NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP 2009-2015) IN PAKISTAN: CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND A WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Educational policy-making is a cornerstone of educational planning (UNESCO). In the light of the National Education Policy (2009-2015), the paper discusses strengths and weaknesses prevalent in policy formulation and explores implementation and review process in Pakistan by making use of available relevant literature on this topic with special reference to policy reviews available with UNESCO. The paper also attempts to discuss critically National Education Policy by making use of the International Institute for Educational Planning's (IIEP) applied framework regarding educational planning and policy-making. The policy analysis framework and case studies developed by UNESCO provide planners with both a conceptual and an operational guide for understanding the critical linkages in the policy-planning process for education. The purpose of this paper is to suggest a scheme or series of steps through which sound and workable policies can be formulated, and then, through effective planning, put into effect, evaluated and redesigned. The paper puts forward recommendations for exploiting opportunities and encountering challenges for making education policy a cyclic process to avoid incremental policy-making approach.

Keywords: Policy, Education Policy, 18th Constitutional Amendment, Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Introduction

There is no consensus among scholars on the definition of policy. For simplicity sake, *Study of Educational Research and Policy-making in Pakistan* (2013) defines policy as "what government chooses to do or not to do… a set of statement by the government-at whatever level-of what it intends to do or not to do about a public problem" (Birkland, 2010, p.9). Such statements of governmental choices can typically be found in, constitutions, statues, regulations and documents such as national and provincial education policies. Policies are made for the purposeful intervention in overlapping areas of practice, service and governance within the larger system of public –service delivery.

There are many heuristic and theoretical models exhibiting the policy process. However, all models do not assume or depict research as informing policy. The linear model of policy process begins with the identification of problem that can be addressed by policy followed by agenda setting process, policy formation, policy legitimization, policy implementation and policy evaluation (Dye. 2011). Other models include but not limited

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to game theory, elite theory, incremental approach, rationalism, public choice theory. Although all of these models describe the policy-making process from different perspectives, yet the common elements could be traced. The common element of all models is the perception that policy-making is primarily a political process- not one that necessarily uses research-led and informed policy decisions.

An extensive body of literature explores the research-policy nexus highlighting how the research is used in policy-making. The instrumental use of research entails that the problem exists but information and understanding to resolve the problem is lacking. Thus, the research bridges this gap of missing knowledge and a solution is reached. The symbolic use of research denotes that research knowledge is applied to political decisions after they have already been made. When there is an expectation that research will be used to inform policy decisions, it is often used symbolically to legitimate a decision (Weis, 1980; Coburn and Stein, 2010)

The scope of educational planning has been broadened. Attention to the growth and expansion of educational systems is being complemented and sometimes even replaced by a growing concern for the quality of the entire educational process and for the control of its results. Finally, planners and administrators have become more and more aware of the importance of implementation strategies and of the role of different regulatory mechanisms in this respect (UNESCO 1995).

The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) is an international centre for advanced training and research in the field of educational planning. It was established by UNESCO in 1963. The Institute's aim is to contribute to the development of education throughout the world, by expanding both knowledge and the supply of competent professionals in the field of educational planning. In this endeavour the Institute co-operates with interested training and research organizations in Member States. The Governing Board of the IIEP, which approves the Institute's programme and budget, consists of a maximum of eight elected members and four members designated by the United Nations Organization and certain of its specialized agencies and institutes. In order to help the Institute identify the real up-to-date issues in educational planning and policy making in different parts of the world, an Editorial Board has been appointed, composed of two general editors and associate editors from different regions, all professionals of high repute in their own field. At the first meeting of this new Editorial Board in January 1990, its members identified key topics to be covered in the coming issues including education and development, equity considerations, quality of education, structure, administration and management of education, curriculum, cost and financing of education, planning techniques and approaches and Information systems pertaining to monitoring and evaluation. National Education Policy (NEP-2009-2015) is no exception for addressing these key topics.

The document is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 1 describes overarching challenges, identifies two fundamental causes that lie behind the deficiencies in performance (the commitment gap and the implementation gap), and outlines the way forward. Chapters 2 and 3 articulate the ways of filling the Commitment Gap (system values, priorities and resources) and Implementation Gap (Ensuring good governance) respectively. Chapter 4 puts forward the provisions of Islamic Education and transformation of the society on Islamic and human values. Chapters 5 to 8 outline

reforms and policy actions to be taken at the sub-sector level. Chapter 9 broadly suggests a Framework for Implementation of the Action Plan of this Policy document. Annex- I lays out the current state of education sector. Available indicators have been assessed against data in comparable countries. Two main reasons prompted the Ministry of Education (MoE) to launch the review in 2005 well before the time horizon of the existing Policy (1998 - 2010). Firstly, the Policy was not producing the desired educational results and the performance remained deficient in several key aspects including access, quality and equity of educational opportunities. Secondly, the international challenges like Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Dakar Framework of Action Education for All (EFA) Goals and the challenges triggered by globalization and nation's quest for becoming a knowledge society in the wake of compelling domestic pressures like devolution and demographic transformations have necessitated a renewed commitment to proliferate quality education for all.

Statement of the Problem

Ministry of Education (MoE) Government of Pakistan launched the review in 2005 well before the time horizon of the existing Policy (1998 - 2010) on the plea that the Policy was not producing the desired educational results and the performance remained deficient in several key aspects including access, quality and equity of educational opportunities and secondly, the international challenges like Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) , Dakar Framework of Action Education for All (EFA) Goals and the challenges triggered by globalization. It is high time to determine the strengths and weaknesses of National Education Policy and to suggest a way forward for research-led policy- making.

Significance of the Study

The paper attempts to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of NEP-2009-2015.The government has used incremental approach in designing the current education policy. This policy has not been made through proper research and surveys and is mere revised version of previous policy. The incremental approach may not be appropriate for the current scenario which Pakistan is facing now-a-days. The worth of education policy is no more than a political poly as one can see a "disconnect" between the policy and practices in Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2010).

This paper will inform Educational policy makers in Pakistan to avoid incremental approach. Muzaffar (2010) is of the view that the inadequacy of education reforms in Pakistan reminds us of Albert Hirschman who claimed that public organizations needed political influence (or voice) for improvement in their performance. The research will pave the way for public awareness for restructuring education system in Pakistan on popular public demand by securing government not only in policy formulation but also policy implementation and rigorous review.

Moreover, Article 25-A of the Eighteen Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan (2010) demands for the policy-relevant research. In the wake of the passage of the 18th amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan, requiring mandatory education for all children up to age 16, government officials need research support to help them think

through the amendments legal, financial, technical and systematic implications. Therefore, the constitutional changes are likely to result in a spike in demand for policy relevant educational research (Muzzaffar & Ayesha, 2013).

Research Methodology

This research relies on literature review and document analysis. National Education Policy has been thoroughly studied coupled with related studies on its analysis. The analysis has been made in the light of applied framework prescribed by International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), UNESCO. The policy analysis framework and case studies developed by UNESCO provide planners with both a conceptual and an operational guide for understanding the critical linkages in the policy-planning process for education.

Discussion

National Education Policy has certain merits as far as policy formulation is concerned. Siddiqui (2010) opines that NEP (2009-2015) is different from previous education policies in the sense that its process of designing started almost three years before. A number of seminars and meetings were organized for shared vision of different groups of stakeholders.

National Education Policy provides insight into overarching challenges & deficiencies, their causes and the way forward. Moreover, the policy takes into consideration demographic transition in Pakistan. The recent studies on demographic trends reveal that economists have begun to focus on the impact of changing age structure of the population. The interest in relation between population change and economic growth has again caught light due to the demographic transition taking place in the developing countries, which offers potential economic benefit by changes in the age structure of the population during the demographic transition, owing to an increase in working age population and associated decline in the dependent age population.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been addressed in NEP. Historically, however, ECE has not been formally recognized by the public sector in Pakistan. The traditional 'katchi' class in some public sector schools has predominantly remained a familiarization stage towards formal schooling for un-admitted, young students. A limited part of the Grade I National Curriculum is taught to this group. The policy denotes that ECE age group shall be recognized as comprising 3 to 5 years. At least one year Pre-primary education shall be provided by the State and universal access to ECE shall be ensured within the next ten years. Non-formal Education has been given due consideration and has not been merely addressed as Adult Education, like previous policies. NEP recommends that Government schools should initiate Non-Formal Education (NFE) stream for child labourers. Children involved in various jobs or work shall be brought within the ambit of non-formal education system with need-based schedules and timings. NEF programmes, currently in practice up to grade 5 shall be expanded up to grade where required. Special literacy skills programmes shall target older child labourers, boys and girls (14 to 17 years). Special educational stipends shall be introduced to rehabilitate child labourers.

Education in Emergencies has been addressed for the very first time in the history of policy-making in Pakistan. Pakistan has endured serious emergent situations in recent years causing collateral damage at a large scale. The schools have been the worst victim because of the school infrastructure not constructed to bear the tremendous shock of earthquake and the school administration as well as the students was not prepared to meet such kind of challenges. Although there were some provisions in the school curriculum and learning materials to address crisis and disaster management related issues due to non-availability of a proper mechanism the concepts could not be enforced appropriately. Pakistan's education system has now recognized the need for preparation of individuals and groups to grapple with the demands of emergencies through organized and effective responses. Credible rehabilitation and disaster management plans need to be put in place to ensure early restoration of education service.

Quality Assurance in Education has been given high consideration allocating separate chapter on quality and its constituents in education sector. The policy highlights six basic pillars that have the major contribution. These are curriculum, textbooks, assessments, teachers, the learning environment in an institution and relevance of education to practical life/ labour market. The most significant action is required in improving teaching resources and pedagogical approaches that teachers employ. The reform of teaching quality is of the highest priority.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009 analyses problems and issues hampering the development of education in Pakistan, and outlines a wide range of reforms and policy actions to be taken and pursued in a coordinated federal – inter-provincial process. The NEP thus outlines what is to be done. The NEP does not deal with who will do what, how will something be done, and when is something be done? Past national education policy documents, with some exceptions, largely remained declarations of intent and were not followed up by an effective implementation .Even where implementation did take place, there was no complete process for monitoring and feedback. To prevent failure of this policy, an implementation framework with a follow up and feedback mechanism, were to be developed. The basic principles were agreed in the 13th Meeting of Inter-Provincial Education Ministers (IPEM) held on 9th May, 2008 in Islamabad. The meeting decided and directed that "An Action Plan will be developed by each Province/Area and collated at the Federal level.

Taking stock of the current situation is an indispensable part of any policy development exercise as a mean of identifying areas of policy intervention. The policy provides a brief review of Pakistan's education system through indicators of access, equity, quality, resources, and structure of the education system. The latest available profile is complemented by information on how some of the indicators have evolved over the recent years. The policy provides a comparison with a selected group of countries that could be regarded as benchmark or reference countries. The most recent data has been used for making comparison regarding access to educational opportunities, equity in education, the gender dimension, the rural-urban divide, provincial and area disparities, quality of provision.

On the other hand, taking weaknesses of NEP (2009-2015), the policy looks like a long wish list, such as allocation for education will be 7% of GDP by 2015, level of public sector schools will be lifted to match the level of private sector schools, and a common curricular framework will be applied for abolishing educational apartheid. Siddiqui (2010) considers it too good to be true.

Madrassah Education authority shall be established by Ministry of Interior with the mandate of providing an opportunity for all existing and future Madaris to excel and enhance the services they already provide to the nation by providing advice and assistance in streamlining policies, objectives and syllabi to give graduates a competitive edge in the job market and for placement in institutions of higher education. However, the Ministry of Education should take supervisory role of Islamic Education rather than the Ministry of Interior.

Financial resources for education come largely from the public sector, which spends2.5% of the GDP (2006-07) on education while 0.5% is estimated to be the contribution of the private sector, putting the combined resources at around 3% of GDP for 2006-2007. The data on public expenditure on education points to low priority Pakistan gives to education as it spends relatively less on education in terms of GDP (2.3%) as compared to the countries like Iran (4.7%), Malaysia (6.2), Thailand (4.2%), South Korea (4.6%), India (3.8%), and Bangladesh (2.5%)

Conclusion

NEP 2(009-2015) addresses the issues highlighted in UNESCO-International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) framework i.e. education and development, equity considerations, quality of education, structure, administration and management of education, curriculum, cost and financing of education, planning techniques and approaches and Information systems pertaining to monitoring and evaluation in policy making process. However, implementation is limited to development of framework. There is no harmony between desirability, affordability and feasibility. Desirability involves three dimensions i.e. the impact of the policy on the various interest groups or stake-holders compatibility with the dominant ideology and targets of economic growth articulated in national development plans; and in some cases, the impact of a policy option on political development and the stability.

Education is on the concurrent list. In wake of 18th amendment, what would happen to implementation framework is not evident in the policy. Affordability denotes the fiscal costs of the change as well as the social and political costs need to be evaluated. The difficulty of making these estimations lies in the ability to predict future trends, including economic growth. This is especially important because educational expenditures are more vulnerable to changes in economic situations and political objectives than some other kinds of public expenditure. Therefore, alternative economic scenarios need to be considered. Opportunity costs and political costs should also be weighed. The education policy envisages increasing budgetary allocations to 7% of GDP. If we keep in mind the previous allocations to education during the past several years, it does not seem promising. From 2001 to 2009, the government expenditure on education as % of GDP has remained 1.82 1.79, 1.86, 2.20, 2.15, 2.24, 2.50, 2.47, 2.10 respectively. Moreover, no economic growth projections have been provided to make this claim realistic.

Feasibility pertains to the availability of human resources for implementing the change. Fiscal resources are easy to compute. More difficult is the estimate of what level of training is required of teachers (the more sophisticated the programme and/or technology involved, the more highly trained the personnel need to be) and whether there are enough personnel to implement the policy option. Equally important is the presence of the institutional culture (norms, procedures, and environment) necessary to attract, retain, and effectively utilize trained personnel in transforming policies into plans and implemented programmes. Another element in the calculus of feasibility is time. Most studies of education projects indicate that there are frequent time overruns in implementation. More realistic estimates of time need to be made and can only be done by the careful assessment of the implementation capabilities and experiences. Education initiatives have to be sustained politically and financially over a lengthy period of time to reach fruition. AEPAM data projections reveal that from 1960 to 1970 literacy rate increased at the rate of 0.5 percent per annum. However from 1981 to 1998 the rate of increase in the literary figures was 1.07 percent per annum. The population of Pakistan is growing at the rate of about two percent. It is not feasible to achieve 86 percent literacy rate by 2015.

There are challenges associated with the interface of research and policy. A commonly accepted explanation for the non-use of research is the "two communities" theory., which argues that researchers and policy makers exist within entirely different communities with different values, worldviews, orientations, languages and timelines. However, this theory has been critiqued for oversimplifying the roles of both researchers and policymakers in terms of beliefs, multiple identities, and alliances and various roles and responsibilities (Ginsburg and Gorostiga [2001] as cited in Muzzaffar & Ayesha, 2013)

The current education policy will last till 2015. It is high time to ponder for making education policy a cyclic process to avoid incremental policy making approach. The policy review should be started well before time on scientific grounds. The said review should inform the upcoming policy formulation based on the synthesis of desirability, affordability and feasibility in line with the national development plans.

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