

A REVIEW OF RURAL WOMEN EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: Education doesn't mean merely to get a degree or a certificate but its meanings are so broad that it also increases one's self empowerment. In addition, education also broadens the vision and way of thinking of a person. Education is considered as a key factor to bring change in human behavior. The importance of basic education is recognized all around the world. The research studies revealed that 95% of the world illiterates reside in developing countries out of which 70% were females who are the major contributors towards illiteracy. The majority of women who cannot read and write live in Asia which clearly depicts poor literacy rate of the regional countries. According to UNESCO report (2012), Pakistan is among the countries those have poor literacy rate in the world while International Human Indicators database places Pakistan at 130th place out of 141 countries on the basis of adult literacy (above 15 years) in which Pakistan's female literacy rate was of most consideration and was found to be much lower than males. UNICEF (2012) report suggested that affirmative efforts are required to improve women literacy, skills, reproductive health improvement, and livelihood success so that they may increase their participation and leadership skills thus ensuring gender justice through equal access of both males and females to education.

KEYWORDS: Education. Female, literacy, poverty, skills

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education gives awareness to human beings to know themselves and their surroundings. It creates sense of change in human behavior at all. Education is the area where resources need to be spent for change and development. Tens of thousands of studies have been found those exerted focus on the pivotal role of education in the development of the society as well as any country in the world. In the words of Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world". Education doesn't mean merely to get a degree or a certificate but its meanings are so broad that it also increases one's self empowerment. In addition, education also broadens the vision and way of thinking of a person.

1.1 Education and its importance

Education is considered as a key factor to bring change in human behavior. The change must be in mental, social and economic human behavior [1]. Education attainment is one of the basic human rights and it promotes economic growth and human development index of any country [2]. Importance of basic education is recognized all around the world. It has been declared as the basic right of every child. Universal education goal has also been set up with the title "Education for All" by 2015 to make education accessible to each and every child in 2000 at World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal. Efforts are now being exerted towards achieving this global objective. On the other hand, UNESCO report 2013-2014 also narrates that although all the countries along with local and international NGOs are paying serious attention. However, to achieve this target, more integrated efforts are required which should be directed towards rural poor who cannot educate their children only due to financial constraint. The report further indicates that by the end of 2011, 75million children were still out of school [3].

1.2 Obstacles in educational development

Reference [3] report on education 2014 recommends that to achieve "Education for All" goal by 2015, an urgent action and huge financial resources for education is required to boost up the literacy rate. The report also depicts that inadequate funds from donor agencies are also one of the primary obstacle in achieving the literacy goal. The report

also justifies numerically with the help of-facts and figures that gender inequality is another major concern towards illiteracy. Removing gender inequality by 2015 has also a pivotal role in the objective of "Education for All" target. Gender equality will directly help in achieving global literacy objective. Ensuring equal enrollment ratio of females to males (gender parity) is the first and initial step towards attaining education goal. Reference [4] report concluded that gender discrimination is the major barrier in obtaining education, employment and earnings which still persists in this modern era of science and technology. Although gender gap regarding education at international level is narrowing down, but still a lot of work needs to be done because in some cases it is widening which is being observed especially in traditional societies. . Reference [5] reported that in 1990 average years of schooling for females were 50% of the male schooling years. Female literacy was only 58% of the male rate. The World Bank report concluded that in the last 30 years, the average schooling years for women has increased at quiet appreciable rate than males [6].

1.3 Literacy rate and female education in South Asian countries

Reference [7] identified that population growth, improper quality of schooling; low enrollment rate and poverty were the major reasons for low literacy rate around the world. The research study further revealed that 95% of the world illiterates reside in developing countries out of which 70% were females who are the major contributors towards illiteracy in developing countries. Illiteracy was found to be very high in Asia. Although South Asian countries have achieved significant results in increasing their primary enrollment rate and thus developing their education systems and sent more children to school up to 90% by the end of 2011, which is 15% more than 2000 i.e. 75% in year 2000. The commendable point is increasing girls' enrollment rate from 68% to 88% of the total primary school going age of girls which is highly encouraging. However, despite continuous efforts towards achieving universal education goals, millions of Asian children are still out of school. Reference [8] narrates that Pakistan has the highest pre-school and primary school exclusion of 51% and 34.4%

respectively in the region to increasing population rate, education demands are not being fulfilled to cover up all the children and encouraging them to go to school. Reference [9] reveals that almost 75% of the world's illiterate adults are live in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Brazil, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is disgusting situation for all the ten countries including Pakistan which is at number three. Education is very much necessary for developing and strengthening human resources for social as well as economic growth. Education has positive impact on different societal factors [10]. The majority of women who cannot read and write live in Asia [11] which clearly depicts poor literacy rate of the region. Reference [12] report on education describes that in 2000 the global literacy gender gap was 9.9 percentage points which reduced a bit to 9.1 percentage points in 2009 which shows that gender disparity has not reduced significantly during the first decade of 21st century and to make gender disparities graph continue declining then more prolong and forceful efforts are required. Gender disparities were observed to be more in south and west Asia where male literacy rate is observed to be 73.5% and only 51.3% adult women has the ability to read and write. Thus the gender gap was 22.2 percentage points which is very high as compared to global average gender gap of 9.1 percentage points which clearly shows gender difference in literacy.

1.4 Female education in Pakistan

According to Reference [13], Pakistan is among the countries those have poor literacy rate in the world while International Human Indicators database places Pakistan at 130th place out of 141 countries on the basis of adult literacy (above 15 years) in which Pakistan's female literacy rate was of most consideration and was found to be much lower than males. Increasing population is another big challenge to increase literacy rate of a country. Making education available for continuously growing population is a tough ask. UNESCO report also shows the list of nine countries including Pakistan having high population growth rate but with low literacy rate [14].

In the list of top ten countries with highest percentage of illiterate adults, Pakistan is at number three. Reference [13] further discloses that by the end of 2015, Pakistan will be included among those countries which are very far from achieving the target of at least 95% primary enrollment rate by 2015 i.e. less than 80%. The report also shows that Pakistan is included among those countries with positive but relatively slow progress in the improving literacy rate [13]. Therefore, the efforts require a boost and financial backup for more quick progress towards goal achievement. According to constitution of Pakistan section 25A which clearly states that "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 law". The constitution declares free of charge and obligatory education to all children from age five to sixteen [15].

Reference [16] concluded that low standard of primary education and most importantly the dropouts of girls has much worse effects on overall Pakistan's literacy rate. Leaving literacy rate apart, provision of quality education is

another major challenge. Quality of education at primary and secondary level in Pakistan is declining especially scientific education needs to be improved which is in deplorable condition. Current education of the country cannot meet the international qualitative demands. Since independence, shortage of teachers has remained a major problem especially at primary level education. The curriculum was too old to meet present demands [17]. Reference [18] concluded that minimum enrollment level of primary and secondary education clearly suggests more forceful, productive and result oriented efforts for educational development.

1.5 Reasons for low female literacy rate

On the other side, if one look at the education statistics; it looks quiet shocking for Pakistan. According to [1] the national literacy rate is just 57% including 69% males and mockingly females were more exposed to illiteracy i.e. with literacy rate of only 45%. Public sector spending on education is very low as compared to other neighboring countries i.e. 2.1%. This literacy figures clearly depicts the persistence of gender gap among male and female individuals for access to education. Reference [19] narrated that in Baluchistan, the female literacy rate is worst than other provinces of Pakistan where 90% of the females were found to be illiterate. There were 50 million illiterates in Pakistan above 10 years of age out of which 30 million include women.

Reference [20] reported that economic and gender inequities were among the major issues responsible for illiteracy. Female literacy rate in Pakistan is unacceptably low. He further suggested that provision of free and compulsory education must be place at top priority in policy implications. Author recommended that additional resources must be utilized to minimize gender differences to encourage female education throughout the country. Reference [19] further concluded that rural people which accounts for 67% of the total Pakistan's population, are living poor conditions without any basic necessities of life those are obligatory in the constitution of Pakistan. The results of the study revealed that literacy rate of rural females in KPK and Baluchistan was less than 10% which is very shocking and demands urgent attention from policy makers. Gender problems were also highlighted in the study.

Reference [21] found that Pakistan is facing a major challenge of majority of the out of school children in the region. A large number of which is females and majority from rural areas. The author concluded that limited availability of public schools near the villages especially girls' schools in rural areas were the major barrier towards poor female literacy rate. Old teaching methods and schooling facilities were also the common reasons for low literacy rate in rural areas of Pakistan.

Reference [22] found that social benefits associated with female education are far more than male education. The author further elaborated that to observe the number of females attending schools is not of much importance rather it is more important to investigate the hurdles hampering them to gain education and continue it without any pause. Reference [23] found from the study that gender differences

were also considered the major factor contributing to low literacy rate in Pakistan. The researcher further elaborated that providing equal educational opportunities without any gender discrimination to males and females hence promoting gender equality which can give far better results. Reference [24] urges that mother's education is more important for child's survival. A well educated mother can raise her children more efficiently. The report further suggests that policy implications should shift its focus from increasing income towards the enhancing female education. Educational activities and projects must focus female education on priority to enhance female literacy rate. Reference [25] explained that in Pakistani society which is very much conservative and traditional in its nature, females are exposed to very drastic conditions of health, education and outdoor mobility. They further concluded that to improve the social status of women from Islamic point of view, policy makers should focus on improving their health education and working conditions. Reference [26] concluded that poverty and gender disparity were the major reasons towards low enrollment rate in basic education in Pakistan.

Reference [16] highlighted that sons are preferred over daughters for attaining education in poverty stricken rural communities of Pakistan. The country's literacy rate is increasing at very slow rate as compared with other countries of the region. The authors concluded that gender disparity is the major hurdle to our literacy rate. Movement of girls is restricted and after reaching puberty, they are even more restricted and they are not allowed to move freely. Reference [27] described that education is the universal human right and it is an important component of women empowerment. The authors elaborated that high level of gender disparities exist in rural and urban areas of Pakistan.

Reference [28] suggested that to obtain high literacy rate among rural females who are most affected by traditional and cultural norms and cannot get education due to various reasons, new education schools for females must be established in rural areas along with financial support in the form of scholarships so that their financial barriers to education may be minimized. Reference [29] exhibits that in Pakistan, there is highest dropout rate at primary level especially between grade 1 and 2. The report further depicts that rural female dropout rate is far more than the urban females i.e. 67%. While during province-wise comparison, Sindh was found to be having more rural dropout rate which was 75% with urban rate of 40%.

Literacy rate differs variably between rural and urban population. People living in rural areas are more far from education facilities. Urban areas are more exposed to best and up to date education facilities. In Pakistan, this difference is second highest in the region with 28 percentage points. To reduce this gap, literacy policies and strategies must include all those approaches and procedures that facilitate lowering illiteracy followed by regular monitoring in rural areas. Public infrastructure development in rural areas can also help in reducing literacy gap as it will paved the way to enthusiastically championing the cause. Poverty reduction can also contribute significantly in encouraging increase in literacy rate [12].

Reference [3] report 2014 reveals that at primary level, gender disparities exist in 40% of the countries and according to data. In 80% of the disparities, females were on the lower side. The report further discloses that in south and west Asia, four countries have most severe ratio of gender disparities. Afghanistan is at number one with 71 girls for every 100 boys in school while paradoxically, Pakistan is at second number with 82 girls for every 100 boys going to school. Reference [30] highlighted different factors responsible for low female education in Pakistan. They narrated that the main reason for low female literacy rate is the lack of female schools and scarcity of female teaching staff especially at secondary level. The authors further discussed that, gender disparities exist at primary level of education and it has resulted in low satisfaction level of parents regarding girls' education. Different cultural constraints, high fee rates and poor economic condition were also found to be major contributing factors towards low female education. The study further concluded that low economic status was also among the major reasons highlighted in the study. Based on the conclusions, authors suggested that parents must be made aware about the sensitive issue of female literacy.

Reference [8] UNICEF (2014) report on South-Asian regional study identified different factors responsible for highest exclusion rate in Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. According to report, household wealth was the most critical factor particularly pointed out in Pakistani society. The report further shows that gender gap was another factor identified. In Pakistani society, school attendance was observed to be lower for females. Reference [31] reported that the education system is not up to international standards especially science education needs to be improved keeping in view the global educational demands. Shortage of teachers and poorly equipped laboratories, medium of instruction and poorly developed curriculum are among major factors contributing towards such low quality education. There are number of factors responsible for low literacy rate in females. Those include lack of awareness among the rural masses regarding importance of education, lack of easy access to education centre like i.e. schools and literacy centers etc. In addition, poverty, lack of integrated approach and non-existence of management and information system are other major hurdles while education awareness campaigns are also lacking [19].

2.0 SUGGESTIONS

Reference [12] (2012) report suggested that affirmative efforts are required to improve women literacy, skills, reproductive health improvement, and livelihood success so that they may increase their participation and leadership skills thus ensuring gender justice through equal access of both males and females to education. The report further suggested that Nepal and Pakistan each will have to devote special attention towards encouraging and enhancing literacy rate among girls and women to narrow down the gender gap in literacy which will automatically contribute a lot towards overall literacy rate. Afghanistan and Pakistan should increase their female enrollment and retention rate in primary schools. Non formal education must be provided to those who

cannot formally attend the school for any reason. Through improvement in girls' enrolment in and ensuring completion of primary education along with other various such initiatives for adult women, may help to redress such gender imbalances. To increase female literacy rate, girls' primary enrollment must be encouraged and gender differences in children's enrolment must be removed Reference [10]. Government of Pakistan needs to improve this situation by increasing the funding for girls education and giving financial incentives to people for sending girls to schools especially in rural areas [32].

3.0 CONCLUSION

After reviewing various studies it is concluded that education is of vital importance for prosperity of any country. Countries with low literacy rate have poor economic condition therefore high poverty rate. People living in rural areas are deprived of basic educational facilities including quality and quantity of education as well, therefore illiteracy rate very high in rural areas. The dropout rate and gender discrimination are major challenges to Asian countries. Pakistan has high dropout rate in the region. Its literacy rate is increasing at very slow rate if compared with other regional countries. Unfavorable situation exists for rural female education which is thus a major cause for low literacy rate in the country. Rural females are facing various challenges to attain education including gender discrimination and high poverty rate. Insufficient exclusive facilities for girls' education in rural areas is acting as another traditional barrier because rural people are not convinced to send their females to attain education in co-educational (education for boys and girls together under one roof) environment. They are relatively more satisfied to send their girls to girls' only schools. Insufficient female teaching staff in rural schools is another point to be considered for policy makers. Lack of awareness exists among rural people about benefits associated with female education. Coping with increasing population is another major challenge. Providing education to such a huge population is another major problem.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Pakistan must uplift its literacy rate to survive in this era of development. To make swift development in literacy rate, female education must be focused on priority basis. To encourage female education, financial support must be provided to females through scholarships and rewards so that they can get best quality of education. Rural areas must be focused where illiteracy rate is very high especially among females. In rural areas, separate schools for boys and girls must be opened as rural people are more traditional and hesitate to send their daughters and sisters to schools with co-education system. Gender disparities must be tackled with special focus and participatory approaches. Easy access to schools should be ensured to provide education to people living in rural areas at their door-step. Educational curriculum must be revised assuring that it meets the international standards. Awareness campaigns and programs must be initiated in rural areas so

that rural people must be made aware of the importance of female education.

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