

EPISTEME AIMS OF EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF FINLAND, PAKISTAN, AND MALAYSIA

Sohni Siddiqui*

Naureen Nazar Soomro[†]

Reena Majid Memon[‡]

Abstract

Finland educational system is among the top systems in the world and Finnish students have proven themselves as intellectuals and responsible citizens in the past. In contrast, Pakistan is facing substantial education challenges and despite efforts been made, providing quality education to all children is still a dream. More than half of the adult population is not able to read and write, and there is huge inadequacy of skilled human resource that can impact the economy of the country. Malaysia, like other developed countries, has recognized importance of lifelong learning and is advancing it as a major source for economic growth. Competence, skills needed to ensure holistic growth of students is mentioned explicitly. Besides comprehensive curriculum development, Malaysia introduces such programs as to generate human capital by means of education and training. The creative learning environment and constant encouragement to students is provided to focus on latest skills that are need of the labour market. In Pakistan, it seems curriculum is properly documented with clear aims of what excellences to be fostered in individual but how to foster such excellence is missing.

Keywords: Educational system, Epistemology, Pakistan, Malaysia, Finland.

*PhD Scholar, Technical University, Germany. Email: sohni.zahid@campus.tu-berlin.de

[†]Assistant Professor, Area Study Centre, Far East & Southeast Asia, University of Sindh. Email: naureen@usindh.edu.pk (Corresponding author)

[‡]Assistant Professor, Dawood University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi. Email: reenamemon09@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The epistemic aims of education reflect how a given curriculum and education policies diffuse the knowledge and theory as it recommends. The epistemic aims explain what preparations are needed by the students to understand, interpret, and produce knowledge according to the theory of knowledge adopted and followed by the society. This research is designed to compare how the educational system in Pakistan, Malaysia and Finland are employed and putting efforts to meet their objectives and aims. Furthermore, the success rate, level of implementation, and shortcomings are also examined.

Finland educational system is among the top systems in the world and Finnish students have proven themselves as intellects and responsible citizens in the past. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013), Finish students since 2000 have been one of the top performers of OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) with top ranking in reading, science, and mathematics between 2000 and 2009. In addition, research has declared that students' background has low impact on education performance.

Educational opportunities for adults and lifelong learning has produced top skilled adults from Finland according to International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). The education system of Finland has nine years of basic education that is the comprehensive school. It strongly focuses on equity and on ensuring high achievement. It offers flexibility at an upper secondary level where vocational education and training options paves the way for tertiary education.

In contrast to Finland, according to National Education Policy Framework (MFEPT, 2018), Pakistan is facing substantial education challenges. Due to high ratio of out-of-school children, Pakistan is amongst the E9 countries, which are the nine (9) countries that has the

most illiterate adults that is 70 per cent of all the illiterate adults in the world. These countries are Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Pakistan. In addition, more than half of the adult population is not even able to read and write a single line and lacks skilled human resource that can positively contribute to the growth of the country. National assessment survey (2014) revealed that children from all the provinces of Pakistan perform far below the required national standards. However, according to National Educational Policy Framework (2018) 'priority policy actions are expected to ensure that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive a high quality of education to achieve their full potential' (MFEPT, 2018, p. 6).

Malaysia, in order to achieve Vision 2020, emphasizes on nurturing human capital so that Malaysia can become a knowledge economy. The Vision was developed at the time of Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991, which calls for the nation 'to achieve industrialized nation status' by the end of this decade (Cheong, Hill & Leong, 2016, p. 74). The educational policies drafted by Malaysian Education Ministry since its independence has mainly focused on promoting Malay language and 'to bring together the children of all races under a national education policy' in the country where 'the national language (Malay language) is the main medium of instruction' (Zaini, 2014 quoted in Cheong, Hill & Leong, 2016, p. 74).

Moreover, the education policy of Malaysia also emphasizes on provision of education to all disadvantaged Malays, to ultimately achieve the objective of universal education.

Objectives of education in Finland, Malaysia, and Pakistan

Education in Finland is regarded as one of the basic rights of all citizens. Initially, the national education system aims at raising the level of awareness and to offer equal educational opportunities to all citizens regardless of their affiliations.

The major aim is to support pupils' growth so that they can act as ethically responsible members of the society. It also focuses on providing pupils with knowledge and skills needed in their lives (de Educación, 2011).

Malaysia, since its independence in 1957 has put his best efforts to develop and improve its national education system. For this purpose, Malaysian government has invested significantly in the education, has developed comprehensive educational plans, and strictly followed policy reforms and implementation which has in response supported it in nation-building and economic growth (UNESCO, 2013).

The Vision of Education in Pakistan is described in National Education Policy 2009 as:

Our education system must provide quality education to our children and youth to enable them to realize their individual potential and contribute to the development of society and nation, creating a sense of Pakistani nationhood, the concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, their regional and local culture and history based on the basic ideology enunciated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (MFEPT, 2009, p. 7).

It can be perceived from the statements that all countries Educational Policies and Principles are well designed and catering holistic development of children. However, research has proven that in Pakistan despite efforts been made policies are not completely implemented in the past and as a result objective of education did not meet with Pakistan's population (Bahar, 2012).

Aims of education

Finnish Education Policy's main objective is providing high quality education and training to all its citizens. The Finnish education centres around quality, efficiency, equity, and internationalization.

The Constitution of the land records basic right to education and culture to everyone. Education is pre-requisite to the competitiveness and well-being of the society and these principles are reflected in the structure of the education system. The highly permeable system allows progression to higher levels. The education should focus on learning of the children rather than testing (Matilainen, 2011). However, in contrast to Finland, in Pakistan, huge inconsistencies in access to educational opportunities across the country, and differences in the standard and quality of education are some of the impediments towards attainments of aims and objectives. Moreover, uniformity in educational system is missing. Pakistan's schooling system consists of three main school types. The public sector schools, private sector schools, and *madrassah* schools are three systems that are working simultaneously in the country. The education system is further bifurcated into subtypes. The main reason behind this is mainly the curriculum, quality of textbooks, examination systems, and the language of instructions used by teachers. Thus, a single curriculum or policy have failed to be successfully implemented in all prevailing educational systems.

There are many similarities and differences in the aims and objectives of education in Pakistan, Malaysia and Finland's Educational Policies. Aims and objectives of Finland is more focused on children's growth and described in terms of the development of the Pupil. Similarly, the aims and objectives of Pakistan's Educational policies are designed to foster the holistic growth of children. In addition, aims are also encouraging to develop public sector education system and highlighted points to improve standards, quality of education with increasing literacy rates, research-based learning and opportunities for universalization of education. On the other hand, the objectives of Malaysia's Educational Policies centres on the achievement of national integration and unity among the various races/ethnic groups for being multicultural and multi-ethnic state. National unity is clearly visible in most of the policies including educational policies of

the Federation of Malaysia (Jamil & Raman, 2012).

Pakistan and Malaysia are Muslim countries, therefore, one of the aims is to foster Islamic ideology and build nationalism and spirit to the welfare nations. The education systems of Pakistan and Malaysia are designed to strengthen the religious, nationalist, and cultural ideologies of individuals, based on Islamic Faiths and Beliefs. Aims also include developing spiritual intelligence in the light of Islamic Ideology. In contrast, Finland's educational aims are more focused on social, cultural, technological, and economic beliefs that are observed and discussion on religious ideologies seems missing. In contrast, Pakistan's educational aims seems less concerned about the environment whereas, in the Finnish Education system, awareness about healthy environments is among the top priorities.

Aims of education in Finland

According to World Data on Education (UNESCO, 2012) in general curriculum designed to serve education system has well defined aims and goals and some of the primary aims of education are to improve children's capacity for learning; promoting pre-requisites for participation in education; developing themselves during their lives; application of unified core curriculum; and promote healthy growth and development in pupil. Some of the visionary aims education is designed to dealt with are; promoting creativity, producing global and environmental responsible peoples; developing life management skills; management of information glut and learning skills; and creating Technological competencies.

The report 'Learning and Competence 2020' established by the Finnish National Board of Education expresses that some of the aims of education are; developing thinking skills; work and interaction skills; encouraging individual strengths to foster excellence; and developing awareness about environmental issues and eco-systems (FNBE, 2020).

Aims of education in Malaysia

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the major objectives and aims of education in Malaysia are; providing essential intellectual, effective and psychomotor skills in pupils; fostering common ideas, and aspirations in pupils in order to enhance national unity and national identity in a multi-ethnic society; producing manpower with the requisite skills for economic and national development; inculcating desired moral values; and promoting personality and aesthetic development of the pupils (UNESCO, 2006, p. 1).

Aims of education in Pakistan

According to National Educational Policy 2009 and 2017 (MFEPT, 2009; 2017), some of the objectives designed to meet through proper curriculum implementation are:

- to develop curriculum and ensure Taleem (Seek, Use and Evaluate Knowledge), Tarbiyya (Social, Technical, Moral and Ethical Training) and Tazkyya (Purification of Soul)—known as three pillars of the policy;
- to promote national cohesion by respecting all faiths and religions;
- to acknowledge and appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity;
- to ensure equal educational opportunities to each citizen of the country;
- to develop a self-sufficient and self-dependent individual, capable of analytical and original thinking,
- to meet the educational needs of the child such as literacy, numeracy, and problem solving and learning contents that is knowledge, skills, values, and attitude;
- to enable an individual to earn his/her livelihood honestly through skills earned;
- to universalize education up to Matric considering article 25 (A) by 2020;

- to assure quality of academic programs;
- to promote culture of research and innovation; and
- To promote of Science and Technology for economic development

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND STRUCTURES

The structure of all the countries in discussion are designed with proper planning with clear guidelines and requirements for promotion to the next level. However, certain discriminations are also undertaken and are discussed.

System of education in Finland and people of society has brought great contributions towards the success of the system and confidence on day-care facilities and trust in the proficiency of their schools, teachers, and educational staff, with no national standardized tests or high stakes of the evaluation, has allowed the system to work efficiently without externalizing pressures and biases. The teaching profession is a highly appreciated and minimum master's degree that includes research and practice-based studies are required to be part of this vocation. In addition, their salary is slightly above the OECD average. Furthermore, autonomy towards pedagogical practices, assessment of students' learning, and professional development for both teaching and evaluation responsibilities are observed (OECD, 2013).

In Pakistan, no specific curriculum is defined for day-care education, and external pressures from parents, authorities, administrations have also negatively influenced the implementation of policies and curriculum.

In Finland Pre-primary education starts from the age of 6 years and before this age, facilities of day-care are made. Pre-primary free and voluntarily education starts from 6-years-old children for the first grade of basic education and almost 98 per cent of children go for it. However, the government has taken initiatives to make it to 100 per

cent by creating opportunities for remote area children and children of immigrants (OECD, 2013).

The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in Early childhood learning (years 3-5) or Pre-primary education (3 – 4+ year age group) in Pakistan is assumed to be more than 35 per cent, however, no data about NER at Early Childhood Education (ECE) level is available (MFEPT, 2017). Moreover, in primary or elementary education level, more than 22 million Out of School Children, with more girls than boys are reported by Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17 (AEPAM, 2018). It is stated that despite efforts been made, across the years primary net enrolment rates (NER) have remained rather static according to Pakistan Social and Living Measurement Survey 2018-19 (PBS, 2020).

Nine years of compulsory schooling with a voluntary tenth year is the Basic education in Finland. Education is free, and textbooks and a daily meal are provided by the school. Pupils in basic education needs not to go through national tests. Instead, teachers give assessment in their respective subjects based on the curriculum taught to students during educational year. The only examination, which is the matriculation examination, is held at the end of upper secondary education. The admission to higher education is granted on the basis of matriculation examination result and entrance tests (Matilainen, 2011).

Malaysian education system has five stages of education: pre-school, primary education, lower-secondary education, upper secondary education, and tertiary education. The education up to upper secondary education is free that is eleven years of basic education. The compulsory education in Malaysia is only up till primary level.

Pre-school education in Malaysia, which is first level of education, is aimed at children of 0-6 years of age. The children at the age of 6 years are moved to primary education, which is for the period of six years. After completing six years and after passing the Primary School Assessment Test (UPSR), the students are promoted to secondary

education. The Secondary education in Malaysia is further divided into lower secondary and upper secondary levels of education. Three years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary education provide children with Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination (SPM) and the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Vocational) Examination for those who opt for vocational track of education (UNESCO, 2013).

Community colleges, polytechnics and universities offer certificates, diplomas, and degrees in various areas as part of tertiary education in Malaysia. For accessing university, the students need to go through one and half years of post-secondary education program i.e., Higher Secondary School Certificate. Three to four years of university, education decorates students with bachelor's degree. However, for medical or dentistry fields of study require five years of education in university. Further, two years are for master's degree and a doctoral degree program consists of minimum three years of study (UNESCO, 2013).

After pre-primary in Pakistan, primary stage (Grade 1-5, 5-9+ years) starts with compulsory Primary Education. It is the fundamental right provided by Constitution of Pakistan under article 25(A) to all the boys and girls, irrespective of their political, religious or class affiliations. The quality of education at the primary level of education does not meet satisfactory levels according to surveys and research in the field. Barely 40 per cent of children have minimum required competency in basic and important subjects that are Languages, Mathematics and Science. After Primary, Secondary Education (6-12 grade) begins which consists of three phases: first is the Middle from class 5 to 8, High from class 9 to 10 and Higher Secondary from class 11 to 12.

Only around 38 per cent out of the total population of the secondary-level age group, which is over 29 million, are enrolled in various levels of Secondary education which shows that about 18 million 10

to 18 years aged adolescents are out of school (OOS) in Pakistan (AEPAM, 2016).

General and vocational education in Finland starts from the age of 16 and continue till 24 years. After compulsory basic education school-leavers opt for general or vocational upper secondary education which leads to higher education. More than 40 per cent of children opt for vocational upper secondary studies after completing their basic education. The selection of students for upper secondary school depends on their grade point average in the basic education certificate.

Vocational qualifications can be completed by means of upper secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET), apprenticeship training, or as competence-based qualifications. Adults usually complete Competence-based qualifications. Polytechnics and universities enjoy broad autonomy. There is freedom of education and research on both platforms of polytechnics and universities. The education and training in Finland are funded by the Government therefore there is no tuition fee at any level of education (Matilainen, 2011).

According to the International Standards Classification of Education- ISCE-2011 (UNESCO, 2012a), higher education in Pakistan includes Bachelors', Master's, and doctoral or equivalent levels which starts after intermediate or higher secondary level. Similar to Finland, in Pakistan admission to higher education is based on the matriculation results, intermediate examination, and entrance tests, but facilities for grants or loans are very limited.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can be classified into two categories, Degree Awarding Institutions (DAIs) or chartered universities. Colleges or institutes affiliated with the DAIs also form part of Higher education. The quality at the higher education level in Pakistan, however, is not compatible with international standards. Only 1/4th of faculty members of universities possesses

the highest degree of Ph.D.; however, University teachers of Finland are required to hold a Doctoral or any other postgraduate degree to be part of the tertiary level of education.

Only two of the universities in Pakistan has competed in the list of top 500 universities in the world. In contrast, 7 Finnish universities and 6 Malaysian universities are among the top QS ranked 500 universities (QS Top Universities, 2019).

There are many discriminations among Finland's, Malaysia's, and Pakistan's educational systems. In Finland requirement to enter in master's program is 3 years of professional experiences, however, there are no such requirements not even for doctoral admission in Pakistan. Malaysia has somewhat similar requirement as of Pakistan for entering the master's program that is bachelor's degree holders can opt for admission in master's Program. This is the reason that in Finland the average age for completing masters is 24 years; however, in Pakistan 21-22 years' pupils hold a master's degree. Moreover, primary education starts with 6 years of age in Finland but in Pakistan, 2.5-3 years is the average age, to begin with, schooling. The grading system is also based on hobbies and extracurricular activities in Finland whereas in the other two countries results are based on one-time pen and paper exams. Pakistan faces significant skill shortages and mismatches of high skilled labour in the labour market. Only half of the employers during the survey of Pakistan enterprises (World Bank, 2015) report their satisfaction over the production of skilled labour by general and technical education in the country and almost 25 per cent of firms report a lack of skilled employees.

CURRICULUM OF EDUCATION

Finland's national curriculum based on 500 pages is a detailed plan explaining every aspect of the education system. Objectives, principles, and values are explained in detail within 100 pages, remaining explains syllabi. Competence, skills needed to ensure

holistic growth of students is mentioned explicitly. There are no school inspections or national achievement tests covering entire age groups and society trust on teachers, who announce internal examinations and results for promotion to the next level. Moreover, detailed explanations of methodologies in addition to digitalization adopted to develop competencies among pupils. Project-based learning is promoted and explained, where teamwork, co-operation, and skills to deal with real-world challenges are inculcated. In addition, the skills needed for research and interest in lifelong learning is flourished. The curriculum defines the main objectives for different subjects and promotes new kinds of learning methods. Despite the common framework offered, there remains considerable freedom by which schools can interpret the curriculum according to their desire (Lähdemäki, 2019).

In Finland, the curriculum is usually revised after every 10 years and is usually a more open, co-operative, interactive, and inclusive process. The administration or the curriculum bureau is not the sole designer, responsible for the improvement of the curriculum, and teachers and educators also become part of the committee. Moreover, there are no punishments or sanctions for schools or teachers if teachers deviate from curriculum or syllabus provided by the authorities. It is believed that level of interest and commitment varies across different parts of Finland and schools have authorities to adopt or design curriculum according to their context and requirements. Moreover, 2016 curriculum has shaped keeping views about globalization that is influencing skills, competencies, pedagogies and role of the school. The curriculum has well explained meaning of holistic growth that flourished each and every aspect of individual including social, economic and psychological. The curriculum has also explicitly defined practices related to assessments and evaluations.

In Pakistan, the curriculum is an official document need to be implemented rigidly by teachers with no scope to revisit it and make

amendments (Vazir, 2003). Moreover, the curriculum is designed by special authorities, bureaus, and wings, with no involvement of educators implementing it at ground level, though in an official document it is clearly mentioned that teachers' feedback will be taken seriously for reformatations and to fill gaps. Moreover, uniformity in curriculum across different provinces and systems of education is missing. However, autonomy of schools and teachers is supported according to the official document but leverages for amendments in the curriculum are missing and teachers have to follow a lecture or authoritative methods of instructions. The 2018 curriculum is also officially taking care of most of the foundations, but technological foundations and environmental-related aims seem missing. Along with variations in methods of instructions, huge discrepancies in the language of instruction across the provinces are observed. Students learning objectives (SLO's) are clearly defined according to subject needs but most of the evaluations are based on rote learning and pen-paper type of exams. Content is designed and sequenced with planning, but the main source of content is textbooks and many other resources are unconsidered and negligibly used. However, keeping demands of different educational systems (public, private, madrasah, elite) leverage to design and provide supplementary materials by educational institutions is given (Ahmad, Rehman, Ali, Khan , & Khan, 2014). This helps only elite class institutions to make workbooks or other supplementary materials but the level of usage of such materials varies from context to context.

Educational technology importance is mentioned but details of technology-oriented resources and methodologies to implement are neglected. Moreover, it is clearly mentioned that curriculum designers and implementers lack field research and experience, and this is one of the reasons that the curriculum fails to fulfil the practical demands of industry and society. Different methodologies names and objectives to meet with global needs and requirements with some explanation are given but a detailed plan to implement it is neglected.

It seems curriculum is properly documented with clear aims what excellences to be fostered in individual but how to foster such excellence is missing in Pakistan's curriculum. Sources of information are clear but authenticity and practical importance are questionable as many of the studies are obsolete or outdated but still teach as a part of the curriculum (Abbasi, Baig, Munir & Habib, 2018).

Malaysian curriculum development process involves feedback from teachers and experts, the reports from state education offices, the survey findings and library research, and consideration of local and global trends. A Curriculum Committee is assigned the task of developing the curriculum for the education system. The concept paper that is developed by the Committee is forwarded to the Central Curriculum Committee in Ministry of Education, Malaysia where the workshops involving practicing teachers and subject specialists take place to further reform the curriculum. The process of curriculum development exhibits the involvement of all the stakeholders from top level to those who actually implement it. Not only it is implemented in true sense after it is finally approved from the Ministry, the draft curriculum is piloted to check its effectiveness (Rahman, 2014). Besides comprehensive curriculum development, Malaysia, introduces such programs as to generate human capital by means of education and training. The creative learning environment and constant encouragement to students is provided to focus on latest skills that are need of the labour market (Buntat, Puteh, Azeman, Nasir, & Iahad, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The Global Competitiveness Index 2018 (Schwab, 2018) ranks Pakistan on 125th place in the category of skills out of 140 economies. Pakistan lags behind other South Asian economies. Even Bangladesh is ranked at 116th place and Nepal at 106th. Several other comparators such as Malaysia and Indonesia also performed better in ranking.

Pakistan faces significant skills shortages and mismatches, and there is yet inadequately met market demands of skilled labour. The issue of lack of uniformity in curriculum across different provinces and systems of education is missing. In documents, the autonomy of schools and teachers is appreciated however, the leverage for amendments in the curriculum is not much acknowledged. The teachers are to follow the authoritative methods of instructions. Though the government has made a comprehensive educational policy, curriculum with clear objectives and goals, where some of the new aspects were explored but some of the major issues are still neglected. The main issue is related to proper implementation according to plan and problems such as lack of institutions, high inflation rate, and expensive quality educations are the main hurdles in the achievement of desired results. The objective of the government to bring all children to schools by 2020 is still unapproachable. Out of school children's rate has also increased due to the high poverty rate. Target for achieving 100 per cent literacy rate is not properly planned and it seems that the government has set the target without proper survey, research, and planning. Last but not least, policy and curriculums designed are appropriate and in detail, but it will only be successful if implemented as it is desired.

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