

CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF PUBLIC SECTOR COLLEGE EDUCATION IN KARACHI (PAKISTAN)

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ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at investigating the variables which might be related to the poor standard of education in public colleges of Karachi (Pakistan). The respondents of the study included students, teachers, and principals of the respective colleges. The data was collected through a closed-ended questionnaire. In order to test the validity of the hypotheses, the study adopted chi-square method of statistical analysis. The study revealed that, coaching centers have a negative effect on students' attendance in public colleges; the system of examination was found to promote rote learning; no relationship was found between lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly; and students' low attendance in colleges was found to cause negative effects on the result of colleges. Some recommendations are: promotion of conceptual learning through modifications in the system of examination and teaching methodology; 75% attendance should be compulsory otherwise the examination admit card should not be issued; constructive role of non-governmental organizations, and replication of similar studies.

Keywords: Educational problems, Public colleges, Standard of education, Karachi, quantitative.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the basic needs of society and its provision is frequently regarded as the responsibility of the state. In Pakistani society, it is a dilemma that the quality of public sector education is considered lower than that of the private sector. Public colleges are no exception to this, as time and again, both print and electronic media keep highlighting different issues and problems related to public colleges. This piece of work is a sociological study that is specifically related to educational sociology. By definition, "sociology is the systematic study of human society and social interaction" (Kendall, 2016:4), whereas educational sociology can be defined as "the application of sociological principles and methods to the solution of problems in an educational system" (Educational Sociology, n.d.).

Education is the wheel of progress on which nations rely for their future. Pakistan's Ministry of Education along with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization developed National Plan of Action on Education for All (2001-15). According to the respective plan, Pakistan's adult literacy rate should have reached to 86% by year 2015 (Choudhry, 2005:3). Nevertheless, according to government-statistics, the adult literacy rate of Pakistan is 57% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2016:16). This is when literacy was defined as the ability to read a newspaper and to write a simple letter.

However, Pakistan Census 2017, the sixth census of the country, has utilized an upgraded definition of a literate person with the addition of mathematics: "Literate is someone who can read a newspaper or a magazine, etc., can write a simple letter and can do basic math in written" (The Census Organization, Government of Pakistan, 2015:39). Including Pakistan Census 2017, the definition of literacy has been changing throughout the six censuses of the country, which raises ambiguity about the true figure of national literacy.

To a general observer of society, it looks hard to believe that 57% people of Pakistan can actually fulfill the stated criteria of literacy. Even educated people are sometimes found unable to write a simple letter. This raises a question mark on the functioning of Pakistan's education system.

The state of education in Pakistan is alarming. Warwick and Reimers (1995), in their book, Hope or Desire, state the factors ailing the education system of Pakistan, including unmotivated faculty and students; inactive principals; a curriculum divorced from the real problems faced in teaching; heavy reliance on lecturing, dictation, rote memorization, cheating in examinations, and a lack of supervision. (Siddiqui, 2012:93).

The above excerpt clearly depicts the problems of Pakistan's educational system in general. However, the focus of the current study is public colleges of Karachi which are an important part of the local

social institution of education. Before 1972, private educational institutions constituted a substantial proportion of the total educational system of schools and colleges. In 1972, the government of Pakistan nationalized all private educational institutions. After getting nationalized, the colleges which had then become public colleges, continued catering the needs of the students.

But gradually, the decline started to take place as evident by the shrinkage of enrollment. According to the Report on the System of Education in Pakistan, across Pakistan at the higher secondary level, i.e. intermediate level, the enrolment in private educational institutions is 64% (Nordic Recognition Information Centres, 2006:8), which shows that the part of public educational institutions on the Intermediate level is 36%.

The use of unlawful means during examination is devastating to any system of education. Unfortunately, this is a common practice during examinations conducted by the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK): "On May 6, the question paper for a physics exam to be conducted by the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) was leaked. Earlier, the mathematics paper for intermediate part-II was made public before time; a total of six question papers have been leaked this year. Examinations have been hit by a storm of tech-savvy cheating techniques, which have raised questions over the government's lackluster management, corrupt administration, and the use of innovative methods by the cheating mafia" (College Principal Assaulted, 2017).

Further, the rise of coaching centers seems to have replaced the learning activity of college classrooms for various reasons. One reason is: teachers who make the question paper of intermediate examination also teach in coaching centers, as evident by the following excerpt translated from the book of renowned educationist Prof. Dr Abdul Wahab: "A month before the examination, college teachers demanded repeatedly that the teacher who made the question paper should be appointed for three years. That demand was also coming from some who I had thought to be very honest. The only reason of the demand was so that students might be aware of who would be making question papers for three years. In this way, their coaching centers would shine and they would coin money" (Wahab, 2014:108).

Decline of public sector colleges is encouraging the capitalistic private sector to be dominant. Quality education which is actually the basic right of every citizen is becoming unaffordable. Majority of people cannot afford the fees of private institutions. So, they are left with the option of public schools and colleges which are unfortunately not fulfilling their purpose effectively and this is indeed a social problem.

A social problem implies the undesirable social conditions which are a source of menace to social well-being. Thus a social problem may be viewed as mass phenomena subject to statistical analysis and depiction. The victim of a social problem possesses attributes in common with others in his group or class (Khalid, 2003:1).

Probably as a consequence of the undesirable condition of college education, National Education Policy 2009 (NEP) aims to address the issue of detaching classes XI and XII from college education and merging them into the school level. Stated in the policy is that, Grades XI and XII shall not be part of the college level and shall be merged into the school level forming part of existing secondary schools, where needed and provision of necessary human and physical resources shall be ensured. This exercise shall be undertaken after a detailed studies of the failures of previous such efforts (Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, 2009:38).

In a similar study, Raza (2010) found that teachers' disengagement behavior (lack of commitment to the institution) to a great extent adversely affects their performance. He also found that aloof behavior (when the principal keeps distance from the teachers and avoids any intimacy) of principals was negatively correlated to the teachers' performance.

Ahmed (2009) in his study on school students found that the academic achievement of the students under the study had a significant positive correlation with their parents' education and annual income of the family. Since many in Pakistani society cannot afford the fee of private colleges, they, therefore, send their wards to public colleges. Most parents of these low income families usually have a low level of education. This is especially true for the colleges where admissions are closed on low percentages. So, it is likely that the annual income of less privileged parents and their low level education reflect negative effects on their ward's overall academic progress.

Naeemullah (2007) in his study did a comparison between the Cambridge education system (A-level) and the intermediate education system of Pakistan (FSc), while focusing on the curricula, teaching methodology, and examination system. One of his findings included the encouragement of students' creativity in the A-level system of examination and its lack in the Intermediate system of examination.

Sultana (2004) conducted a study for assessing the need and designing a model for professional development of college teachers in Pakistan. Her sample consisted of 60 degree colleges from all provinces of Pakistan. The respondents included the principal, five teachers, and 20 students from each selected college. Some of her findings were: Teachers did not practice elaborating the lesson with the help of examples; they did not use methods of motivating the students, they also ignored instructional technology and modern pedagogical techniques to enhance learning experience. Lack of knowledge regarding the educational objectives that were documented in the policies as well as the curriculum was evident. They ignored methods of students' progress evaluation; they overlooked the character building and intellectual thinking along with developing critical skills in their respective students.

Aziz (2009) carried out a study on faculty members' perception of an ideal college teacher. The characteristics of an ideal college teacher taken out from interviews with the respondent teachers of the study included: Mastery of the subject, disciplinarian, skillful, knowledgeable, punctual, well-prepared, manager, humorous, good communication, motivator, dedication, caring, well-dressed, inspiring and sympathetic.

He also criticized on the eligibility criteria of a college teacher, i.e. master (16 years) qualification only. He stressed upon the requirement of a professional teaching degree as it enhances the instructional skills of a teacher.

In contrast to the above past researches, the current study focuses on the following issues of college education: rise of coaching centers and its negative effects on students' attendance in colleges, system of examination, rote learning, lack of accountability by the principal, teachers not taking their classes regularly, and negative effects on the result of colleges due to low attendance. **Rationale of the Study:** Although, news related to malfunctioning of public sector colleges of Karachi are covered by the print and electronic media time and again, yet this area lacks research based investigation. The number of enrolled students in BIEK in year 2017-18 was 2,04,802 (Enrollment Section, BIEK, personal communication, December, 2017), which reflects that a huge number of students tend to be affected by the prevailing undesirable condition of public colleges in Karachi. Since it is a mass phenomenon, the justification of the study and its rationale are well valid.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective was to find out the relationship between independent and dependent variables of the four hypotheses of the study, where independent variables (causes) were coaching centers, system of examination, lack of teachers' accountability by the principal, and students' low attendance in colleges. Dependent variables (effects/consequences) included: students' low attendance in colleges, rote learning, teachers not taking their classes regularly, and negative effects on the result of colleges. The research was also intended to provide useful recommendations for the betterment of public sector college education in Karachi.

HYPOTHESES

- 1. There is a relationship between coaching centres and negative effects on students' attendance in colleges.
- 2. There is a relationship between the system of examination and rote learning.
- 3. There is a relationship between lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly.
- 4. There is a relationship between students' low attendance in colleges and negative effects on the result of colleges.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design: A survey based quantitative research in which the relationship between the independent and dependent variables of the four hypotheses of the study was analysed through Chi square method of hypothesis testing.

Sample: The universe of the study was Karachi (Pakistan). The study needed to have three different populations, i.e. public colleges in Karachi, students of public colleges enrolled in BIEK, and the teachers

of public sector colleges. The population of public colleges was 132 (Directorate of College Education Karachi, n.d.). These colleges included intermediate and degree colleges only. The number of registered students in intermediate, i.e. the first year and the second year was 2,04,802 in year 2017-18 (Enrolment Section, BIEK, personal communication, December, 2017), which was the population of students for the study. The population of teachers of public colleges was 3086 (Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of Sindh, 2017:33).

The study had three categories of respondents, i.e. students, teachers and the principals. Naturally, the sampling of colleges had to be done before the sampling of other categories because students, teachers and principals of the sampled colleges had to be the respondents of the study. Simple random sampling technique through lottery method was adopted in order to select the colleges, students and teachers. For principals, no sampling technique was applied; instead, all the principals of the sampled colleges were among the respondents. The sample size of colleges was 56, students 383, teachers 342, and principals 56. The sample sizes were calculated at 95% confidence level, the confidence interval was 5 for students and teachers, and 10 for colleges. These calculations were performed on the sample size calculator designed by Creative Research Systems (Creative Research Systems, n.d.).

In order to collect data from 383 students, 7 students were selected from 47 colleges each and 6 students from 9 colleges each. In order to collect data from 342 teachers, 6 teachers were selected from 50 colleges each and 7 teachers from 6 colleges each. 56 Principals of 56 sampled colleges also among the respondents. Collectively, the total number of respondents was 781.

Assessment Measures: The study adopted three structured, closed-ended questionnaires for data collection from students, teachers, and principals. All three questionnaires were almost same but a few items/questions were different and suitable according to the respective category of respondents. The questions offered the responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from the options of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. Students' questionnaire had 25 items, teachers' 27, and principals' questionnaire had 28 items. The reliability of the three questionnaires was calculated on SPSS through the data of pilot study, where the

values of the co-efficient of Cronbach's Alpha were found to be .758, .800 and .778 for students', teachers' and principals' questionnaires respectively. Item 2 of students' questionnaire and item 1 of teachers' and principals' questionnaires were about relationship between the variables of coaching centers and negative effects on students' attendance in colleges. Item 4 of students' questionnaire and item 3 of teachers' and principals' questionnaires were about relationship between system of examination and rote learning. Item 13 of students' questionnaire and item 12 of teachers' questionnaire were about relationship between lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly. This item is not included in the principals' questionnaire due to the probability of a biased response by the principals. Item 10 of students' questionnaire and item 9 of teachers' and principals' questionnaires were about relationship between students' low attendance in colleges and negative effects on the result of colleges. The scoring is presented in tabular form with the application of Chi square for hypotheses testing.

Procedure: The researcher explained the purpose to the principals of the sampled colleges and requested their cooperation in data collection. The respondents were informed that their filling of the questionnaire would be considered as their consent to participate in the research and that they could withdraw any time while filling the questionnaire. They were ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of their identity and the provided data. During the process of data collection, the researcher remained with the respondents, answered their queries, and thanked them at the end of the activity.

Results: Four hypotheses were formulated for the study. Chisquare (x^2) method was employed to test the hypotheses and to verify the existence of relationship between the variables. All hypotheses were tested with level of significance (α) being 0.05. Degree of freedom (df) was 8 for hypotheses 1, 2 and 4, and 4 for hypothesis 3.

TABLE-1

APPLICATION OF CHI-SQUARE FOR TESTING HYPOTHESIS 1

- H₀: There is no relationship between coaching centers and negative effects on students' attendance in colleges.
- H_a: There is a relationship between coaching centers and negative effects on students' attendance in colleges.

Coaching	Negative Effects on Students' Attendance in Colleges						
Centers	Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly	Total	
	Agree				Disagree		
Students	176	114	5	60	28	383	
Teachers	155	126	3	32	26	342	
Principals	9	31	4	8	4	56	
Total	340	271	12	100	58	781	

Calculated value of Chi Square $(x^2) = 38.797$

Degree of freedom = 8

At 5% level of significance the critical value = 15.507

Level of significance (α) = 0.05

As the calculated value of Chi Square (x^2) 38.797 is greater than the critical value 15.507, therefore, null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it is concluded that there is a relationship between the two variables of coaching centers and students' low attendance in colleges.

TABLE-2

APPLICATION OF CHI-SQUARE FOR TESTING HYPOTHESIS 2

Ha: There is a relationship between the system of examination and rote learning. Rote Learning System of Examination Strongly Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Total Agree Disagree 48 Students 121 180 22 383 12 21 342 Teachers 119 168 19 15 Principals 14 28 8 4 2 56 49 Total 254 376 73 29 781

H₀: There is no relationship between the system of examination and rote learning.

Calculated value of Chi Square $(x^2) = 16.992$

Degree of freedom = 8

At 5% level of significance the critical value = 15.507Level of significance (α) = 0.05

As the calculated value of Chi Square (x^2) 16.992 is greater than the critical value 15.507, therefore, null hypothesis is rejected and

alternate hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it is concluded that there is a relationship between the two variables of the system of examination and rote learning.

TABLE-3

APPLICATION OF CHI-SQUARE FOR TESTING HYPOTHESIS 3

- H_0 : There is no relationship between lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly.
- Ha: There is a relationship between lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly.

Lack of teachers'	Teachers not Taking Their Classes Regularly						
accountability by the principal	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	
Students	47	51	22	119	144	383	
Teachers	39	61	25	94	123	342	
Total	86	112	47	213	267	725	

Calculated value of Chi Square $(x^2) = 4.109$

Degree of freedom = 4

At 5% level of significance the critical value = 9.488Level of significance (α) = 0.05

As the calculated value of Chi Square (x^2) 4.109 is less than the critical value 9.488, therefore, null hypothesis is accepted and alternate hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it is concluded that there is no relationship between the two variables of lack of teachers' accountability by the principal and teachers not taking their classes regularly.

TABLE-4

APPLICATION OF CHI-SQUARE FOR TESTING HYPOTHESIS 4

- H_0 : There is no relationship between students' low attendance in colleges and negative effects on the result of colleges.
- H_a: There is a relationship between students' low attendance in colleges and negative effects on the result of colleges.

Students'	Negative Effects on the Result of Colleges					
low attendance in colleges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Students	118	94	18	80	73	383
Teachers	97	101	16	81	47	342
Principal	18	23	06	06	05	56
Total	233	218	40	166	124	781

Calculated value of Chi Square $(x^2) = 20.600$

Degree of freedom = 8

At 5% level of significance the critical value = 15.507Level of significance (α) = 0.05

As the calculated value of Chi Square (x^2) 20.600 is greater than the critical value 15.507, therefore, null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it is concluded that there is a relationship between the two variables of students' low attendance in colleges and negative effects on the result of colleges.

DISCUSSION

Intermediate (XI and XII classes) education in public colleges of Karachi (Pakistan) is though as affordable as it can be – there are ailing characteristics attached to it which actually fail the purpose of education in public colleges. There is a justified need to look into the situation for its improvement as education is the integral part of a civilized society and there should be no compromise on the quality of education. Therefore, the study was an attempt to identify the problems in a scientific manner and bring forward useful recommendations which may hopefully provide the solution to the problems. In the light of the above-mentioned findings of the hypotheses, the following conclusion has been drawn.

Instead of going to colleges, students opt for coaching centers because coaching centers are generally thought to provide quality education and exam preparation. Being the alternate means of tuition, coaching centers cause low attendance in colleges, therefore, there is a need to identify the qualities of coaching centers on the basis of which a large number of college students prefer to join them instead of going to colleges. Then, those qualities may be adopted by the college side as well.

The findings of the current study include students' low attendance in colleges causes negative effects on the result of colleges. Students' low attendance is very common in public colleges of Karachi, whereas, there is a requirement as per rule that 75% attendance of a student is mandatory. Unfortunately, the rule is not implemented in practical, and students are given their examination admit cards without having adequate attendance. This encourages absenteeism among the students. Therefore, the rule needs to be implemented with unshaken resolve, and the admit cards should not be given upon non-compliance. Problems like these cannot be eradicated without discipline.

The aim of education is not only to teach necessary life skills, but also to unravel the hidden potential of the learner to the possible limit. Therefore, just rote memorization of academic material is comparatively less productive than its conceptual understanding. Since the study finds the system of examination to be related to rote learning, it is recommended that such a system of examination as well as teaching methodology should be developed that urges students to improve their conceptual knowledge and stimulate their creativity instead of just rote memorization. In this regard, examination papers of Cambridge system can be studied as they are widely considered as a good example of testing pupils' conceptual knowledge.

Further, teachers' lack of accountability by the principal was not found to be related to teachers not taking their classes regularly. After installation of the biometric attendance system in 2017, teachers are now more accountable. They are more regular and punctual in most cases because of the condition of recording their check-in as well as check-out both on the biometric machines. Unfortunately, it is students' attendance that remains low in colleges, which not only hinders the process of education, but also damages the overall academic result of colleges.

In Pakistani context, many NGOs are working on education in collaboration with local as well as international donor agencies. Mostly, their focus is on early childhood education, primary education, and teacher education, but not on the intermediate level. After coming in consultation with the competent bodies, the involvement of NGOs in public colleges of Karachi may prove to be beneficial in the areas of teacher training, management training, teaching methodology, curriculum development, system of examination, etc. This collaboration will also bring about transparency and accountability.

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the dynamics and problems of public colleges of Karachi, the qualitative side should be explored as well. In this regard, focus group discussions with the students, and the parents; in-depth interviews with the principals, higher-ups in the administration, and seasoned educationists outside the setup of college education will present the picture in a much more subjective way. Further, similar studies in the future can employ gender based or faculty based samples, and can be conducted in

different geographical areas with different variables, sample sizes, and varied respondents.

LIMITATIONS

For limitations of the study, though the sample size is good enough but it is more general than specific. Naturally, the dynamics of boys and girls colleges tend to be different, yet the sample of the study is not gender based but general. Studying boys and girls colleges separately would have allowed the research to have gender based specific results. Further, obtaining a sample of colleges specific to various faculties like arts, science and commerce may have enabled the study to reflect the faculty related specific problems. Further, the study limits to the quantitative aspect and the qualitative aspect has not been covered.

IMPLICATIONS

The study can be utilized for informed policy making. The implications of the current study include a potential impact on policy and decision making process for the betterment of intermediate education in public colleges of Karachi. The study provides research based evidence of the role of some important variables in the decline of college education in Karachi. In addition to the official knowledge bank that authorities already have regarding colleges of Karachi, the study provides findings and recommendations as an academic and neutral source. The study has practical implications such as the need to address the issue of coaching centers affecting upon students' attendance in colleges, and students' low attendance having negative effects on the result of colleges. Also, there is a need to update the system of examination and make it more favourable to conceptual learning than rote learning, etc. Further, the study can be used to draw comparisons between public and private colleges of Karachi, or public colleges of Karachi and public colleges of any other geographical area in Pakistan. It also serves as a reference document for the researchers who wish to study in the same area of interest.

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