



A Review of Public-Private Partnership for Elevating the Literacy Rate in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a country facing lots of challenges related to human development. The field of education is no exception in the sense of development. To counter these problems, reforms and educational projects were introduced to bring educational development. This study analyzes Punjab education foundation (PEF) school reform programs to evaluate one such project. For that purpose, the data of PEF annual reports published by the Punjab government and other articles about the PEF programs were used for analysis. The review of reports shows that the PEF introduced different programs under its umbrella to meet its objectives. The PEF provided free education to the province's less privileged areas and provided on the job training to the school staff. Moreover, educational vouchers have been provided to needy students to encourage the parents to send their children to the schools. These efforts have elevated the literacy rate and quality of education in the Punjab province of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Punjab Education Foundation (PEF); Literacy; Educational development; Private education; Literacy rate; Pakistan education system*

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INTRODUCTION

Educational Background in Pakistan

Development in education has been considered as a tool for developing countries to reduce poverty and improve gender equality, democracy, and political stability (Larocque, 2008). Education and the socio-economic development of a country are directly linked (Gillani, 2021). As education is promoted in a country, the illiteracy rate decreases and the country's socio-economic status increases through the reduction in unemployment (Kayani et al., 2017).

Pakistan's government is giving a lot of importance to education due to its increasing significance in the country's development (Parveen et al., 2021). This is an utmost priority agenda for the government to eradicate illiteracy from the country (Ahmed et al., 2022). To further improve educational standards and eradicate illiteracy in the country, a further amendment was made in the constitution for compulsory education until a certain age and grade (Khushik & Diemer, 2018).

Despite these efforts, the education system in Pakistan is still facing lots of challenges, i.e. financial, managerial etc. (Akhtar & Tariq, 2015). The country's quality of education is below average (Parveen & Tran, 2020). The adult literacy rate in the country stands at 58% (UNDP, 2016). As per the Human Development Index (HDI), Pakistan is ranked at 147, with a value of 0.0550 points (UNDP, 2016). As per UNESCO, Pakistan has the second most out of the school children in the world. To counter these problems, different reforms and educational projects were introduced to bring educational development to the country (Khushik & Diemer, 2018). The central aim of the many educational projects was to counter the fundamental challenges faced by the country, i.e. access to education, gender equality, and infrastructural development. PEF is one such plan to address these challenges (The PEF Act of 2004).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To provide an overview of different programs introduced by the PEF.
2. To highlight the significance of PEF programs in developing schools in rural areas.
3. To provide a conclusion about the overall effect PEF programs have on improving education quality in rural areas.

Research Questions

The research questions of the study are:

1. What is the public-private partnership of PEF?
2. How does this program of public-private partnership work?

3. What are the achievements of this program for educational development in Pakistan?

METHODOLOGY

This paper reviews PEF programs and policies by critically analyzing the different programs introduced under the umbrella of PEF in the rural areas of Pakistan. In this paper, we analyzed how PEF created school reform programs in the context of Sustainable Development. All PEF programs were analyzed in this paper. The data about these programs were collected and analyzed using PEF annual reports published by the Punjab government and other articles written about the PEF programs.

PEF PLAN

PEF is a comprehensive project for improving education in the country by Pakistan. This project runs under the vision of providing free education to every child in the province, as education is the fundamental human right of every human being. PEF builds strong partnerships with individuals and communities in remote districts to provide optimum results. This project has been termed a role model project in education by the World Bank for the developing economies. The primary purpose of the PEF is to reduce the out of school children ratio and improve education quality in schools at the provincial level. PEF provides access to free education to the province's less privileged areas and provides on the job training to the school staff. Educational vouchers have been provided to children working as child laborers due to the less privileged economic backgrounds to encourage the parents to send their children to the schools. PEF has also introduced different projects under its umbrella in the whole province, especially in the least developed areas, to promote education. These programs include; Foundation Assisted School (FAS), Education Voucher Scheme (EVS), New School program (NSP), and Public School Support Program (PSSP). Besides these programs, PEF also established different departments like Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Academic Development Unit (ADU) to enhance the quality of education in the area (PEF, Annual Report 2016).

The strategy of the PEF

The salient features of the PEF strategy are as follows:

- Improve the quality of education and students enrolment rate in the province through public-private partnerships.
- Provide technical assistance for training and development of private schools teachers.
- Provide financial support to the schools running in rural and remote areas.
- Decrease the gender gap in literacy by promoting female education in rural areas.

PEF Functions

The core functions of the Foundation are to:-

- Assist in capacity building of the human resources (Teachers) working in the educational institution through different on-job training programs.
- Financially assist the schools of the less privileged area to improve schools resources.
- Provide incentives on achievements to students and teachers to motivate them to do their best.
- Encourage public-private partnerships to improve student enrolment rate.
- Provide technical assistance to educational institutions.
- Testing of different policies and programs through interventions
- Ensure and maintain uniform educational standards in the private schools
- Rank private educational institutions based on their performance and ability to maintain educational standards.
- Raise funds for educational institutes through donations, grants, contributions and subscriptions.
- Undertake any other task given by the Central Board with the government's approval.

PEF Programs

Foundation Assisted School (FAS)

Foundation Assisted Schools (FAS) is one of the plans introduced by PEF to provide access to education in the less developed areas of the Punjab province through public, private partnerships. This model is designed by keeping in focus the less privileged area schools. The main objective of this model is to improve quality standards in schools located in less privileged areas. FAS program has now reached over 3500 partner schools all over the province, and more than 1.77 million students enrolled in these schools. Financial and technical support has been provided to these schools working under private-public partnerships, mostly located in rural areas of Punjab, to promote education in these areas (Awan & Akmal, 2015).

The basic structure of these schools is like the ownership and administration is mainly controlled by private stakeholders and the operational cost of schools supported by government's financial support. FAS administration selects criteria, procedures, and SOPs for the selection of schools to ensure transparency and competitiveness. The FAS model is bringing private ownership in schools for improving the efficiency in the running of schools. One of the challenge of public schools in rural areas was the incompetent management. Through this program, government is trying to fulfill the gap of good governance in rural area public schools. The supported schools under this program assist students in accessing quality education despite their less privileged background. The schools running under this program gets monthly funds as per the volume of the schools (Number of students in a school). Further incentives have been provided to schools showing better results to encourage the school administrators. The quality of education and the quality of the school environment in these schools has also been tested through physical inspection by the FAS representatives. To ensure maximum quality assurance, these schools goes through different quality assessment test. This helps government to ensure that these schools are keeping up with the national standards. Failing twice in these special tests means cancelling the partnership certificate by the FAS (PEF, Annual Report 2016).

New School Program (NSP)

New School Program is another program of PEF to promote education in the less developed area. In NSP, main focused was given to the areas where school facility is not available or cannot meet the educational demand of the area. Through this program, mainly the small rural villages were given priority and new schools were built in these areas. The government sets a criteria that if no school facility is available for minimum as 350 children, this program will cover these areas and built school facility for those area children's. Local individual entrepreneurs and people linked with the education sector have encouraged operating these schools under the program. These schools enable students of these areas to access education at their doorsteps. It helps reduce the out-of-school children and dropouts ratio in those areas. In the beginning, the PEF authority made a contract with the local private administrator to have a minimum enrollment of children's as low as 50 is acceptable to be part of PEF program. Beside this, the schools must have two classrooms, two teachers, drinking water and one toilet within six months. The schools that can cope with these criteria are officially included in the list of PEF-partner schools and get financial support accordingly. This program spreads all over the province of Punjab. The NSP ensures the retention of the students in these schools by providing training to the staff and administrators to establish and run a new school (PEF, Annual Report 2018).

Education Voucher Scheme (EVS)

This unique program was operationalized in the Punjab province in the year 2006. The main objective of this project is "to help the less privileged area children's to access basic education by overcoming financial constraints ". This program is designed to encourage low-income families to send their children to schools rather than to work. One of the reasons for the low enrolment rate in poor areas is that families have financial problems. So these low-income families are sending their children to work to earn something instead of sending them to schools. This behavior is also creating the problem of child labor in the country. By providing financial support through these educational vouchers, the government encourages families to send their children to schools. The EVS provides these benefits to children in the age group of 5-16 years. The money has been distributed directly through vouchers to registered children/parents. As a result of this program, the poorest families now have a better choice to send their children to the schools without being financially vulnerable (PEF, Annual Report 2015).

Public School Support Program (PSSP)

The Public School Support Program (PSSP), another program under PEF, plans to enhance the quality of education in schools with issues like low enrollment and poor results. The main objective of this program is to improve the standards of low performing schools by privatization. This program is specially designed to fulfil the objectives of ensuring 'education for all' objectives of the government. The government sets a criteria in the country that all children of the age 5 to 16 years must have access to education free of cost. The key objectives of the PSSP program are:

- Increased focus on children's school enrollment in less developed areas.
- To enhance the quality of education by providing necessary teaching and learning facilities at these schools.
- To ensure Out of School Children (OSC) enrollment in those areas.

Continuous Professional Development Program (CPDP)

This program was established in 2005 with the aim to promote the quality of education in public sector schools. Through this program, teachers and head teachers have provided different on-job training programs to increase their professional expertise in the relevant subject areas. The services of different experts have been outsourced through this program, which then provides training in different schools and centers. First, the training needs in the different areas have been identified through a survey Training Need Analysis (TNA). This program has significant importance in the professional development of teachers.

This program helps teachers improve their pedagogical skills by providing them with continuous learning (Javed *et al.*, 2012). As per the authors, this program is helping teachers to become more professional in their field. The primary

aim of this program was to counter the problem of poor performance of students because of the incompetent human capital in the education sector. The Punjab government realized that to achieve excellence in education, they must focus on the human capital side.

The Continuous Professional Development Program (CPDP) consists of a core team of Master Trainers (MTs) outsourced from different specialized professions who train teachers and head-teachers. The role of these Masters Trainers is to train the teachers and head-teachers and equip them with the advanced skills and competencies which effectively enhance teachers' performance in the classroom settings. These training programs fall under two categories:

- i. School Leadership Program (SLP)
- ii. Teacher Development Program (TDP)

School Leadership Program (SLP) is specially designed for the head-teachers working in the public sector schools of Punjab province. It helps public schools leaders understand their roles and responsibilities in improving the quality of education at their institutes. This program emphasizes training about different leadership types and their impact on school improvement to enhance school leaders' effectiveness. The Teacher Development Program (TDP) is a teacher training program for public schools teachers. This program was introduced as the government realized the need to improve the public sector's human capital to improve education quality. Through these programs, different types of training have been provided to the school teachers as per the needs of the area. Training programs are specially designed to improve teachers' skills in classroom management, curriculum planning, teaching methodology, lesson planning etc. (PEF, Annual Report 2016).

DEPARTMENTS OF PEF PLAN

Academic Development Unit (ADU)

The department was established in 2005 by PEF to ensure the quality of education in the public sector schools through Quality Assurance Test (QAT). The department holds a specialist team of professionals from the fields of every science and math been taught in the public schools. Their job is to conduct special examinations by first developing the special exams as per the standardized content of education. These exams are used as the QATs for measuring the performance of different schools. In General, QAT based special examinations have been conducted yearly (PEF, May 15, 2018).

Monitoring and Evaluation Department (M & E)

This department was established in the year 2005 to track and monitor the progress of the PEF programs. It helps in making strategic decisions by providing vital information to the administration of PEF. Its basic function is to collect and evaluate the data of the ongoing PEF programs so to measure these programs efficiency and effectiveness. This department closely monitors the implementation of PEF supported programs in the whole province. M&E department reports directly to the senior management of the PEF plan and help them in making the right decisions (PEF, May 15, 2018).

PEF ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the years, the PEF plan achieved significant success in the province (Akhtar & Tariq 2015). According to the authors, the new schools have been built in the remote parts of the province which resulted in the increase in the net enrollment rate of students at the primary levels. The track of this positive change in enrollment is upward trending. It means that better management and the implementation of PEF supported programs results in bringing out of schools children to the schools.

PEF partner schools also have a better organizational structure in terms of management than the other public schools that are not running under PEF (Saeed & Zubair, 2019). The authors also stated that the availability of different supporting departments also helps PEF better monitor teachers' and schools' performance and take measures to improve it. The student to teacher ratio is also better in the PEF partner schools, which are vital for student performance. Hence, by improving the basic organizational structure of schools, the students' performance has been improved in PEF schools. This is one of the key achievement of PEF program.

Constraints/Problems in Implementation of PEF Plan

Saeed and Zubair (2019) stated in their study that PEF partners' schools are having problems selecting appropriate teachers in remote areas. The lack of skilled human capital in remote areas hinders the PEF's ability to hire the most skillful candidate for those schools. So they are recruiting teachers in those areas only based on minimum acceptable degrees. The less qualified staff has not been really productive for the PEF plans. The authors also stated that in the public-private partnerships of PEF, it was seen that some of the schools are been run by business-minded people. Their business approach to the schools in these areas can affect the quality of education.

CONCLUSION

The large population of a developing country like Pakistan is always a problem for the government to efficiently utilize the resources for the benefit of its people. The large population size brings many challenges to developing its human resources for a better quality of life. The government of Pakistan cannot spend a lot on the development of its people in all parts of the country. This resulted in a poor educational environment and caused a high illiteracy rate. Efficient projects like PEF can help the government improve the country's educational scenario with minimum resources. The PEF, through its programs, has been able to improve the efficiency and skill level of teaching staff in the country. This resulted in the increases in the enrollment rate in the schools, especially in the remote areas, which helps in elevating the literacy rate in the Punjab province.

The PEF helps reduce the barrier to education by putting negligible financial pressure on poor families. The PEF helping policies in the poor and remote areas make it easier for the students of less privileged backgrounds to get access to education. The PEF also helps in improving the human capital in the public sector schools to enhance the quality of education in those areas. The increase in the schools' enrollment rate is also helping the government counter the problem of out-of-school children and child labour. This project has been termed a role model project in education by the World Bank for the developing economies. It has expressed its satisfaction with the agenda of promoting Quality Education (Saeed & Zubair, 2019). That shows the success of the PEF plan on the provincial level. The specific problems which are associated with some of its programs can be solved with better management, and the model of this plan can be applied to other provinces to elevate the literacy rate all over the country.

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