

## **The Crucial Role of Education in the Economic Development of Balochistan**

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper is an attempt to discuss the crucial role of education in the economic development of Balochistan. Illiteracy rates in Balochistan are higher than in any of the other province of Pakistan. This study will discuss the problems of illiteracy and low standards of education in Balochistan. It is estimated that in over 90 per cent of villages either no school exists, or if a school exists then no teachers are available. Furthermore, this study ends up with a set of recommendations that how to improve the education system in Balochistan.*

**Key words:** Education, Economy, Illiteracy, Poverty, Balochistan,

### **The Problem of Illiteracy and Low Standards of Education in Balochistan:**

Education empowers people and makes them aware of their rights. It makes them economically more productive and prosperous. During the era of slavery as well as the slaves were prohibited from acquiring education because an educated person would not accept a life of slavery and rise and fight for or her rights. When Belgium colonized African country of Congo, it strictly prohibited the native population from acquiring any form of reading and writing skills. If a community ignores the importance of acquiring education or does not take education of its children with the

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seriousness that it deserves, which is contributing to its own slavery and deprivation. Human capital is one of the most important determinants of economic growth. Human capital is the amount of skill embodied in the work force and is commonly measured by the amount of education and training. It is generally understood that better educated and trained workers can produce more goods and services in an hour than those of less educated and trained workers. An increase in human capital, i.e. increase in education and training means that the same quantity of labor input becomes capable of producing more output. The countries that have well educated populations are generally richer than the countries that have less educated populations. The literacy rates and quality of education have never been good in Balochistan, but the educational system has almost completely collapsed during the last few decades. Hundreds of thousands of children, particularly in the rural areas of Balochistan, are growing up without an opportunity to attend school and without any hope for a better future. The objectives of economic growth and improved living conditions for the people of Balochistan cannot be achieved without a substantial investment in human capital.

**Causes of High Illiteracy Rates and Low Educational Standards:**

The average illiteracy rates in Balochistan are far higher in Balochistan than in any of the other three provinces of Pakistan. Some of the major causes of high illiteracy rates in Balochistan are as follows. First, historically low rainfall and scarce vegetation conditions have forced people over most areas of Balochistan to adapt a pastoral nomadic life, constantly moving in search of water and pastures. Under the existing conditions it is relatively difficult to arrange education for children. Second, the fact of abject poverty and suffering in Balochistan was recently reiterated by the renowned human rights advocate, Ms. Asma Jehangir.

She said that, according to reliable reports, 80 percent of Balochistan's population lived under poverty line and 37 percent of the population went hungry each day as they did not have access to even a full loaf of bread. Obviously under such conditions, sending a child to school means loss of family income further exacerbating conditions of poverty and starvation. Third, it is estimated that in over 90 percent of villages/settlements either no school exists, or if a school exists then no teachers are available. Even when the teachers are available they are mostly unqualified to the extent of illiteracy. Under these conditions it is logical for parents not to send their children to school as nothing would be gained from such a futile exercise. Fourth, a limited number of parents avoid sending their children to school because they believe that the children turn into individuals that are less devout and observant Muslims and less traditional Baloch/Pashtun. A larger number of parents, however, believe that sending a child to school makes him a less capable and less willing workers when it comes to performing the traditional tasks of farming, fishing and shepherding. In each of the above cases, particularly when no government jobs become available, the costs of sending a child to school outweigh the benefits for many poor parents. Fifth, the educational system in Balochistan has been heavily politicized since 1970s. The local Baloch and Pashtun could not fill the vacuum left by the departure of qualified teachers from other provinces. Most teacher appointments since 1970s have been based not on merit but on bribe payments and nepotism, gravely lowering the quality of education in the province, in general. Finally, the governments have, in general, lacked interest in alleviating the problem of illiteracy in Balochistan and lacked the understanding that education is the most important determinant of economic wellbeing in a society. The positive relationship between

literacy rates and economic growth is well established and documented. Numerous United Nations surveys and studies conducted around the world, particularly in Latin America, have shown that economic growth rates are directly and positively correlated with the percentage of a country's budget that is spent on education.

### **How to Improve the Educational System in Balochistan: Some Recommendations**

A government concerned about the economic wellbeing of the people of Balochistan, must tackle the existing serious problems of illiteracy and poor standards of education. Included in the following recommendations are policies that have been successfully followed in many developed and developing countries of the world. The government of Balochistan, particularly the education department is well aware of the problems of ghost and, incompetent teachers, and routinely cheating students, it is high time these problems are resolved once and for all.

#### **1. Introduce Free and Compulsory Elementary Education:**

It is recognized around the world, that elementary education plays the most important role in determining a person's lifelong knowledge, productivity and overall success. It is no secret that the Western industrialized countries entered into an era of rapid economic growth only after they introduced a system of free and compulsory elementary education. Higher economic growth rates in Japan became possible after the introduction of free and compulsory education under Meiji reforms of 1867. In China, similarly rapid economic growth became possible after revolutionary leader Mao Zedong introduced free and compulsory elementary education in China in 1949. In the United States of America, the government ensures, even by use of coercion if necessary, that every boy and girl receives mandatory high

school (12 grade education). Not going to school (truancy) may result in different kinds of penalties including fines to parents or removing the child from the parents' custody.

Article 25-A of the 18th Amendment of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan says "The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 5- 16 years". The government, therefore, is constitutionally mandated to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the country. But, if the past experience is any guide, the implementation of this constitutional requirement, as the 1973 constitutional requirement of provincial autonomy, may not see the light of day any time soon. However, with the installation of new governments at the center and the province, one can hope that a more serious consideration will be given to this most important issue? In Balochistan, higher rates of poverty, disease and suffering could, to a great extent, be attributed to higher illiteracy rates. The importance of implementing the constitutional provisions of free and compulsory education for all children in Balochistan cannot be overemphasized.

Among other things, compulsory education helps ensure equality, justice and fairness in a society. Everyone knows that the United States of America is the leader of the capitalist world, but not many people know that USA has a family income distribution which is more equal than Russia (a former Soviet state) and China, the largest socialist country in the world. It is believed that one factor that has greatly contributed to America's equal income distribution is its system of mandatory and good quality elementary education system. It is imperative that the free and compulsory education provision as envisaged in the constitution be implemented in Balochistan, with immediate effect or as soon as possible

## **2. Compensate Poor Parents for Each Child They Send to School:**

Compensating poor parents is justified on the grounds that in most rural areas of Balochistan people with meager incomes live on a minimum subsistence level. Survival requires that children, at very young age, work and contribute to family income so that starvation is avoided. Many Latin American and African countries face similar problems of high poverty, illiteracy and inequality. Similar to the problems in Balochistan, many parents in those countries cannot afford to send their children to school. These countries have devised policies under which the parents receive a certain amount of money as compensation for each child that they send to school. Such programs have proved to be extremely successful in increasing literacy rates and decreasing poverty levels, contributing to overall economic development of the countries concerned.

## **3. Provide Free School Lunches to Poor Students:**

Many governments of rich as well as poor countries around the world have introduced a system of providing free lunches to the poor children up to high school level. One of these countries is the United States of America where poor children are provided free and nutritious lunches on request. In poverty ridden Balochistan this in itself may induce many parents to send their children to school, which they would not have otherwise done. Additionally with Balochistan's high incidence of poverty, most children suffer with malnutrition and associated health problems. Introduction of a free school lunch program will greatly alleviate the problem of malnutrition, thus increasing life-long economic productivity.

## **4. Increase Teacher Salaries and Benefits:**

According to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, "A good teacher is like a candle that consumes itself to light the way for others". People all over Balochistan in

general and in rural areas in particular, live under primitive conditions with no access to the very basic necessities of life, like drinking water. This is one of the main reasons behind ghost schools teacher, refusal of teachers to attend schools, and the corruption surrounding this situation. The role that a well-educated and well trained teacher plays for the betterment of the society is extremely important, therefore, the teachers deserve high salary and other benefits.

#### **5. Emphasize On Elementary Education at All Levels:**

It seems that in Balochistan, elementary education receives the least attention compared to higher levels of education. It is recognized around the world that elementary education (k-12) is the most important for a child's growth and future productivity and success. This level of education, therefore, needs the most government attention and highest funding so that best qualified and trained teachers as well as best equipment and facilities could be made available. In the developed countries of the world, including the United States of America, elementary education is mandatory and free and the government teachers are highly qualified and trained. On the other hand, college and university education is not free and the government funding is limited, so that students have to pay for their own education. It seems that the Balochistan government spends more money on and pays more attention to college and university education than to elementary education. If this is true then obviously the government priorities are wrong. A rupee spent on a primary school student has a far more positive economic and social impact than a rupee spent on a university student.

#### **6. Replace Dishonest and Incompetent Teachers:**

A teacher is a role model for children, it is of utmost importance that he/she is well qualified, well trained and above all honest and trust worthy. Over the past year teachers, local community elders, and education department officials have all been involved in corrupt and dishonest practices resulting in low literacy rates and educational standards. Such activities have had, and would have if allowed to continue, serious consequences on the well-being of the current and future generations. All over Balochistan, at least hundreds of teachers, in cahoots with education department officials and local elders, receive government salaries and benefits for decades without attending the school even for a single day. A large number of elementary level teachers lack the very basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary for teaching. They were appointed based not on their qualifications but on their ability to pay bribes and they were probably related to a minister or a top bureaucrat in the government. Such teachers must be reeducated and retrained, if they are so amenable. Otherwise they should be retired so that they can follow careers that suit them. It is less expensive for the government and the society to allow retirement to such employees with full pension and other benefits rather than allowing them to continue as non-performing and economically burdensome teachers.

#### **7. Eliminate Elitist Educational Institutions in the Interest of Economy, Justice and Equality:**

These institutions (Residential schools/colleges and others) have been established to benefit the elite of Balochistan, i.e. children and relatives of politicians, high level bureaucrats and Sardar cum feudal lords. This elite class of people are already the most privileged in Balochistan. They get the highest paying government jobs; they embezzle billions of rupees, receive government subsidies, government contracts, and permit to play buses on different routes and so on. On top of all of this establishing special

schools/educational institutions for their children is uncalled for and against the rules of justice and fair play. Under the current conditions there is very little chance that a poor person's son or daughter can have access to these institutions. It is the responsibility of the government to provide equal opportunities of schooling to all, and make efforts to reduce not increase inequality in society. These schools increase inequality, perpetuate the power and privileges of the elite, and contribute to social unrest and instability. These schools also make no sense economically because such a school/college is probably ten times as costly to run as an ordinary government school. These schools may also increase corruption in society as the rich and wealthy offer bribes to the authorities concerned so that their sons and relatives get admitted into these elite schools. Also a person educated in these schools is more likely to be successful in civil service exams and be appointed as a top level administrator/executive officer himself. The most important drawback is that the elite in the government take no personal interest in improving the public education system in the province.

#### **8. Encourage Parent and General Public Involvement in Children's Education:**

One unfortunate reason behind the failed educational system in Balochistan is the absence of parental and community involvement in the education of the children. Parents in most cases are themselves be illiterate and not in a position to get involved and be helpful. But even an educated parent normally does not realize the importance of close parental involvement in a child's education and upbringing. Balochistan could learn from the experience of developed countries and probably from the experience of parents in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. America's public elementary

education system is one of the best in the world, because of the importance that the American people and the American government place on it. The Government ensures that the elementary school teachers are the best educated and best trained and the schools are equipped with modern teaching and learning facilities. The parents remain closely involved in the education of their children, helping in homework and providing guidance to the children. Through PTA (parent-teacher association) meetings and other means the teachers remain in constant touch with the parents and apprise them of the student's progress and problems if any. The teachers help students in their homework during after school hours, if for some reason, the parents are unable to provide such help. Such involvement already exists among some communities in Balochistan, Hazaras of Quetta and Nassars of Duki are two shining examples, there may be others. We know the relative success of Hazaras in all walks of life and commitment to their children's education may be one the most important contributing factors.

### **9. Follow the Example of Advanced Countries: How Elementary Schools are run in the USA?**

In the United States, public schools are run by school districts, which are under the control of state and local government. The governing body of a school district, which is typically elected by direct popular vote and consists of 5-10 members in most cases, is called a school board. The school board appoints a superintendent, usually an experienced public school administrator, to function as the district's chief executive for carrying out day-to-day decisions and policy implementation. A personnel committee under the superintendent interviews and recommends appointment of teachers and other staff to the school board. Each school has a PTA (Parent Teacher Association) which meets from time to time, normally once a month. The PTA discusses matters related to studies but

also extra-curricular activities and fund raising for various events and purposes. Of course there is a huge difference between the United States and Balochistan. But matters like establishment of school districts and school boards, appointment of teachers at the local level, close supervision, and parent involvement in their children's education are worthy goals that our school systems need to make all efforts to achieve. In a city like Quetta there could be as many as 5-20 school districts, each with its own governing school board, superintendent, personnel committees, and PTA.

#### **10. Abolish Long Winter and Summer School Vacations/Closures:**

In the developed countries of the world long vacations are allowed because the children with the help of their parents get involved in numerous outdoor educational activities. They go to national parks, mountain resorts, forests, lakeside areas and beaches and to natural wild life reserves. During the vacations the children continue to learn about nature, natural phenomena and the world at large and benefit greatly. In Balochistan, as in the rest of Pakistan, no such learning and beneficial activities take place and the children end up wasting their precious time and possibly not helping their families in any productive activities either. The government may consider shortening the duration of vacations to say, one month rather than the long three months that they currently have. Even eliminating the vacations entirely for the elementary level children may be good thing under the existing circumstances. This and all other decisions by the education department must be taken after thorough consultations with parent groups and community leaders. The government may also provide heating or cooling systems in schools that are located in extremely hot and cold areas of the province.

#### **10. Introduce Vocational Education at the Middle or High School Level:**

In a province that constitutes 45 percent of Pakistan's total geographical area the almost complete absence of skilled workers is shocking. Over the years, skilled masons, electricians, plumbers, blacksmith, carpenters and even barbers have come to Balochistan from other provinces or countries. The disturbed conditions over the past few years have prevented the skilled workers from coming to Balochistan and the people had to depend on inferior quality workmanship and services of local workers. To overcome this problems some form of vocational educational systems needs to be introduced in Balochistan. Vocational education (education based on occupation or employment) is education that prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers. While the students attend classes, say at high school level, they also learn skills of the above kind. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic, related to a specific trade, occupation, or vocation. At the college level vocational training could involve teaching professional skills in engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, pharmacy, law etc. In Germany and other countries of Europe vocational education is related to the age-old apprenticeship system of learning. The government should seriously consider introducing appropriate kind of vocational training at different levels of elementary schools in Balochistan.

#### **11. Introduce Teaching Balochi, Pashto, Brahvi in Addition to Urdu and English from the First Grade/Kindergarten Level:**

It is important that education in mother languages be introduced from kindergarten/first grade throughout the province of Balochistan. It is heartening to note that teaching in mother languages at the primary level,

with some success, has already been introduced in KPK and Sindh provinces. Lately, there is some movement towards introducing education in mother language in the province of Punjab as well. An article, “Sethi’s Gesture for the Good of Punjabi” written by Mushtaq Soofi (2013) appeared in Dawn of June 2, 2013. Mr. Soofi says, “After the emergence of Pakistan, muddled vision of culture and language further confounded the issue (of regional/provincial languages). Linguistic and cultural diversity of the country was perceived to be a threat to the ill-conceived notion of national unity. The Bengalis, who spearheaded the Pakistan movement, were the first to debunk the newly invented myth of monolithic uniformity that denied the rich diversity of the federating units of the country. They rose in protest and got their language recognized as one of the national languages.” Mr. Soofi further states in the same article that although the 1973 constitution recognized the linguistic rights of each federating units of the country, providing it with constitutional authority to make language/languages of its choice as its official language/languages (Soofi Mushtaq,2013). Only Sindh declared Sindhi as its official language at the time. Only a year or two ago KPK introduced the teaching of various languages spoken by the people in that province at the primary level.

Between 1970 and 2000 two serious attempts to introduce mother languages at the primary level and making them national languages were made. The first attempt was made during Sardar Attaullah Mengal’s government in 1972, when Mir Gul Khan Naseer, his education minister, called a conference of Baloch intellectuals to prepare for introduction of Balochi as the official language of Balochistan. The conference of which I was a participant, recommended that Balochi be immediately declared the official language of Balochistan, and introduced at the primary level. The

fiercest opposition to the proposed idea came from some corners and before any final decisions could be made the central government disbanded the Mengal government in 1973. When Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was the chief minister of Balochistan, he actually implemented the teaching of Balochi at the primary level. This attempt like the previous one eventually ended in failure. It seems that the current PML (N) government may follow policies different from the previous central governments. This government may realize that a policy of allowing the federating units to develop their languages and cultures, will strengthen not weaken the state of Pakistan.

One reason that earlier attempts in declaring a language as a national language and introducing its education in schools failed, is that no unanimity/consensus could be achieved. In fact, unanimity in this regard is neither achievable nor necessary. The Balochistan government should follow the realistic approach that was taken by KPK government last year. This approach will require that in Balochistan all three major languages, Balochi, Pashto, and Brahvi be made national languages. A child right from the beginning Gindergarten/prep level must be taught in his own mother tongue in addition to Urdu and English. I would also like to share with the reader something that may not be well understood by many people. Studies have shown that children have the capability to learn more than one language at very young age and that people in general, learn languages better the younger they are. In my home state of California in the United States, I recently met an elementary level teacher who told me that in her school they have an “Immersion” program where young children at the kindergarten level are starting to learn a foreign language, in this case Chinese. She told me that this program was very successful and more and more parents are opting to encourage their children to learn non-english

languages. It is common knowledge that in Quetta many 5-10 year old kids even those who have never been to school speak multiple languages, Pashto, Urdu, Brahvi, Farsi, and Balochi. It is high time that Balochistan government introduced Balochi, Pashto, and Brahvi as its official languages and start teaching all these languages at the primary level(www.balochistan.gov.pk, 2014).

### **Conclusions:**

For the good of our province and our future generations it is imperative that the above changes to improve the educational levels and standards in Balochistan be implemented. Any expenditure that is made on educating our children and on improving the educational standards is worthwhile and constitutes an investment for future well-being of the province and its people. If the need for reforms is taken seriously and reform programs are honestly implemented, we will start reaping the benefits within a relatively short period of time.

Both Japan and China the top economic leaders in Asia have reached this stage by first introducing education reforms including compulsory and free elementary education. North American and European countries lead the world in scientific and technological advances because of their superior educational systems. Examples exist even within Pakistan. The vast majority of the refugees from India (Mohajirs) who came to Pakistan in 1947 and afterwards constituted the poorest community at the time. Most of them settled in urban areas and while going through all kinds of hardships ensured that their children were educated. Today the Mohajir community is the most educated and also economically the most prosperous in Pakistan. An example within Balochistan is that the Hazara community mainly living in Quetta as a minority have decided that they

will ensure the best possible education for their children. An average Hazara is more educated, and more prosperous than an average Baloch or Pashtun mainly because of their collective and cooperative efforts and their commitment to acquire education.

The educational reforms must be introduced regardless of the costs involved. Everyone in Balochistan talks about the billions of rupees that were embezzled by the Raisani government during the past five years. Actually all prior governments were equally, if not more, involved in corruption and embezzlements of government funds. If government corruption and waste is eliminated or reduced the provincial government will have no problem financing educational improvement programs, so essential for our children, on whom the future of our province and the country truly depends. In addition, there are many so-called nation building departments that receive government funding worth billions of rupees each year, but their contribution to the well-being of the people of Balochistan is minimal. 90 percent of the tasks that these departments perform can easily and more efficiently be done by the private sector. Providing quality education to our children is far more important than funding departments like animal husbandry, forestry, agriculture, cooperatives, population planning and the like. Most of these departments were created to provide jobs to the unemployed and many well qualified people are employed in these departments. I also worked in one of these departments for some five years, but know that I failed to do anything worthwhile over those years for the province and its people. Just paper pushing exercises day after day does not constitute anything productive or good for anyone. Thus, it will make economic sense if most of these departments are reduced in size and many well qualified people working in them are appointed as teachers on their own pay scale and benefits.

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