

EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN LEARNING IN PAKISTAN

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II. INTRODUCTION

Open learning as an alternative to formal campus based education is a personalized course of supervised study, which can lead to a recognized academic award. Need and significance of this system of non-formal education can not be over-emphasized for a developing country like Pakistan facing huge financial constraints and committed to development in the shortest possible time. In fact, open learning system of non-formal education intends to teach those who are quite out of the formal education. There is an urgent need to think on vital issues and subjects of national importance in the universities of Pakistan and encouraging them to foster mutually beneficial relationships with the well-known foreign universities specially those in USA, UK and the English speaking commonwealth countries. The successive governments in Pakistan have made scanty use of knowledge and expertise available in many universities for the shaping of decisions on national and international issues and the formulation of national development plans. This review study relating to the forum of open learning through distance education would make a greater contribution towards solving the education problems in Pakistan.

III. PERSPECTIVES OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION/OPEN LEARNING IN PAKISTAN⁴

Keeping in view the growing need and significance of non-formal educational approach in Pakistan, several agencies, institutions and organizations have undertaken numerous non-formal education programmes in the country. The following pages contain a brief account of some of the major non-formal education programmes of these organizations.

1. Ministry of Education⁵

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO launched the Experimental Pilot Project Integrating Education and Rural Development (EPPIERD) in 1977. An evaluation of this project was carried out during October 1980 and following were the findings and recommendations:

- (a) In its four years, the Project has made most impact through the community and non-formal activities, especially the women education centers. It has been a stimulating force towards the self-help attitudes being encouraged by the Government.
- (b) The main purpose of the project, i.e. its impact on the re-orientation of Primary School learning, has had less attention. New and more urgent efforts are needed if this aspect is to be implemented.

(c) The Project was seen as “part of a larger effort by the Government of Pakistan to promote and to integrate educational programmes therein”. The terms of the Agreement of 1974, therefore, were designed to outline future progress. Had these been more closely followed, the Project would have been considerably strengthened. This is especially so with respect to the structure of the national and local communities, and the establishment of advisory teams to assist “the conduct of research and the built-in evaluation of the Project”. Regular meetings of these groups would have brought wiser expertise into the Project’s plans, and also made a more impressive effect among Pakistan’s educational developments; and

(d) Though EPPIERD has not, in the four years of its nominal five-year’s experimental period, achieved the potential expected, this does not mean that its concepts should not be further explored. It would be unwise to lose the experience of the Project gained so far, especially as the decision to extend it to some of the provinces is awaiting more evidence as the Project proceeds.

In view of these findings the project was re-organized under the name “Rural Education and Development (READ)” and was assigned to the Primary and Non-Formal Education Wing of the Ministry of Education in Islamabad. UNICEF provided financial support for continuance of this Project. The Project provided package of five components i.e. mosque schools; women education centers; village workshops; community viewing centers; and adult literacy center. The overall objective of the Project was to develop effective teaching-learning methods of assisting children, young people and adults in rural areas to prepare them for effective integration into the economic, social and cultural development of Pakistan. The project was launched in January 1981 and evaluated in 1983. The Evaluation Report recommended its extension to 2000 villages all over the country, yet it could not be continued for other reasons.

2. Allama Iqbal Open University⁶

The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the pioneer institution of non- formal and distance education established in Pakistan in 1974. The University offers as many as 216 different courses through its media based and tutorially supported non-formal/distance education system. These courses have an extremely wide range, from literacy to M.A., M.Sc. and M.Phil levels. Leaving aside the details of higher level courses, some of the lower programmes/courses need special mention in the context of non- formal education, which are:

(a) Literacy and Adult Education: In this field, the AIOU had its earliest collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Pakistan Television Corporation. AIOU’s main contribution was through participation in the development of materials, research surveys, evaluation exercises and the setting up of community viewing centers under the aegis of its regional offices.

Under the Integrated Functional Education Project, the University, after undertaking detailed surveys of target areas, developed literacy and skill-oriented teaching materials. Numerous class cycles for adults, (both male and female) each of six-month duration were run in the selected villages of Rawalpindi, Mirpur, Bannu and Hyderabad districts. Need-based literacy materials in Urdu and regional languages were prepared. These materials emphasized literacy, social awareness and skill development.

(b) Functional Education Project for Rural Areas (FEFRA) was another important Project of non-formal education in Pakistan. This was ODA assisted project of AIOU, which had developed and launched functional education courses for rural illiterates. These courses were: (i) child care, (ii) poultry-keeping at home, (iii) livestock management, (iv) electricity in the villages, (v) agricultural credits. This project was merged into the main stream of the AIOU system and is functioning as a programme. The instructional methodology was designed to facilitate maximum learning of the target population. Since the Project was meant for illiterates, cassettes were prepared in local dialects which explained the pictures and diagrams drawn on the flip charts. Each group of the learners had a group leader who was oriented in operating radio cassettes and follow the instructions given therein. Built-in discussion intervals were provided in the cassettes. This Project has now been converted into a regular programme of the university.

(c) Integrated Functional Education Project has been recast and started (exclusively for females) as a pilot project near Rawalpindi. It is of 18-month duration and aims at making the illiterates, literate and then providing follow-up materials so that they may not relapse into illiteracy. Females educated in this way, may join the stream of formal primary education and move on to secondary education through the women education project of the university.

(d) Integrated Functional Literacy Project. The Women's Education Department of Allama Iqbal Open University has started a pilot project for women through its distance teaching system. Financial assistance for the project is being received from the Netherlands Government and it is being sponsored by Women's Division, Government of Pakistan. The project aims to provide opportunities of education to women in far flung areas who could not attend the formal system of education due to social, financial or cultural reasons. After the successful completion of this Project, courses at Matric level will be incorporated into the regular programmes of AIOU and made available throughout Pakistan.

(e) Women's Matric. Under assistance from the Government of the Netherlands, the MOU has started Women's Matric (Secondary Level Certificate) Education Project. To begin with, it was launched in some selected areas and is now being gradually extended to the whole of the country in phases. It was planned to educate about 10,000 girls per annum under the Project by 1990.

3. Health, Social Welfare and Population Welfare Wing

Under this Wing, Health Education Cells are functioning at federal and provincial headquarters. They appoint health educators in medical colleges, public health, nursing schools, etc. Started in collaboration with the World Bank, the Plan aims at the improvement and expansion of health education programmes as an integral part of the health services. Community services such as maternity and child health centers, adult literacy centers, vocational training centers are provided by federal and provincial governments to help people solve their problems.

4. Agriculture and Livestock Departments

Field staff of these departments play an important role in advising farmers on plant protection, provision of seeds, crop patterns, poultry farming, sericulture, fish farming, etc. These field workers carry pamphlets to the villages and deliver them to the farmers. They also provide orientation to groups of farmers on new techniques and methods of agriculture.

5. Rural Development Department

Strategies like Village Aid, Integrated Rural Development Programme and the constitution of Marakiz were adopted by the Ministry of local Government and Rural Development and Provincial Rural Development Departments to accelerate development in rural areas. These programmes have been discontinued and currently substituted by the People's Works Programme (PWP). Pakistan Academy for Rural Development was established in 1959. One of the main objectives of this Academy is to experiment with new techniques of Rural Development. Activities of the Academy in non- formal education include the extension education programmes for rural development workers and "Ulema" project aimed at education of religious leaders. A similar Academy has also been established at Quetta. The NCRD (National Center for Rural Development) caters to the training needs of key personnel engaged in various programmes of rural development. It carried out research activities also pertaining to rural development and disseminates their results.

6. National Council of Social Welfare (NCSW)

Formed in 1956, the NCSW is providing assistance to the programmes like women welfare, health youth classes, adult education centers and vocational training for the handicapped throughout the country.

7. Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation¹

In view of the importance of and urgency of eradication of illiteracy audio programmes through Radio Pakistan were launched from all its stations. Alif Ujala (L for light) was the first programme designed to enlist and motivate the teachers and taught. The initiative and execution of this programme has indicated that radio, apart from informing, educating and entertaining its listeners, is also capable of playing a socially useful role. It has the power to reach further and faster into every corner of remote rural areas than any other media. Its low cost and repeated contacts compared with the cost of contacts through conventional methods make the radio programmes undoubtedly attractive for the promotion of literacy and adult education.

8. Pakistan Television

Pakistan Television today covers more than 85% of total population and more than 34% of total area of Pakistan. Responding to the compelling need of the country to promote adult literacy and the objectives of the National Education Policy, PTV devised and televised several major educational programmes covering adult functional literacy along with formal school and college education. It is stated that the PTV through its Adult Functional Literacy Project has made 120,000 male and 153,000 female illiterates as literates. ⁽¹⁾

The role of the UNICEF in financing literacy programmes through PTV has been really commendable. About 500 community centers equipped with TV sets, teachers and primers were provided for each center. Educational features like science magazine for students, National Geography and TV Clinic were added to the on-going programmes.

PTV has presented programmes on Adult Functional Literacy (AFL) spread over many cycles and ran full courses of tele-lessons based on booklets, primer Naya Din (New Day) for viewers enrolled in community viewing centers.

The adult viewers have acquired basic literacy skills and insights into such practical subject areas as health and nutrition, saving and budgeting, child care, vegetable growing and agriculture.

9. Government Technical Education and Private Training Centers Government Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology, vocational institutions and technical training centers provide evening programmes for training in a variety of trades such as drafting, electrician, auto, surveying, welding, etc. These programmes have a lot in overcoming the shortage of skilled and semi-skilled manpower in various fields due to exodus of trained manpower to the Middle East.

10. Agency for Barani Area Development (ABAD)

The ABAD is operating in more than 10 Barani, i.e., rainfed districts of Punjab. It offers courses of 6 to 12 months duration in auto and farm machinery, welding, tailoring, motor winding, in more than 22 well established centers.

11. Agricultural Universities

Along with being institutions of higher learning, the agricultural universities also have their extension programmes for farmers and agricultural field staff in crop production, plant protection, bee-keeping, food technology, etc.

12. Iqra Pilot Project

The awfully low literacy rate in Pakistan has been a major handicap in developing the country's resources and improving living standards of the people. The root cause for slow growth has been illiteracy. Inadequacies in the formal system of primary education and achievement in the Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) have been very low. Narrow literacy base, lack of incentives for the target population including illiterates and voluntary teachers have always eroded programmes of adult and non-formal education.

Iqra project was, therefore, introduced by the Literacy and Mass Education Commission (LAMEC) ensuring economic incentives to voluntary teachers for the time and efforts put-in to make a person literate. Educated persons, ex-servicemen or persons already engaged in some economic activity were encouraged to utilize their free time and knowledge productively. The Project aimed at covering 50,000 people in one year. The plan was pre-dominantly result-oriented with handsome reward to voluntary teacher of Rs.1000.00 per neo-literate.

The project office in LAMEC at Islamabad had the overall operational control for registration and examination of volunteer illiterates. Elected institutions like union councils were fully involved for the convenience of participants in the scheme.

13. Nai Roshni Schools

Another aspect of the literacy campaign in Pakistan was the Nai Roshni Schools, meant for primary school drop-outs and children who never enrolled in primary schools.

Nai Roshni Schools were a completely non-formal system intended to enable 10 to 14 year old children to complete their education up to grade-5. The duration of schooling was two years, completion of which was expected to enable a child to join class 6 in the formal system.

Teaching was arranged in formal school buildings in the afternoon by specially trained teachers employed for the whole day. Besides teaching special task of these teachers was to motivate the target population, public relationing and keeping records of students. The programme was planned for 1986-90 and the expected number was to educate 1,650,000 students in 22,000 Nai Roshni Schools. The two projects I.e. Iqra and Nai Roshni could not work successfully because of mismanagement, inefficiency, lack of coordination which caused financial drain on the part of the Government.

IV. HUMAN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT- An international comparison³

Investment in Human Capital through health, education and other social services can undoubtedly go a long way in improving the socio- economic condition of an economy. But the dilemma with most of the governments today is that their immediate priority is to attain growth in the economic sectors while human development is of secondary importance. All our policies are directed towards growth in the Gross National Product (GNP) which is no doubt imperative but unfortunately in many countries this does not necessarily translate into improvement in human lives. Sound and stable economic growth is one which helps to promote human development in the true sense of the word. These are objectives which should be in front of all countries, but yardsticks for judgement are different in different countries. In this context, Pakistan's performance regarding it's social indicators is significantly poor if compared to other countries in the South Asian region.

Since the 1970s, Pakistan managed to maintain a better per capita income than other countries in the region and even today we stand on top among the low human development countries as ranked in the Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) considered in the table. But unfortunately, if we look at our health, education and demographic indicators we have certainly failed to establish ourselves on top. Countries like, Nepal and Bangladesh whose per capita incomes have always been very low compared to ours and sometimes even one half or less than that are now doing remarkably well in their social sectors. This clearly indicates investment priorities of nations even in the situation when there is a resource crunch. So the question arises where the money is flowing in the case of Pakistan because if we look at our annual growth rate of GNP since 1980 to 1993 we appear with a fine growth of 6.1 percent which shows that we are only worse off than China with the figure of 9.4 percent among the selected countries. This sometimes gives rise to high hopes that the efforts with respect to improved growth rate of our GNP will definitely help.

Thus, it can be duly stated that successful and steady rise in GNP is never a direct measure of human well being. Wise countries are those which are able to translate the increase in income into advancement in the dimensions of human development. At each and every stage, policy makers must monitor where the growth of country is heading, who are the beneficiaries and which sector is improving, and which sectors are the victims of this growth? This is because of the fact that GNP is just used to measure flows of production, income and expenditure, which in their turn can be used to represent means to human well being. There could be several reasons for not achieving the desired results even from our appreciable growth in income. But one of the major factors is the problem of population explosion. Ever since 1960, Pakistan continued to have an average annual growth rate of population at around 3 percent per annum, which is the highest among all the countries, like Srilanka and China with their population growth figures as low as 1.8 percent, can achieve higher literacy and enrollment rates, even though their per capita income is about the same as that of Pakistan.

V. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, LITERACY AND OBJECTIVES²

(a) Conceptual Framework

The International literacy year (1990) provided an opportunity to renew the commitments for ensuring a fully literate world. The two principal messages of the year were: (a) that literacy matters and it matters greatly and (b) that the provision of education is, above all, a public responsibility but there is a role for every one including the private sector, Non- Governmental organizations (NGOS), Community Based Organizations (CBOS) and other allied organizations to ensure this basic human right. There is a need for a grand alliance amongst government, the private sector and the donors.

In Pakistan, the current literacy rate is estimated at 38.9 percent, It is 50 percent for males and 27 percent for females (Economic Survey of Pakistan 1996-97, page 115). The female literacy for rural areas is not more than 8 percent. It is estimated that the stock of literates in 1992-93 was 29.65 million while the population of 10 years and above was 83.77 million (Eighth Five-Year Plan, 1993-98, page 315). By the year 1998, the population of 10+age group will rise to 96~69 million. The addition to the literate population during the five-year (1993-98) period was estimated to be 18.83 million. The lower priority to adult literacy was manifested the First Five-Year Plan (1955-60) to the Third Five-Year Plan (1965-70) when no financial allocations were made for the promotion of literacy, hence no targets were set either. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1993-98) allocated Rupees 1.750 billion (US \$ 43.75 million approx.) for Adult Literacy Programs to make 16.86 million people literate. This comes to about Rupees one thousand per person to become literate. For the attainment of the objectives and the targets of this policy in letter and spirit, a comprehensive pragmatic, realistic, and well- monitored plan of operation should have been prepared.

The non-formal education is now receiving a growing awareness and acceptance as a dominant approach to education in the future. The idea is certainly not a new one. The practice is almost perennial. The consciousness that learning has to be co-existent with life is as old as mankind. All traditional societies had, in one way or the other, some learning practices within all periods of one's life and as part and parcel of one's overall activities. It is only in the more recent times that learning and education became time-bound and space-bound, mostly limited to some age groups, predominantly professionalized, institutionalized and sociologically and pedagogically programmed This reflects in reality the basic trends in the global evolution of our >, contemporary societies, which are increasingly over organized and over structured, ' leaving less and less scope for creativity, imagination, choice and peoples real) participation. Educational systems and learning facilities mirror the same trends and ' societal characteristics. They are not, and cannot be, exceptions in the overall rules of , the human nature. The increased emphasis on non-formal learning stems from the) awareness that institutionalized, time and space-hound education does not correspond to ' the requirements of today's societies. The concept of non-formal education is based on an integral educational philosophy rather than the piecemeal and diffused practices stimulated by working or living exigencies. Hence, the non-formal learning concept today is a comprehensive answer to the identified needs.

(b) Objectives

1. To achieve the global objective of Education for All and All for Education.
2. To complement and supplement the formal system to achieve the target of Universal Primary Education (UPE) through community involvement in the shortest possible time.
3. To impart functional literacy for adolescents (10-14) who missed out the chance of primary education.
4. To provide lasting functional literacy and income generation skills for rural women of 15 to 25 age group.
5. To provide the basic educational facilities to working children and reduce child labor.
6. To expand the facilities and services of middle level education through community involvement and non-formal means.

VI. FUTURE STRATEGIES AND INNOVATIONS FOR OPEN LEARNING⁷

The studies and research work done for the government by certain universities cost much less than what is paid to the army of consultants. The increased use of our universities by the government and semi- government organizations for research surveys and studies will help in developing them into reliable and competent think tanks, promote inter- university linkages and build up cadres and teams of scholars and researchers who are essential for the planning process in the government as well as in the private sectors. The universities to which such government assignments are given will also benefit financially, Almost every university in Pakistan today needs more funds to stay afloat and expand its educational services. In Pakistan also, some universities and colleges have taken profitable initiatives in this direction but, at times, official formalities and red-tape cause unnecessary delays in the completion of foreign research assignments, particularly in relation to government run universities. In the present age of computers, the internet and website and the amazing revolution in the information technology, utmost promptness in the handling of foreign assignments and the reliability of the data furnished are exceedingly important. The advances in the realm of information technology have opened up new avenues of useful foreign contacts for our educational institutions, especially universities. By availing the new leaps in the communications technology, informatics and the revolutionised teaching methodologies, our universities, colleges and schools can vastly enhance their teaching skills. They should take advantage of a new internet-based computer network established for the Commonwealth countries known as the Commonwealth Electronic Network for Schools and Education or SENSE. The Commonwealth of Learning (based in the Commonwealth University of Distance Learning) in Vancouver, Canada, according to its vice chancellor, Dr. Dhana Rajan, has contributed to the establishment of CENSE.

Universities in Pakistan can also seek cooperation from the Malta-based Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET- IT), an International Foundation sponsored by the London-based Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Malta for economic and social development through the application of the information and communications technologies, especially in the fields of electronics, commerce, public administration, education and distance-learning and institutional networking. In the annual conference of the more than a century old Royal Commonwealth Society in London in June 1998 useful information about the operation of the SENSE organization and the recent CENSE meeting in Canada was furnished by British educational experts, Douglas Butler and Peter Dunn. Pakistani schools should develop linkages with the Commonwealth electronic network for schools via the internet through CENSE and its website.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is currently working on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission on Commonwealth Studies headed by a Canadian educationist, Professor T.H.B. Symons in 1997. Its report and recommendations emphasized that immense opportunities exist for Commonwealth countries to benefit from each other in education and many other fields. The secretariat in London is setting up the Association for Commonwealth Examination and Accreditation Bodies. It is also working on projects to increase the delivery of education through non-formal channels because, in its view, the surging demand for education in Commonwealth countries cannot be met by the formal school system alone. As the Vancouver-based Commonwealth of Learning is helping open Universities in many Commonwealth Countries, including Pakistan, its training workshop held in May 1996 in India for the science laboratory technicians of such universities was very useful. The Commonwealth Higher Education Support Scheme (CHESS) has promoted, since its launching in 1990, collaborative efforts among the developing Commonwealth countries to increase access to scientific books and journals for universities and colleges. One of the recent undertakings of their CHESS is to enhance the management skills of senior women administrators in higher education through regional workshops. The Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium (CUSAC) presently comprises a group of 45 universities; it creates opportunities for their students to study for a year in another Commonwealth University. The number of Commonwealth scholarships and fellowships has been increasing every year and Pakistan scholars also benefit from this programme.

Pakistani Universities should seek participation in 5-day Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning to be held from March 1 to 5, 1999 in Brunei Darussalam. Its theme is : “*Empowerment Through Knowledge and Technology.*” It has been jointly sponsored by the Vancouver-based Commonwealth of Learning, the Brunei Education Ministry and the University of Brunei Darussalam. One of its main purposes is to extend Open Learning into all aspects of education, training and human resource development. Pakistan has gained considerable expertise in Open Learning and distance-education from its Open University in Islamabad.

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