a mechanism to ensure predetermined outcomes through an angle and clear cut guidelines, may it be a conference or commission approach. Islam and national ideology remained common denominators and rest purposes of education generally appear to reflect the political considerations and dictations. Resultantly no policy could earn desired wide spread ownership.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Pakistan came into existence the successive governments have announced several education policies for direction and quality education. Since education affects their lives in a variety of ways, it is a concern of most of the people. Therefore it has been a continuous concern and matter of interest to all. During the 59 years of Pakistan's existence, the Government of Pakistan has announced the following Education Policies and Reports:

1. Pakistan Educational Conference -1947
2. National Education Plan - 1951
3. The Report of the Commission on National Education - 1959
4. Report of National Commission on Students Problems-1966
5. Recommendations for Education Policy - 1969
6. New Education Policy - 1970
7. The Education Policy -1972-80
8. National Education Policy -1979
9. National Education Policy -1992-2002

10. National Education Policy -1998-2010

11. Education Sector Reforms- 2001-2005

Each of the above listed documents can be graded as policy but some of these do not strictly fall into the category of Education Policy. For example, the 1951 Plan strictly speaking is not a policy because it sets a plan, spelling out details of the implementation of the decisions of the 1947 Education Conference. The Report of the National Commission on Students Problems (1966) again, while addressing the issues related to students unrest really looks at the Commission Report on National Education (1959) and investigates the problems that surfaced during its implementation. As a result certain punitive recommendations of the Commission Report (1959) in its implementation such as, withdrawal of degrees as a punishment, which caused commotion amongst students, were withdrawn. The 1969 draft policy, which had some punch in it, was widely circulated for comments, but finally abandoned in view of more serious issues mainly the political turmoil in the country. It was never seriously considered or implemented. The 1970 New Education Policy was announced, but before its

implementation, the political disturbances started in former East Pakistan, which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh. This policy, which in any case, is a document full of compromises leaving everything to the provinces, was never taken seriously, least of all, implemented. The Education Sector Reforms originating from the Education Policy, 1998-2010 was announced in 2001. It was, in real terms, an implementation plan of nine major components of the policy.

In this study the effort has been made to look at the question of education policy from another dimension which will, hopefully, differentiate it from the contexts in vogue. It pertains to the decision making process and major determinant factors, which not only greatly influence the policy itself but are also critical for change. It is believed that education policy is the outcome of the major trends and concerns in society and world at large. The formal education itself is and has been in serious difficulty for some decades and at present it is hydra-headed in dimensions, but too weak a sector either to transform it or to effectively influence and respond to the trends and needs of the society. Let us undertake a circuitous and bumpy journey of exploration and see what we can learn at the end of it.

In general, the policy formulation process has inbuilt assurance of participation at grass root levels of all the stakeholders and experts. A mechanism is devised and adopted to involve all to identify the needs as well as priorities that shape the policy. The finalized policy is thus implemented throughout the country.

1. The Process

The process of policy formulation in Pakistan, almost every time, has been initiated by the government. In each case, the government with a definite mandate and angle starts the process and guides it all the way through. For example the 1947 Conference was sponsored and guided by government. Similarly in 1958 policy-making was initiated by the then President himself. A Commission was appointed with clearly defined terms of reference. The 1972 policy again was the outcome of a clear guideline given by the then government and was entirely

government sponsored. The Education Policy, 1979 again was developed under the specific instructions and guidelines given by the President himself who gave the terms of reference and even list of persons to be invited for the Conference. The 1992 policy was significantly different i.e. Conference of educators and public representatives was held and the views expressed were put together by a team of 'experts' in the Ministry of Education. The same government initiated the Education Policy, 1998-2010 after a gap of six years even though the Policy had not lapsed. It was obvious expectation that 1992 policy be owned and implemented instead of embarking on the new one. However, a task force was formulated for the purpose, which conducted meetings/seminars at national and provincial levels.

Policy formulation in Pakistan occurs in two ways. Firstly, the government holds a conference of eminent educationists and opinion leaders and hears their views and opinions on different aspects of education e.g. curriculum, teacher training, examinations, the question of quality, vocational and technical training, Pakistan ideology etc. The topics/themes also include different levels of education e.g. Primary, Secondary, Tertiary or whatever. These Conferences are usually of two-three days duration, where sessions on different themes are organized that often run parallel and are deliberated by the groups. At the end of the conference, the groups present reports and their views are summarized into a coherent policy outline. These are later processed by the Ministry of Education and put into a policy document.

The other method is to appoint or commission eminent educationists with clearly defined terms of reference. They elicit the views and opinions of educators, thinkers, opinion leaders etc. through interviews/focus groups. It sometimes also develops questionnaires and other instruments, which are circulated to obtain the views of different segments of the population. The responses in both cases i.e. Interviews/focus groups or response to questionnaires are considered, processed and put together in a coherent document.

Of course, all the views and opinions are not necessarily reflected in a policy document. Basically only those

opinions/suggestions find their way into the policy, that are considered appropriate by those who are putting them together or the panel of commission members who have the mandate to produce the policy. Even the commission members have to see and decide if the views fall in line with the terms of reference given to them and, more importantly, in accordance with the wishes of the ruling government.

To what extent and in what way formulation of policy is a participatory process is a question hard to answer. In theory, policy formulation is participatory because it involves the participation, either in the form of a Conference or through an expert commission or through eliciting views of different population groups in a variety of ways as indicated earlier. In practice, the following factors greatly limit participation:

- The participants in the conference for policy formulation are a selected group. Generally those people are selected who reflect the same shade of opinion as of the government. For example in the policy conference held in 1979 all the invitees represented the right wing and not a single invitee represented any other viewpoint. In the 1972 conference almost all the invitees were those who held the liberal ideas heralded by the Peoples Party, and not a single person who represented the so-called right wing was invited to participate.
- In the case of Commissions, the choice of Commission members, their terms of reference, the educationists they interview, has largely a restricted participation. On top of it all the views, opinions and suggestions are filtered by agents of the government, making sure that, nothing that is not acceptable to the government finds its way into the policy.
- The other set of issues concerns imposition of policies. Basically policy gives guidelines, sets the parameters and determines the directions of growth. Earlier policies are limited to just this, but later policies also contained outlines of the programs and projects, indicated the costs and the time frame for implementation. This exercise started from 1972

policy onwards and has expanded in terms of details and non - flexibility over the time that is clearly visible in the 1992 and 1998 policy documents.

2. Implementation

Basically the implementation strategy of the policies is initially reflected in the medium term plans, which correspond to the policy in terms of time frame sometimes but not always. But the plans spell out in the implementation strategy, the costs involved, the time frame, etc in detail. Comparison of the policy targets and the plans, indicates that targets are usually scaled down in the corresponding plans and a number of recommendations of the policy are dropped in the plans. Further, the actual expenditure on education is reduced significantly than the proposed allocations. There is generally a squeeze on education due to the limitations of resources. The only exception was the 1972-78 period, which had non-plan or the rolling plan period, when the amount allocated was actually spent. The reason for it was that the party in power had its own team of Ministers who communicated well and the party had a clear majority in the parliament. However, an analysis of expenditure indicates that funds allocated to primary education were partly transferred to higher education. This happened when there was a shortfall in resources for education. Since primary education was perhaps the most silent or the least influential of the entire sub sectors of education it bore the brunt of shortage of funds.

While still on the question of basic education, our greatest failure has been in the area of primary education and literacy. It is a common observation that in each policy the targets differed. The 1992 policy sought to achieve universal enrolment by 2002. Targets of enrollments at other levels were also deferred. The 1998 Education Policy seemed to reassert to achieve universal primary education by 2010.

On the question of paucity of resources, since policy is the responsibility of the Federal Government and the implementation is the job of the provinces, the resources allotted to education in the provinces are in accordance with their own priorities and resource situation. Also the

policies with regard to various recommendations are modified in terms of realities on the ground. Here basically the problem is of inter-governmental (federal and provincial) relationships and coordination. Very often the priorities of the Federal and Provincial Governments are not the same and implementation is largely influenced by the priorities of the provincial governments. The transfer of the financial liability of higher education to the Federal Government based on the clear understanding that the resources thus saved by the Provincial Governments will be utilized for growth of primary education is a typical example for this.

It is not only just paucity of resources that modifies implementation of policy recommendations. There are a number of other factors as well, mainly difficulties, both political and managerial, that come in the way of implementation. For example the recommendations of Commission on National Education (1959) to extend first degree to a three years program could not be implemented and the student agitation against this decision forced the government to withdraw it. The change in composition of different university bodies such as the syndicate and senate by eliminating students and teachers was also withdrawn and as a consequence of the Education Policy, in 1972-80, both the groups were inducted in a big way in Universities. Another major decision of the 1972 policy i.e. nationalization of private educational institutions ran into serious trouble when implementation started. At the time of policy formulation the problems of nationalization were pointed out to the Education Minister but were not given due considerations. This decision ran into serious difficulties later. The next government decided to withdraw the decision but a great set back to educational growth had already occurred. Now the situation regarding the proposed model of universities by the Higher Education Commission is not much different.

In this whole gamut of formulation and implementation of policies the most interesting feature is that neither there is anything sacrosanct about policy decisions that they have to be implemented nor is there any ban on new policy decisions without a formal exercise in policy

formulation. For example in 1980-82, suddenly it was decided to make Arabic compulsory at lower secondary levels. A summary for the President was moved and the President's approval obtained in the name of strengthening and supporting Islamic ideology and to introduce an additional subject in the Scheme of Studies. Now we have four languages in the Scheme of Studies for VI-VIII namely Urdu (National Language), English, Arabic, and Regional Language in the case of Sindh. The students have to learn about four languages in a Scheme of Studies that includes eight or some times nine subjects in total.

Again Agro-technical component which has been introduced as a major policy decision of the 1972 policy for VI-VIII has been dropped in most of the schools because of the problems of the shortage of qualified teachers, non availability of workshops, shortage of resources to purchase raw materials etc. Had it been conceived and implemented properly, it would have strengthened pre-vocational component of general education.

There are a number of examples of major deviations from policies. The 1979 Policy clearly decided that Urdu (national language) or an approved provincial language would be the medium of instruction in all schools. Suddenly as a consequence of pressure from vested interests, particularly private schools with a foreign curriculum culminating in foreign examinations (GCE O and A levels) having English as the medium of instruction were allowed to follow English through a modification in the law. With this change there has been a sudden spurt of foreign curricula, foreign examinations and the decision of the medium of instruction has been swept away like a straw in a flood. Interestingly in Islamabad all the model schools adopted English as medium of instruction overnight. No body gave any consideration to the students' plight, and above all administrative order was based to make English compulsory in all primary schools in utter disregard of the fact that it is not possible to implement this decision all over the country, specially in rural areas.

3. Institutional support for change

This section aims to discuss if there is any institution that is charged with the responsibility of policy formulation for desired change. Basically, according to the constitution of Pakistan, the Federal Government is responsible for the formulation of policy. In the Ministry of Education there is a Wing for policy and planning headed by a senior professional. The 1972 Policy decided to establish a National Education Council, with a network of Provincial Education Councils, the main responsibility of which was to keep Education policies and implementation under constant review and make recommendations for modification. At the Federal level the President was the Chairman of the Council and the Federal Minister of Education was the Deputy Chairman and the Provincial Ministers were designated Chairman of these Councils in their respective provinces. The Councils had specialized Committees for different sub sectors of education e.g. Primary, Secondary, Tertiary, Technical Education etc. The National Education Council generally remained dormant but some times, depending upon its Chief executive (normally a Senior Professional of the Ministry of Education), undertook surveys, studies and some very outstanding work on different aspects of education. Unfortunately, this important network was not valued as it should be, and shut down even before making any mark. The major agent of support in policy making remains a sporadic undertaking mainly dependent upon the personal views instead of research and most of all perception of the importance which the Chief Executive of the government attaches to education policy. Modifications are made at all levels, as and when considered necessary. Mainly it is a government undertaking but perhaps, with the private sector expanding fast in education, the time may not be far when the private enterprise will play a role in policy formulation. It is effective even at present but in informal manners.

4. Foci

Keeping in view the analysis one can conclude the following major factors that control our policies:

I. Pakistan's Ideology

Pakistan came into existence because the Muslims of the sub-continent said that they were a separate nation and that they needed a separate homeland to lead their lives in accordance with their values, beliefs and ideology. It is logical that this should be reflected in education.

II. Socio-economic Development

Education has emerged as a force for socio-economic development of a country. An ever-growing demand and need for development to improve the quality of lives of the masses of the country remains a focal point.

III. Qualitative and Quantitative Improvement

Pakistan, at the time of partition, inherited a very small number of schools, colleges and universities which were highly insufficient to meet the requirements of a new nation. This was coupled with a massive backlog of illiterates and unemployed people.

IV. Population Pressure

In the initial stages it was due to mass migration from India and subsequently owing to the fast population growth rate.

V. Defence and Debt Servicing

An unfortunate tension and conflict with neighbouring country which caused three wars, forced heavy and fast increase in the defence spendings. Increase in the debt of international donors and lending agencies in a variety of ways, including borrowing and the consequential increased liability of debt servicing, left very little for investment in social sectors.

VI. Political Turbulence

Country has a history of political evolution often interrupted by political turbulences. In about 58 years of its existence Pakistan has been struggling to attain a stable democratic form of government.

VII. World Movements

International movements related to education like EFA, Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Reduction Strategy paper etc., and funding agencies like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO etc. produce sufficient impact on the

policy.

VIII. Diversity in Language

A large variety of languages and sub-cultures pose problem in designing policies to respond to each one of them and yet produce a nationally cohesive policy.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the national education policies formulation and change processes in Pakistan following major points emerge:

- Policy-making is generally an ad hoc affair in Pakistan.
- There are no systematic studies that precede policy to provide a rationale for policy decisions.
- Policy-making is abrupt and not periodic.
- Policies lack continuity.
- Policy-making is generally not a participatory process but usually an outcome of personal decisions of individuals who at times are not even adequately informed and equipped with skills of rational decision-making.
- Policy targets are very often too ambitious to be achieved.
- There is always a resource constraint for implementation of policies.
- Provinces and district governments lack the capacity to formulate operational strategies.
- Implementation of policies remains at a nascent stage and gap between policy formulation and implementation is widening.

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