**Poor State of Education**

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The Covid wave, among other things, has affected our education system badly, most of which already was in a state of shambles. Educational institutions have been shut down various times during Covid outbreak. Thus, it is imperative examine the sorry state of education in Pakistan.

Despite the fact that education is indispensable for social development, increased awareness and robust economy, our education system is declining continuously without an end in sight. The 22.8 million out of school children, according to UNICEF, remains second highest in the world. Moreover, the dropout rate in Pakistan remains one of the highest as compared to the developing countries. For instance, according to the report of Finance Division of Pakistan, the average dropout rates in primary from 2007 to 2016 for Pakistan, India and Iran remained 22.7, 9.8, 2.5 percent respectively. The dropout rates of Iran and India are better than that of Pakistan. The statistics reveal a sorry state of our education.

As mentioned earlier, education plays a pivotal role in nation building. Countries that regulate the world order have reached this position due to advancement in their education: science and technology. For example, countries such as America, China and Japan are a lot more powerful than Pakistan. They are far better than Pakistan on many fronts with robust economy, greater per capita income, increased life expectancy, and remarkable positions in Human Development Index.

Japan and China have made rapid progress within the last century. After World War II, Japan had almost been destroyed and its economy was devastated. However, just 75 years after the war, Japan is once again a developed country and ranks at 20th position in Human Development Index with literacy rate at 99 per cent. Moreover, China was overburdened with huge population. It was not in a position to even feed its entire population. Some 30 million Chinese starved to death in the Great Chinese Famine that lasted from 1959 to 1961. Although there were numerous reasons behind this disaster, the point is that China is a well-developed nation now. Both China and Japan have undergone rapid development and economic growth. So what exactly accounts for their breath-taking progress? There can be other reasons in terms of economic policies and check and balance mechanisms. However, the most apparent reason seems to be there emphasis on education. During the period of development, the education remained at the forefront of their policies. They made sure that people are educated and informed.

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There are numerous factors responsible for the downfall of our education. For example poverty, poor infrastructure, unskilled teachers, improper supervision, low budget, poor policies, political intervention, boring environment in school and lack of co-curricular activities. These are all major factors that have contributed to the collapse of education.

Of all these, poverty and poor infrastructure are two main factors that have negatively impacted education. Children belonging to poor families, start going to school late, and even in some cases never go to classrooms as per the UNICEF statistics, 5 million children are not enrolled. Some children drop out too soon in order to earn and contribute to their meagre family income. According to a report of World Bank and projection of IMF, poverty in Pakistan has risen from 24.3 per cent in 2015 to about 40 per cent in 2021. This paints a grim picture when it comes to the education attainment of children. Thirty six per cent of the children belong to poor families in Pakistan.

According to a report of UNICEF, about 3.3 million children are trapped in child labour which, among other things, deprives them of education. Education is a basic right guaranteed by the article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan which states that the state would provide free and compulsory education to children in 5-16 age group. Hence, through implementation of policies, reduction in poverty is crucial to the improvement in education.

In addition to poverty, poor infrastructure also hampers access to education. A survey being conducted independently, in 2016, stated that about 48% schools lack toilets. Besides this, a number of schools lack basic necessities such as access to clean drinking water and electricity. As revealed by a report of Reform and Support of the Sindh Education and Literacy Department, in Sindh alone, out of 49130 schools, 30000 run without electricity; 26260 lack facility for drinking water.

The list of the causes for the decline in our education will go on endlessly. Without going into the details of the other contributing factors, let us have a look at the things that can be done for the betterment of it. After a careful analysis, one would conclude that the non-availability of budget is not the sole factor responsible for this grim situation, for education is now a provincial subject after 18th amendment. Provinces are free to allocate as much part of their budget as they want. However, the issues that plague the system are deeply ingrained in our governance system. Largely, bad governance and mismanagement on the part of the authorities have resulted in this. For example, the funds available for the repair and renovation of schools are inappropriate; government teachers evade from delivering their duty without any fear of check and balance.

Bad governance is the mother of all kinds of corruption. It stems from political instability, political interference in the affairs of other departments, lack of accountability and transparency, poor policies and so on.

Unless the bad governance is tackled effectively, there will hardly be any improvement in our education. Only the sound policies and their fair implementation, without making the frequent changes, will help achieve the goals, otherwise, the same vicious cycle would continue endlessly. We need to get away with the bad governance if we want to reap the benefits of education as other developed nations do.

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