

## **SECOND CHANCE: AN OPPORTUNITY TO STEP FORWARD**

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In Pakistan, the state of literacy within the context of cultural and historical heritage of an Islamic Society, presents a paradoxical picture. The present rate of literacy is estimated to be 38.9%. During the last fifty years the literacy rate has gradually increased at the rate of half a percent. Consequently, Pakistan stands at 142nd position among 160 countries in the world and among SAARC countries, its position is 6th. It is certainly a depressed scenario.

According to recent data available the participation rate in primary education still lags behind at 92% for males and 64% for females. And, of this enrollment 52% dropout during the first two years. No more than 25-35% children actually complete full primary cycle. Further more, at elementary stage, the participation rate is 66% for males and 34% for females. Therefore the estimates show that out of the total 78% primary entrants only 355 reach secondary level. And at the secondary level the participation rate is 25% in females ( National Education Policy, 1998-2010).

Education in Pakistan is privilege of the few and of men in particular. In every sub-sector of the entire education system women's participation rate is low. The reasons are quite complex and can be traced within the system. But there can be no miracles and instant remedies. The lack of infrastructure teachers, need based curriculum, cooperation from elders/family, distance of schools from home, transportation, finances and the overall socio-cultural set-up has contributed in hindering females from participating in education.

The educational scenario of education in Pakistan was not very different in early 1980s when AIOU planned a project to cater the need of women for acquiring secondary education through distance learning system, Women's Secondary Education Programme (WSEP). This is an opportunity for middle grade (8th Class) dropout or those who discontinued at ninth or tenth grade. The programme was developed with a sensitivity to the problem of women.

From the point of view of curriculum and delivery there are in-built flexibilities which facilitate learners to continue their education. The main features of the programme are:

- Minimum age limit for learners is 14 years, there is no maximum age limit.
- Programme duration is four semester (semester is four and half month study period) i.e.; two years at learners pace.
- Eight credits to complete Secondary School Certificate.
- Two credit courses per semester in order to keep minimum burden on the learners.

The distance education policy form the parameters for the subject committee, who write the course materials. The specific curriculum features are:

- Written materials which are in National Language i.e.; Urdu and for Provinces translation of some courses in regional language has been provided.
- Course material is a book which is suitable for self study and is highly illustrated with diagrams.
- Allied supplementary material, workbooks are prepared. Vision books with audio cassettes, audio programme and video programmes for educational TV are included.
- Self assessment questions at the end of each unit of the course book.
- Course guides.

- General guide of the programme.
- Practical manuals, drafting etc.

The syllabi covers a variety of need based and functional courses. Besides the compulsory core of six credit compulsory courses there are sixteen elective courses which are offered in groups which automatically guides the learners to choose their area of interest i.e.; Agriculture group, Home Economics group, Technical group, Health group and Education group etc.

The students' case studies has proved that the curriculum and materials are suitable to their life situation and learning is in proper context. Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach which cut across the boundaries of specialized knowledge also facilitates the learners to excel in their future endeavors, whether it is continuing the education, taking up a job or self sustainability. Within the University the programme has not only established its credibility but has started to expand. All over the country now it is being offered for females as well as males. Within the University there is a privilege of education continuing for Secondary level completers. They are preferred for admission in Higher Secondary education both in science and arts group as well as in Primary Teacher Training programme.

In distance education system the delivery mechanism has to be efficient and all possible support is given to facilitate the learners for smooth completion of their education. A two prong strategy has been adopted i.e.; support from head office and from the regional network of thirty two offices through out Pakistan.

The Head office supports the activities related to nation wide publicity, admission, registration, mailing of study package, holding of examination, advisory service from academics, monitoring and evaluation of course materials and issuance of certificates. The regional offices do the work of publicity in the field. The male regional directors are accompanied by female field coordinators who were appointed specially to cater to the needs of females clientele. They visit the field and approach the females, their parents and do the publicity, motivation and counseling throughout the study period. After the head office finalizes the admission the regional offices make the study group and allocate the study centres, appoint the part-time tutors and all this information is dispatched to the students and the part-time tutors. Once the weekly tutorial starts, where the students get the opportunity to benefit from their tutors and interact with fellow students, the field coordinator supervise and monitor the study centre activities atleast once a month. Even sitting at their offices they get to know the performance of study centres because weekly attendance sheets and cumulative assessment of assignments are sent to the regional offices by the tutors.

The students are provided with guidance, counseling and advisory service through a very well established system. To disseminate information News letter, Instructional posters, .Interaction through direct correspondence with students, Telephonic and personal contacts are used to make the system effective. For career counseling the students are made aware of possible job opportunities available and besides the stereotype roles of teachers and nurses they are advised of taking up jobs as telephone operators, office secretaries, health visitors or workers, small entrepreneurs etc. Many students have been facilitated directly by referring them to related agencies i.e.; First Women bank, Lady police stations, Social welfare dept. , NGOs dealing with domestic violence etc.

The Headoffice staff also provide training to part-time tutors and field coordinator and all kind of backup support need in the field. Because of a very well-established monitoring and evaluation system, problems are identified and solved properly. The detailed research studies have also been conducted which has helped the University to take long term decisions.

Many case studies have also been collected which are indicative of positive impact of the programme on women's lives. The enrollment with Matric programme has brought in them a general awareness, confidence, financial benefits, job security, self sustainability, empowerment and many openings to a new world. The following case studies speaks for themselves:

#### Case Study One

Saeeda Akhtar

Saeeda, age 33years, comes from a low income family. She lives in small village. She is married and has one child. She could not continue after middle level because there was no high school in the village. After a gap of 6 to 7 years she started studying matric through WSEP.

Her sisters were younger to her but were going to school and were very keen to learn. Saeeda herself, at first, was not interested in getting education but on seeing her sisters' learning, she also became interested in education. Her sister who was a teacher told her about AIOU's programme and motivated her to take admission in Matric for Women. After knowing the salient feature of the programme and the benefits that distance education could bring, she decided to join the programme. The main reason of joining WSEP was that she could study at home, at her own pace and could do it without disturbing the routine household work.

Like all other village girls Saeeda also had to do a lot of household chores. She used to cook, clean, wash and look after younger brothers and sisters. She looked after cattle and fetched water. She also used to do embroidery for her own use and for the family. These chore consumed a considerable part of her day and left her with a little time for studies. Thanks to the distance education system she did her studies to her satisfaction as this system does not put heavy burden on the student.

Saeeda is one of the earliest students of the programme. She took admission in 1988 as soon as the programme was offered in her area. Her parents were happy and the entire family was very supportive. The sister would share the workload, would help whenever she came across any problem in her studies. Her sister even accompanied her to the study centre which was located in the town away from the village. She says that in completing her Secondary School Certificate (Matric), the support and motivation by the family, especially of her younger sisters, played a vital role. She says "***without their help I could never manage to complete my Matric***".

Saeeda is one of the lucky students who has completed matric in four semesters (two years). She never faced problems in understanding the course materials and in solving the assignments. Here comes the importance of having an educated family. From the University side, she also had minimum problems. Saeeda still does a lot of work but the nature of the work is changed because she has the Mtric certificate. She is now able to use her faculties in many more directions than the household work. Though there are additional responsibilities as she has got married and have a child, she is working in a private school as a teacher since last three years. Though the salary is small but it is enough for meeting small needs.

Her story does not ends with completing Matric. Matric proved to be a mile stone for her as she decided to continue her education. She has taken admission in Primary Teachers Certificate programme in Allama Iqbal open University.

### Case Study Two

Nasreen Gul

Nasreen is 40 years old and is unmarried. She lives in Nawan shehr in Abbottabad. The need to take admission in a vocational college was the main motivating factor to obtain matric certificate because matric certificate was needed to enter the vocational college. She was also interested in getting more education. According to Nasreen she wanted to do matric after middle level but her brother never liked her to that. She says "***Now I am bigger and more wise (samajdar), so I did it on my own***".

She took admission in WSEP in 1990 and completed it in two years. She attended tutorial regularly and was happy about the behavior and guidance of the tutor. She also liked to talk to fellow students. Tutorial was always looked forward as it provided an opportunity to get out of the house once in a week. She never failed any subject. Most of the girls in her group got married during their studies, had babies and dropped out. But she never lost her interest and determination. Her elder sister was very supportive. She was the one who brought the news of WSEP and asked her to join the programme. She always encouraged her in her studies and often accompanied her to study centre. Above all her own strong motivation led her to complete her matric. There was no one to share household work and she paid the fee herself. She says, "***If I start something, I complete it***".

Nasreen is a hardworking and determined women. She was busy in giving training of sewing, cutting and embroidery simultaneously with the household work and her studies. Distance learning system suited her a lot. Nasreen has completed two year diploma from vocational college. She has established a boutique business and is running a private vocational school. She has sewing machines

and embroidery and knitting machines at her centre. She has started her business by taking loan from the First Women Bank. To get the loan sanctioned she had to go through negotiation with the bank authorities and did all correspondence on her own. She plans to expand her business in future. She says that matric has changed her life. Matric has helped her in two material ways. First it enabled her to get admission in the college and obtain the diploma, secondly it was needed for the loan. If she did not had this certificate she could not be able to do what she has accomplished now. She says that it gave her confidence to go here and there on her own and to meet and negotiate with people. WSEP course on selling of home made products helped her how to do the business and to market her products.

### Case Study Three

Kalsoom Akhtar

Kalsoom is a teacher in Government school. She is 35 years old, married and mother of four children. She completed her middle level back in 1997. She got married at an early age and left school for good. The reason why she did not continue her education was that her husband did not approve girls education. But the desire to get more education was there in her. When her husband committed murder in revenge and was sent to jail, she faced real hardships in those days. It became impossible for her to bring up her children and to feed them properly. The husband slowly realized that if she was educated she could work and support the family. When she spilled her desire before him, he granted permission for the admission in WSEP.

Studying through WSEP was a great advantage at this stage because she had small kids and there was no one to look after them in the house. Apart from that she had to take care of the house hold on her own. Through WSEP she could study by sitting at home and at her own convenience. Moreover there was no extra financial burden on her because there was no fee. Ms. Zakia who was a very kind teacher told her about the Women's Matric programme and remained very helpful throughout the period.

Kalsoom was very determined to fight the worse circumstances of her life. She wanted to get some work. As the social environment allowed teaching as the only respectable profession, therefore, she geared her energies to reach that goal. She took admission in matric and simultaneously joined PTC programme announced by the Prime Minister.. Kalsoom completed matric in the minimum period and applied for a job in the local Govt. school. She was on the top of the merit list and got the job. With the matric certificate from AIOU she was now able to support her children.

### Case Study Four

Balqis Begum

Balqis is a widow with five children to take care of. She is 36 years old and has completed matric in 1990. She is one of the earliest students of WSEP. After doing her middle level she got married. Her husband died after a few years of marriage and she faced the worst crisis of her life. She had to arrange finances for the family. She tried to get some work but with the middle certificate what kind of work she could do? There was no job for her, therefore she decided to improve her education. The WSEP proved to be the only suitable option for her. She could study as well as could look after her children and the house hold. She took admission and started studying. Apart from self motivation her brother-in-law was the most supportive. Her sisters accompanied her to study centre and to the examination centre, they also arranged fee for her.

She has done PTC and has got a job in a Govt. school. She plans to do F.A to improve her job. She thinks matric has enabled her to get a job and to get further education.

### Case Study Five

Mehjabeen Gul

Nasreen Gul is 38 years old and is married with no children. She took admission in WSEP as soon as admission was opened in her area. She completed her matric in 1992 taking four years instead of two. She had a passion for education but as she got married she had to leave her education. Her own family wanted her to continue education but the in-laws are against education. Despite their

disagreement she took admission in WSEP. Her brother and sister were a great support to her. She used to hide her books from her in-laws for the fear that they might tear them apart. Her brother was exceptionally supportive to her in all aspects. He encourages her to be brave and take a stand in the house for her education. He says, *"tell your in-laws that you are an educated girl"*. In these circumstances she studied and has completed matric.

She does a lot of work in the house. She cooks, washes, cleans and take care of the house. She is the one who looks after the sick, the old and all the guests. In addition to that she does embroidery and stitching for her own use and for others without taking money. She is so busy that she hardly can take out time for studies. She complains, *"now she also has to take care of the goat which my father-in-law has bought. The goat is a bullet from the blue. It takes most of my time"*. She is quite depressed with in-laws' behavior. *"My in-laws used to say look she is doing matric at this age"* She could not apply for the post of lady health worker because her husband did not recommend that. He approves teaching only.

She plans to continue her studies through Allama Iqbal Open University. About Matric she says that it has enabled her to get more knowledge and has given courage to fight back the forces which are hindrance to her education. It has opened the doors of further education to her. She thinks she is well respected now.

## References

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