



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION AND ADULT LITERACY IN PAKISTAN: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

*Dr. Dawood Shah

Academy of Educational Planning and Management, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The paper has tried to review the progress towards EFA goals, MDGs related to education and NEP (2009) objectives and targets pertaining to universal primary education and literacy and to identify issues and challenges. Some progress has been made for achieving universal primary education and literacy targets, however, the pace of progress is very slow and Pakistan has missed most of the targets set under EFA, MDSs and NEP (2009). Pakistan is still facing multifaceted challenges in education sector which include low access to education, low retention and high dropout rates, gender disparity, high adult illiteracy rate, poor quality of education, and poor physical infrastructure. Other influencing factors which hinder the progress towards achieving these goals are low budgetary provision for education in terms of GNP, political interference in administrative affairs, poor governance, poverty, high population growth and lack of proper coordination and monitoring mechanism within provinces and at federal level. The Provincial and area governments lack institutional capacity to plan, manage and monitor education system properly in their respective areas especially after 18th Constitutional Amendment. After devolution, the provinces have allocated a significant portion of their budget for education, however a major chunk of budget is spent on salaries and allowances whereas a meager amount is left for development expenditure. Increasing financing for education especially development budget for primary education, capacity building of education managers and teachers, political support for education, school infrastructure improvement, good quality teaching and learning materials and proper implementation and monitoring mechanism are the key ingredients responsible to produce the desired results.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important instrument to enhance human capabilities and to achieve the desired objectives of socio and economic development. Education enables individuals to make informed choices, broaden their horizons and opportunities and to have a voice in public decision-making (Akram and Khan, 2007). Pakistan endorsed Education for all charter of objectives at the Dakar (Senegal) World Education Forum in 2000. Pakistan has also made a commitment to achieve the education related Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Pakistan like other developing countries faces many challenges in improving its education sector. In view of international commitments and constitutional obligations, the government is committed to increase equitable access to quality education. The realization of the EFA goals and education related MDGs is one of main agendas of education policy.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Dawood Shah,
Academy of Educational Planning and Management, Pakistan

In order to address issues of primary education and literacy as well as to fulfil international commitments, National Education policy 2009 aimed at "to eradicate illiteracy within shortest possible time through universalizing of quality elementary education coupled with institutionalized adult literacy programs (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2009, p11). The primary objectives of government policy in the last few years have been to improve the level and quality of education. Pakistan has made some progress regarding literacy and primary schools enrolment rates during last decade, however it has lagged behind as compared to other south Asian countries. The literacy rate of the population (10 years and above) is low and about 29% population is illiterate (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Wide disparity exists in literacy rate across the provinces by gender and location. The enrolment rate at primary level is not very encouraging and 6.078 million primary school age are out of school which is one of the highest in the world (Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), 2016). There is wide disparity in primary school

enrolment by region, location and gender. Moreover, the country has been facing high dropout and low completion rates at primary level. About 31% enrolled children dropped out before completing primary education cycle (AEPAM, 2016). Pakistan has ranked 106th out of 113 countries in Education Development Index (UNESCO, 2015). Public sector expenditure on education is about 2% of GDP which is lower than the other countries of the region (Government of Pakistan (GoP, Finance Division, 2015).

Objectives and Methodology

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the current status of primary education and literacy in Pakistan in light of National Education Policy (2009), Education for All (EFA) goal-i and education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The paper has tried to identify the gaps pertaining to targets set under EFA, MDGs and National Education Policy 2009 by reviewing the relevant documents and computing necessary indicators from the data available with National Education Management Information System (NEMIS, National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. AEPAM), (NEMIS) 2001-02 data was used as a baseline and that was compared with the most recent available data of AEPAM, (NEMIS 2014-15) to review the progress towards universal primary education. Moreover, the estimated population of National Institute of Population Studies was used for computing various relevant education indicators. Some information especially initiatives undertaken by provincial and area governments regarding primary education and literacy was sought from provincial education departments, National Commission for Human Development (NCDH) and other departments. A brief review of national and international commitments towards Primary Education and Literacy made by Pakistan is presented below:

National Commitments towards Primary Education and Literacy

Since 1947, the government of Pakistan has realized the importance of education for socio-economic development of the country and shown its commitments for expansion and development of education sector. One of the main objectives of all the governments' policies since inception of the country was to raise the literacy rate and universalize primary education within minimum possible time. The first Pakistan Education Conference was convened in 1947 which recommended "free and compulsory education be introduced for a period of five years which should be gradually raised to 8 years" (GoP, Ministry of Interior, 1947, p.9). In this conference the education minister in his inaugural speech underlined the importance of literacy and stated "our first and foremost concern must inevitably be a determined vigorous one on the formidable problem of illiteracy and its evil consequences" (GoP, Ministry of Interior, 1947, p.45). Each and every education policy had tried to address the issue of literacy and universal primary education, however, all education policies failed in achieving their objectives. A brief overview of the government of Pakistan's commitments towards universal primary education and raising literacy rate since 2000 is reported below.

Pakistan EFA National Plan of Action (NPA) was developed in consultation with provinces and regions. The plan was based on the Dakar Framework and it was endorsed by the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper –I (PRSP-I). The plan aimed to bring 100% children into schools and raising literacy rate up to 86% by 2015 however, it was not implemented due to lack of financial resources (GoP, MoE, 2003). In 2000-01, the Government of Pakistan initiated a comprehensive Education Sector reforms (ESRs) Program 2001-05 in light of the objectives of National Education Policy 1998. The main thrust of ESRs was on universal primary education, adult literacy and improving the quality of education. ESRs had set targets to increase net primary enrolment from 66% to 76% by the year 2005 and raising literacy rate from 49% to 60% by 2005 (GoP, MoE, 2003). The program was partially implemented and federal government disbursed special grants to provinces, however, the program could not realize its targets. The Medium Term Development Framework (MTDF) 2005-2010 was aligned with the MDG's to accelerate the efforts to achieve education related MDGs by 2015. The main focus of MTDF was to achieve universal primary education, decreasing gender disparity, improving the quality of education and adult literacy and enhancing education budget (GoP, Planning Commission, 2005).

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2009) has mainly focused on universal primary education, equity and quality of education. NEP (2009) aimed to revitalize the existing education system and to enable Pakistan to fulfill its commitments towards Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals relating to education. NEP (2009) proposed that the literacy rate was to be increased up to 86 percent and universal primary education was to be achieved by 2015 as well as reducing drop rate at the primary level. The Policy also proposed allocation of at least four percent in education budget for literacy and non-formal education by the provinces and districts and an increase in budget allocation for education up to 7% of GDP by 2015 (GoP, MoE, 2009). Although NEP 2009 was a consensus policy document, it was partially implemented by federating units in wake of 18th Constitutional Amendment.

Pakistan Vision 2025 envisaged substantial expansion in levels of education, improvement in the quality of education as well as increasing public expenditure on education to 4% of GDP by 2018. The Vision has set target to achieve universal primary education and 90% literacy rate by the year 2025 (GoP, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms). The National Plan of Action (NPA) to Accelerate Education-Related MDGs 2013-16 (NPA) was developed in consultation with provincial/regional Education Departments in 2013. The purpose of National Plan of Action was to accelerate the progress towards the achievement of education related MDGs by the year 2015. The plan aimed to achieve enrolment of maximum number of out of school children in primary schools by enhancing retention and completion rates as well as improving the quality of education at primary level. The plan envisaged that 91% of children of age group 5-9 would be brought in schools by 2015 (GoP, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE and PT, 2013).

Pakistan's Constitution framed in 1973, declared the country's commitment to providing education for all. According to the Constitution, "the State shall: remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period" (Article-37). With the passage of 18th Constitutional Amendment and abolishment of current list, education has become provincial subject. Under 18th Constitutional Amendment, Article 25-A was inserted to the Constitution of Pakistan which declared education as a fundamental right and state "the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by the law" (Article 25-A). The free and compulsory education is to be provided by state which includes federal, provincial and local governments as defined by Constitution of Pakistan under Article-7. Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) have enacted legislation for implementation of Article 25-A, whereas Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have to finalize their legislation in this regard.

International Commitments towards Primary and Literacy

Pakistan has also committed to various international conventions and agreements relating to equal access to quality education for boys and girls (men and women), as outlined below:

On 10th December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Pakistan was one of the 48 Member States which voted in favor of the declaration. According to Article 26 of the UDHR, "Everyone has the right to education" and "Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory" (United Nations, Article 26(1)). The delegates from 155 countries adopted a *World Declaration on Education for All* at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand to make primary education accessible to all children and to reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade (UNESCO, 1990). In the declaration, the signatories, including Pakistan, agreed that every person should be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs, and called for an "expanded vision" of education, encompassing factors such as universalize access to education and promoting equity (UNESCO, 1990). In April 2000, representatives from 164 countries, including Pakistan, adopted the "*Dakar Framework for Action*" and unanimously resolved to promote Education for All. "Dakar Framework for Action" (2000) set six goals to be achieved by 2015. Goal 2 of Dakar Framework states "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (UNESCO, 2000). As a signatory of this declaration, Pakistan also acknowledged education as a fundamental right for all people, regardless of gender, race, religion, or age and recognized the need to make comprehensive efforts to eliminate gender discrimination. In September 2000, 189 nations adopted the Millennium Declaration. From the actions contained in this declaration, eight Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) were drawn up to respond to the world's main development challenges (United Nations, 2000). All 189 United Nations Member States, including Pakistan, had agreed to work towards achieving the MDGs by 2015. Two MDGs related specifically to education. The second Millennium Development Goal calls for achieving universal primary education. Goal 3 focuses on gender equality and empowerment of women (United Nations, 2005).

Current Scenario of Primary Education and Literacy in Pakistan

According to Pakistan Education Statistics 2014-15, the total number of education institutions in the country comprised of 267,955 of which 180,926 (67%) in public sector and 87,659 (33%) in private sector. The total enrolment of students in all categories of education institutions consisted of 44.435 million of which 27.387 million (62%) students in public sector education institutions and 17.048 million (38%) students in private sector education institutions. The total number of teachers consisted of 1,652,141 out of which 859,608 (52%) teachers in public sector and 792,533 (48%) in private sector (AEPAM, MoFE and FT, 2016). The total number of primary schools across the country comprised of 147,228 in 2014-15, out of which 127,829 (87%) schools in public sector, whereas 19,399 (13%) schools in private sector. The total enrolment of students at primary level consisted of 18.368 million, out of which 11.357 million (62%) students in public sector schools, whereas, 7.011 million (38%) students in private sector schools. Out of the total enrolment at primary level, 10.249 million (56%) were boys and 8.119 million (44%) were girls. The total number of teachers was 409,496 of which 314,626 (77%) teachers were in public sector and 94,870 (23%) teachers were in private sector (AEPAM, MoFE and PT). Some key indicators using Pakistan Education Statistics 2014-15 and estimated population of National Institute of Population Studies were computed to determine the status towards universal primary education in Pakistan. These key indicators relating to access, equity and quality of primary education are reported below:

Access and Equity

Net Intake Rate

Net Intake Rate indicates the general level of access to primary education. It also indicates the capacity of the education system to provide access to grade-1 for the official school-entrance age population. A high Net Intake Rate indicates a high degree of access to primary education for the official primary school-entrance age children. In Pakistan, the Net Intake Rate (NIR) at primary level for grade-1 grew from 77% (male 88% and female 65%) to 81% (male 86% and female 75%) between the period 2001-02 and 2014-15. The NIR for male had declined from 88% to 86% between 2001-02 and 2014-15 whereas NIR for female rose from 65% to 75% during the same period. The overall increase in NIR was only 4 percent points during 2001-15 and annual increase was less than one percent which indicates that pace of progress was very slow. Based on this analysis, Pakistan falls off the target in respect of EFA goal-2 Universal Primary Education indicator-9 and unable to achieve

100% NIR by 2015. Moreover, there are variations in NIR among provinces and regions. The highest NIR was observed in Khyber Pakhtun Khwa (KPK) Province where as the lowest NIR was observed in Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Balochistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The highest gender disparity was also observed in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) followed by Balochistan. There are various reasons for not achieving the set targets such as low financial allocation, opportunity cost, high population growth, poor learning conditions in schools, parental preference to educate sons, personal security of girls, parental education especially mother education, non-availability of schools, location of schools especially distance of schools from children residences, lack of basic facilities in schools, law and order situation, lack of qualified teachers and non-functional schools (MoFE and PT, 2014, Shami and Hussain, 2005).

One of the critical hindrance factors in school participation is the poverty which reduces chances of the poor children to get enrolled in the school. The Compulsory Primary Education Act has been enacted in three out of four provinces of the country as well as in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). Now it is constitutional obligations of federating units to provide free and compulsory education to the children aged 5-16. NIR at primary level by gender and Provinces/ Regions in 2014-15 is reported in Table 1:

Table 1. NIR at Primary Level by Provinces/ Regions in 2014-15

Location	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Pakistan	86%	75%	81%	0.86
Punjab	87%	82%	84%	0.94
Sindh	82%	62%	73%	0.76
KPK	100%	92%	96%	0.96
Balochistan	63%	45%	54%	0.72
AJK	56%	55%	56%	0.97
FATA	86%	54%	70%	0.63
GB	50%	43%	47%	0.85
ICT	85%	88%	86%	1.04

Net Enrolment Rate (NER)

Net Enrolment Rate is a key indicator which is used to monitor progress towards universal primary education. It indicates the capacity of the education system to enroll students of a particular age-group. Net Enrolment Rate (NER) has increased from 57% (male 66% and female 47%) in 2001-02 to 72% (male 78% and female 66%) in 2014-15. The overall increase in NER was 15% and an average annual increase was around one percent during 2001-2015. This target is off track and Pakistan was unable to achieve this target by 2015.

There is wide disparity in NER by region and gender. The highest NER was observed in KPK whereas the lowest NER was observed in Balochistan and FATA. The gender disparity at national level has been decreased. Gender Parity Index (GPI) at national level has gone up from 0.71 in 2001-02 to 0.86 in 2014-15, However, gender disparities still exist across the provinces and regions. A lot of efforts are required to achieve universal primary education within minimum possible time. Demographic pressure remains a challenge because the primary school age population is expected to grow at a continued pace. It is evident from the table-2 that Pakistan has

lagged behind the targets in achieving universal primary education and gender equity by 2015. The province/region wise NER at primary level for the year 2014-15 is reported in Table-2:

Table 2. NER at Primary Level by Provinces/ Regions in 2014-15

Location	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Pakistan	78%	66%	72%	0.86
Punjab	78%	73%	76%	0.94
Sindh	71%	56%	64%	0.79
KP	99%	72%	86%	0.73
Balochistan	55%	40%	48%	0.73
AJK	61%	60%	60%	0.98
FATA	84%	45%	65%	0.53
FANA	70%	64%	67%	0.92
ICT	94%	97%	96%	1.03

Out of School Children

The number of out of children of primary school age declined from 8.782 million to 6.078 million between 2001-02 and 2014-15. Punjab has the highest number of out of school children of primary-school age among the provinces and regions that account for 44% followed by Sindh where 31% children are out of school. Punjab and Sindh account for about 75% out of school children of primary school age group in the country. Pakistan has the second highest number of out-of-school children of primary school age in the world after Nigeria. The number of out of school children by province/region during 2014-15 is given in Table 3:

Table 3. Out of School Children by Province/Regions and Gender in 2014-15

Province/ Region	Boys	Girls	Total
Pakistan	2,550,401	3,528,493	6,078,895
Punjab	1,256,490	1,419,607	2,676,097
Sindh	798,880	1,090,900	1,889,781
KPK	16,567	393,523	410,090
Balochistan	281,252	323,410	604,662
AJK	114,520	112,767	227,287
FATA	44,783	149,374	194,157
GB	33,388	36,719	70,107
ICT	4,521	2,193	6,714

Transition Rate

Transition rate gives information on the degree of access or transition from one level of education to a higher level. High transition rates indicate a high level of access or transition from one level of education to the next. It also indicates the intake capacity of the next level of education. The transition rate between primary and middle (lower secondary) level education increased from 69% (male 69 and female 70%) to 81% (male 81% and female 80%) between 2001-02 and 2014-15.

There was overall increase of 12 percent points in Transition Rate between the years 2001-2 and 2014-15. Punjab has the highest transition rate whereas Balochistan has the lowest transition rate among the provinces. Among the regions, FATA has the lowest transition rate especially for girls i.e. 45%. The transition rate from primary to lower secondary level (middle level) by province and regions in 2014-15 is presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Transition Rate Primary to Lower Secondary Level by Provinces and Regions in 2014-15

Province/Region	Transition rate Primary Level to Lower Secondary	
	Male	Female
Pakistan	81%	80%
Punjab	87%	87%
Sindh	68%	64%
KP	79%	74%
Balochistan	75%	65%
AJK	85%	80%
FATA	74%	45%
GB	92%	94%
ICT	100%	100%

Quality of Primary Education

Ghazi, Ali, and Khan (n.d) stated that the quality of basic education is important not only for preparing individuals for the subsequent educational levels but to equip them with the requisite basic life skills. Pakistan has mainly focused on quantitative expansion of primary education while ignoring the quality of education. National Education Policy (2009) has stated "quality of education has been a major casualty of the system's inefficiency" (MoE, 2009, p.27). One of the major indicators of quality education is the students learning outcomes. Quality of education at primary level is dependent upon various factors which include teacher's attributes, teaching and learning materials, physical facilities in school, school environment and socio-economic background of the students. Quality education implies meaningful and better learning that is the result of effective schooling (Khan, Shah, and Hussain, 2004, p.1-2). Some critical indicators which are used to measure the quality of education are reported below:

Learning Outcomes

The quality of public sector education is not very encouraging as reported by various assessment studies. According to recent National Assessment Report (2014), the performance of students of grade-iv in three subjects i.e. English Reading, English Writing and Science was below the scaled mean score i.e. 500. In English Reading the score of grade-iv students was 494, in English Writing it was 290 and in Science it was 433 (National Education Assessment System(NEAS), 2014, p.82). According to Annual Status Education Report (ASER) 2015, 45 percent children in grade-v could not read simple grade-ii level story in Urdu or in their mother tongue, 51 percent of grade-v students cannot read grade-ii level sentences in English and 50 percent children in grade-v cannot do two digits division. The ASER further discovered that Sixty-seven percent students of grade-v in private schools were able to read story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto as compared to 52 percent students of same grade in public schools. ASER found that 65 percent students of grade-v in private schools and 45 percent children of the same grade in public schools can read at least sentences in English. Sixty-one percent children of grade-v of private schools and 47 percent students of grade-v of public schools were able to do division (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, ASER, 2015, p.78-79). The performance of students of public schools was poor in language and arithmetic as compared to private school students. The performance of students of grade-iv and v of public sector is very poor and far from being satisfactory.

The learning achievement of students at primary level especially public sector is so low that after several years of schooling, these students are unable to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Survival Rate

Survival rate is often used as a proxy indicator for quality. The survival rate at primary level of public schools grew from 59% (male 57% and female 63%) to 69% (male 69% and female 68%) between 2001-02 and 2014-15 which indicates that retention capacity of education system at primary level is improving. However, still about 31% students enrolled in primary schools dropped out before completing the primary cycle. The NEP (2009) and EFA have set target to achieve 100% retention rate at primary level by 2015, however, that target has not been attained. GB has the highest survival rate whereas FATA and Balochistan have the lowest survival rates among the provinces and regions. The main reasons for high dropout rates at primary level are inadequate physical facilities in public schools, high opportunity cost especially for poor parents, non-conducive environment in schools, corporal punishment by teachers, overcrowded classes, long distances of school from residences of students, shortage of teachers, teachers absenteeism, political interference in posting and transfer of teachers, poor quality of education, inadequate knowledge of teachers about child psychology, and lack of relevance of curriculum to the needs of the community (AEPAM, MoE, 2006). Survival rate to grade-5 by provinces and regions in public primary schools is given in Table 5:

Table 4. Survival Rate to Grade-5 by Province and Region in 2014-15

Province/Region	Male	Female
Pakistan	69%	68%
Punjab	76%	78%
Sindh	59%	60%
KPK	77%	57%
Balochistan	35%	32%
AJK	80%	87%
FATA	34%	28%
GB	95%	90%
ICT	88%	95%

Physical Facilities

Availability of physical facilities affects the retention rate as well as quality of education. School building, drinking water, sanitation facilities, and boundary wall are the basic physical facilities. It was observed that number of schools with drinking water facilities was increase from 57% in 2001-02 to 63% in 2014-15. Adequate sanitation facilities in schools are essential for retention of students in schools especially for girl. Schools with adequate sanitation facilities rose from 44% in 2001-02 to 65% in 2010-11. The provision boundary wall is considered as one of the most important facilities especially for girls in view of prevailing law and order situation in the country. Currently about 67% primary schools have the boundary wall facility (AEPAM, MoFE and PT, 2016) (AEPAM, (NEMIS), 2016).

Literacy

Literacy is a fundamental human right and a basic tool for making informed decisions making and participating fully in

the development of society (UNESCO, 2008). Low literacy rate is a key challenge for socio-economic development in the country because illiterate and unskilled labor force can barely contribute for sustainable economic development. National Education Policy (2009) has enumerated various causes of low literacy in Pakistan which include social taboos, poverty, child labor, illiteracy of parents and institutional weakness (p.30). The Policy has proposed various measures to raise the literacy rate which include strengthening organizational structure, increasing budgetary allocation, better coordination, development of literacy curriculum and instructional materials, and teacher training. The current situation of literacy in the country is reported in the following paragraphs.

Literacy rate of the population (10 years and above)

The literacy rate of the population (10 years and above) rose from 45% (male 58% and female 32%) in 2001-02 (GoP, Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2005) to 61% (male 72% and female 50%) in 2014-15 (GoP, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2015), however, wide disparity exists by gender, region and location. The overall increase in literacy rate was 16 percent points and an average annual increase was around one percent during 2001-2015. Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate for female i.e. 37%. Under MDGs and NEP (2009), the country was required to raise its literacy rate to 86% by 2015; however, this target was not achieved by 2015. In absolute term, there are an estimated 56 million people (10 years and above) who are illiterate of which 62% are female. Literacy Rate (10 years and above) by Provinces and Gender for the year 2013-14 is given in Table 6:

Table 6. Literacy Rate (10 years and above) by Provinces and Gender in 2014-15

Province/ Region	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Pakistan	72 %	50 %	61 %	0.69
Punjab	70%	54%	62%	0.77
Sindh	74%	51%	63%	0.69
KP	72%	37%	54%	0.51
Balochistan	72%	33%	54%	0.46

Source: Statistics Division, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2014-15

Adult Literacy

The adult literacy rate for both sexes (15 years and above) increased from 43% (male 57% and female 29%) in 2001-02 (GoP, Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2005) to 57% (male 69% and female 45%) in 2014-15 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The overall increase in adult literacy was 14 percent points during 2001-2015 and annual growth rate was about one percent. In absolute term, there are an estimated 52 million people (15 years and above) who are illiterate of which 63% are female. The EFA target for adult literacy was 65% by 2015. EFA target regarding adult literacy was not achieved by 2015. The gender parity for adult literacy during 2001-02 was 0.51 and it increased to 0.65 in 2014-15, whereas the EFA target for GPI was 1 by 2015. These figures indicate that the gender parity has been improved but this target could not be achieved. Punjab and Sindh have the highest adult literacy rate whereas KPA and Balochistan have the lowest literacy rate among all four provinces. Balochistan has the lowest GPI

among all provinces. The adult literacy rate (15 years and above) by province for the year 2012-13 is given in Table 7:

Table 7. Adult Literacy Rate (15 years old and over) by Provinces in 2014-15

Province/ Region	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Pakistan	69%	45%	57%	0.65
Punjab	68%	50%	59%	0.73
Sindh	72%	46%	60%	0.64
KP	69%	31%	49%	0.45
Balochistan	65%	24%	46%	0.37

Source: Statistics Division, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2014-15

Youth Literacy

The youth literacy rate increased from 63% (male 75% and female 51%) in 2001-02 to 72% (male 81% and female 64%) in 2014-15 (AEPAM, 2016). An increase of 9 percent point was noticed between 2001-02 and 2014-15. An average annual increase was less than one percent during 2001-2015. The Youth Literacy Rate (15-24 years) by Provinces and Gender in 2014-15 is given in the following table.

Table 8. Youth Literacy Rate (15-24 years) by Provinces and Gender in 2014-15

Province/ Region	Male	Female	Total	GPI
Pakistan	80%	63%	72%	0.72
Punjab	81%	69%	75%	0.75
Sindh	76%	59%	68%	0.68
KP	86%	49%	67%	0.67
Balochistan	79%	40%	64%	0.64

Source: AEPAM (NEMIS), Pakistan Education Statistics 2014-15, (p.189)

Steps Taken Towards Achieving Universal Primary Education

In light of discussion with provincial/regional education departments' representatives and review of relevant documents, the following initiatives have been undertaken by provinces and regions to achieve universal primary education within minimum possible time:

- School fee has been abolished in all public schools. Moreover, free textbooks are provided in all public sector schools to reduce the financial burden of parents leading to an increase in enrolment.
- Awareness campaign has been launched to convince parents to enroll their children in public schools in order to increase access to education
- Special incentives (food incentives, stipends, etc.) for girl students have been initiated in selected districts to increase girls enrolment
- Corporal punishment has been eliminated in public schools to create a conducive environment in school that may help to increase retention of students in school and to reduce dropout rate
- Missing facilities are being provided in public schools to create conducive environment for students to increase retention rate

- Recruitment of teachers specially primary teachers has been made on merit in all provinces that may help to improve the quality of education
- Teacher performance based incentive has been initiated especially in Punjab
- KPK and Sindh have established Management Cadres to improve governance
- Provinces have shown a strong commitment to education by allocating a substantial portion of their total provincial budget for education. KPK has allocated 26% of its total budget to education, Punjab allocated 24%, Sindh allocated 22% and Baluchistan allocated 19% in 2014-15 (AEPAM, 2016).
- In 2014-15, all provinces had spent a significant portion of their education budget on primary education. Punjab had spent 39% of its education budget on primary education, Sindh spent 41%, KPK spent 33% and Balochistan spent 30% (AEPAM, 2016).
- The National Plan of Action (2013) was developed to accelerate education related MDGs. Moreover, Education Sector Plans have been developed by all provinces and regions.
- Promotion of girls education through Malala Fund i.e. US\$ 6.7 Million which has been implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with provinces and regions.
- Continuous professional development of teachers has been initiated
- In KP, school's council has been empowered to utilize the schools funds on need basis on its discretion.
- Child friendly schools have been established in all provinces
- Parent Teacher Associations/School Management Committees have been formulated to involve the local community in school management
- New primary schools have been opened and some primary schools have been upgraded to middle level. Additional classrooms have been constructed in public schools
- Vouchers Scheme has been introduced through Public-Private Partnership Program to provide quality education to the children with disadvantage background in Punjab and KPK
- Sindh and Islamabad have promulgated Free and Compulsory Education Act Balochistan has promulgated Compulsory Education Act 2014. Punjab has issued Free and Compulsory Education Ordinance, May 2014 (AEPAM, 2015)
- In Balochistan, Policy, Planning and Implementation Unit (PPIU) has been established to design, coordinate and oversee education reforms.
- Real time School Monitoring Information system have been introduced in Punjab and KPK.
- National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) has established 15,344 Feeder Schools across the and currently managing 6,581 Feeder Schools with enrolment of 291,121 students (NCHD, (n,d)).
- NCHD established 8,120 Adult Literacy Centers, imparted literacy skills to 191,500 persons till 2013 and now NCHD has planned to set up 12,000 new literacy centers in the less developed and remote areas of the country. NCDH has also established 400 skill based Literacy Centers in Sindh with enrollment of 10,000 women (Iqbal, 2015).
- At federal level, Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) Project is managing 12,204 Schools with enrolment of 552,311 Students (Iqbal, 2015). KPK has planned to open 1000 non-formal community schools.
- Punjab Literacy and Non-Formal Education department is implementing various projects related to literacy and non-formal education. The main projects are (i) Punjab Accelerated Functional Literacy and Non-Formal Basic Education Project which aimed at imparting learning to 487,640 children and adults in four years ending June 2016; (ii) Punjab Literacy Movement Project aimed at raising the literacy rate in 36 model tehsils by 11% on average in 40 months; (iii) Punjab Workplace Literacy Project aimed at establishing 1,000 non-formal basic education schools at brick kilns in 11 districts for 30,000 learners by June 30, 2017 and (iv) Community Learning Centers Sahiwal (Division) Phase-II aimed at imparting basic literacy in non-formal mode along with functional skills in three districts of Sahiwal division till Dec 30, 2016 (Malik, 2014).
- Literacy Curriculum has been developed in Punjab, Sindh and ICT to improve literacy skills

Issues and Challenges

The then Ministry of Education had signed various international pacts, covenants and agreements for development of education including EFA and MDGs. After 18th Constitutional Amendment, the Ministry of Education was abolished in 2011 and its functions were devolved to provincial education departments. Since 2011 there was no mechanism at federal level to coordinate and monitor the progress of provinces and regions towards achieving EFA's objectives and MDGs especially in terms of physical progress and financial allocation. Moreover, importance of EFA and MDGs commitment was not fully realized by the provinces and regions as a result MDGs and EFA targets could not be achieved.

Presently majority of the provincial education departments lack institutional capacity to plan, manage, implement and monitor education sector programmes and projects resulting slow progress towards achieving MDGs and EFA goals. After devolution of education to the provinces, the responsibilities of education managers have been increased manifold however, their capacity was not developed accordingly. Weak governance is the major constraint because most of the education managers lack required knowledge and skills to plan, implement and monitor the education reforms effectively. Currently the budget allocations for education are not sufficient to realize the goals of universal primary education within minimum possible time. Pakistan has a low level of spending

Efforts initiated to Reduce Illiteracy

- Literacy and Non-formal Education Plan is being developed in light of Pakistan Vision 2025 by National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), Ministry of Education and Training in collaboration with provinces and regions.

on education and it has allocated about two percent of its GNP to education for the last one decade. After 18th Constitutional Amendment, the provincial governments have enhanced their education budget however, a major portion is spent on salaries and allowances whereas meager amount is left for development and new initiatives. In Pakistan, enrolment rate at primary level is low and annual progress is marginal. For example, during the last one and half decade the NER grew by 15% with an annual increase of one percent. Currently about 6.078 million children of primary school age are out of school which is the second highest in the world. Moreover there is wide gender disparity in enrolment at primary level by location and region. At national level 86 girls are enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys. The retention capacity of education system is also low and it is unable to retain the maximum number of students in school for example only 69 percent students reach grade-v and 31 percent drop out before completing the primary cycle. The most critical sphere of education is the quality aspect which could not be improved to an acceptable level. The quality of education at primary level in term of students learning outcomes is abysmally low as reported by recent national assessment surveys. According to these surveys about 50% students do not possess the basic numeracy and literacy skills of grade-ii level.

Adult literacy is also a major challenge presently about 43% adult population (15 years and above) is unable to read and write with a significant portion of female. Most of public schools lack basic facilities such as school building, drinking water, sanitation facilities, electricity and boundary wall which are essential for quality education. Quality of infrastructure is closely related with the quality of education. Moreover, the availability of physical facilities has positive impact on the retention rate. At federal level, no donor coordination mechanism exists to address education sector issues. Despite the priorities and goals identified by National Education Policy 2009, each donor focuses on a particular geographical area or sub-sector resulting duplication of efforts. So there is no cohesive approach to address issues of education sector in an organized manner in order to avoid duplication of efforts by donors.

Recommendations

- A coordination mechanism at federal level should be developed to coordinate and monitor the progress of provinces and regions towards Sustainable Development Goals.
- Provincial and areas government in consultation with federal government should evolve mechanism for proper Implementation of Article 25-A.
- Federal government should provide technical assistance and funding to those federating units which are lagged behind in achieving universal primary education in their respective regions.
- The capacity building of education managers is critically important, therefore, they should be trained in various disciplines of education. The federal and provincial governments should make arrangements for capacity building of education managers.

- The KPK and Sindh have established separate cadre for education managers, therefore, the other provinces and regions should also establish education cadre to improve the governance and service delivery.
- In addition to federal funding, Provincial and area governments should generate their own resource for education. Share of primary education in education budget should be raised especially under development head.
- Education budget should be increased from 2% of GDP to 4% to meet Sustainable Development Goals. Provincial and area governments should allocate at least one fourth of their development budget for education. Moreover, provincial and area governments should ensure timely release of funds to districts and schools.
- The Provincial and area governments should evolve strategies to bring out of school children in to schools especially the poor and marginalized segment of society by offering incentives such as stipend, meal, stationery, school uniform and transport.
- To improve the quality of public schools, the government should provide missing physical facilities and teaching learning materials as well as increasing non-salary budget. Moreover, recruitment of teachers through merit, teacher training, effective governance especially improving supervision and monitoring of schools and effective community participation are the other quality factors which need serious consideration to be addressed.
- At federal level there is need to evolve a donor coordination mechanism to address education sector issues and to avoid duplication of efforts

Conclusion

The paper has tried to review the progress towards EFA goals, MDGs related to education and NEP (2009) objectives and targets pertaining to universal primary education and literacy. A comparison using key education indicators was made using baseline data of 2001-02 with the most recent available data of 2014-15 from various sources. It was observed that some progress has been made for a number of indicators that shows Pakistan's resolve towards fulfillment of its national and international commitments. However, the pace of progress was very slow and Pakistan was unable to fulfil its national and international commitments in meeting most of the targets set under EFA, MDGs and NEP (2009). Presently Pakistan is facing multifaceted challenges in education sector which include low access to education, low retention and high dropout rates, gender disparity by region and location, high adult illiteracy rate, poor quality of education, and poor physical infrastructure. Other influencing factors which hinder the progress towards achieving these goals are low budgetary provision for education in terms of GNP, political interference in posting and transfer of teachers, poor governance, poverty, high population growth and lack of proper coordination and monitoring mechanism at federal level. Keeping in view the current scenario, Pakistan has to go long way to achieve these goals. The Provincial and area governments lack institutional capacity to plan, manage and monitor education system properly in their respective areas especially after 18th Constitutional Amendment. Most of the education managers in provincial and area governments lack required knowledge and

skills to plan, implement and monitor the education reforms effectively. After devolution, the provinces have allocated a significant portion of their budget for education, however a major chunk of budget is spent on salaries and allowances whereas a meager amount is left for development expenditure. In view of abysmal situation of education, the provinces may evolve strategies to address issues relating to out of school children, gender disparity, low retention, low quality, poor infrastructure and governance. Increasing financing for education especially development budget for primary education, capacity building of education managers and teachers, political support for education, school infrastructure improvement, provision of educational facilities, good quality teaching and learning materials and proper implementation and monitoring mechanism are the key ingredients responsible to produce the desired results. Moreover, federal government should develop coordination mechanism to liaise with federating units and donors for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

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