

Strategies to Enroll Out of School Children in Cholistan, Pakistan

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Abstract

The present study focused to identify strategies to enroll out of school children in Cholistan through non formal education. Role of non formal education in Cholistan was measured through initiatives taken by non formal educational institutions as well as on the basis of achievements in present scenario of non formal education. The population of the study comprised on non formal setup of Cholistan. Teachers and field members were selected through census sampling while members of school councils and parents were selected through convenient sampling. A questionnaire consisting on quantitative as well as qualitative data was developed. The obtained data was analyzed through (SPSS) version 20 and thematic analysis. It was found that majority of respondents pointed different modes of non formal education working with different strategies. Most of the respondents also expressed the current scenario of non formal education, role of community in functioning of non formal schools and drawbacks of non formal education in Cholistan. It was suggested that number of non formal schools should be increased with all basic facilities. Government should take steps to facilitate parents to enroll out of school children. National and international stakeholders must focus on the projects of non formal education in Cholistan and quality of education.

Keywords: out of school children; Non formal education; Cholistan

Introduction

Education is the most important element for any nation. The first formal step of education is

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primary education and therefore, primary education is considered as the most important factor for any society because it assures learners' cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor development (Bloom, 1956). The main task of primary education is to admit out of school children into the schools and ensure that all students continue until they complete their basic education. Moreover, bring drop out learners back to school.

The constitution of Pakistan protects the right of free and compulsory basic education without any discrimination (hussain, 2018). Right of education has been accepted all over the world. Many countries took steps to educate their population. In 1948, a convention on the Rights of child was organized and in 1990, World Conference on Education for All was held under UNESCO.

After ten years in 2000, 1100 participants all over the world met at World Education Forum in DAKAR, Senegal, and through this platform, Education for all goals were settled. Four out of six goals were linked with basic education . Pakistan along with other 163 countries was a signatory of the DAKAR framework (Lewin, 2015) .

Non-formal education is a system with flexible mode of education which was developed to educate out of school children and drop out learners. Non- formal education system has flexible rules, flexible time table, ease of time and multi grade teaching outside the premises of formal setup. After DAKAR conference in 2000, Pakistan also worked on Non-formal education in remote areas where there is no formal school established immediately to achieve the international and national targets of education (Dakar, 2000).

National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) was established in 2002 by the federal government to achieve Education for All Goals. Mandate of NCHD was human development and providing basic education through non formal means all over the country (Khan & Niazi, n.d.).

Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training established, "Directorate of Basic Education and Community Schools" to open non formal primary schools in remote areas of all provinces, named 'Basic Education Community Schools' (BECS) (Ashraf et al., 2009) .

In 2002, Government of Punjab established Literacy & Non-Formal Basic Education Department (L&NBED). L&NBED worked in deprived and marginalized areas of all 36 districts of Punjab. Different projects were launched to literate adults and provide basic education by operating non formal institutions in far flung areas where formal schools did not exist. More than 0.4 million out of school children are studying in these non formal schools (Gull & Sarwar, 2020) .

Non formal schools of mentioned above Ministry/Directorate/Department are also working for out of school and dropout children in Cholistan. There is need to study that how far these Non-Formal Schools have proved to be effective to enhance the literacy in the masses of Cholistan. Thus the study provided an informed basis for determining interventions taken by key stakeholders to improve the role of Non Formal education in Cholistan. It also provided a concrete basis for policy making to improve the role of non formal schools to reduce dropout rate and improve literacy rate in Cholistan. This Study further provided a glance to non formal schools working in Cholistan to ensure quality and sustainable education.

Research is focused on Cholistan which is also called Rohi in local language. It is the largest desert in southern Punjab. Its border met with Pakistani province Sindh and Indian state Rajasthan. Cholistan covered the area of 26330 sq km. It consisted on seven union councils,

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four in district Bahawalpur, two in district Rahim Yar Khan and only one union council in district Bahawalnagar.

Cholistan is divided into two parts. One part is called lesser Cholistan while the second is called greater Cholistan. The 70% population of Cholistan lives in lesser Cholistan. The population of the Cholistan is scattered and average nine persons live in per sq km. Due to scattered population, it is not possible for developing countries like Pakistan to cover all population in formal setup. As a result, number of out of school children in Cholistan is larger than other areas of the country (Khan et al., 2004).

Objectives of the study

- 1- To identify the strategies already adopted by non formal setup to enroll out of school children in Cholistan.
- 2- To examine the existing scenario of non formal education in Cholistan
- 3- To recommend appropriate strategies to enhance literacy rate and quality of education in Cholistan.

The Current Research

This study was aimed to discuss the initiatives to enroll out of school children in Cholistan through non formal education. This study was delimited to the Cholistan area of Bahawalpur Division of Punjab, Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The population of the study consisted all field staff, teachers, school council members, parents of non formal schools of L&NFBED, BECS, NCHD, Madaris & NGOs working in Cholistan. Sample was selected through census sampling and convenient sampling. Non formal teachers and field staff of non formal setup were selected through census sampling while members of non formal school council and parents were selected through convenient sampling.

A questionnaire consisting of three major portions i.e. check list, 5-point Likert scale and open ended questions was developed. Checklist was prepared to measure the initiatives taken by non formal education in Cholistan. The 5-point Likert scale was developed to investigate the current scenario of non formal education in Cholistan and open ended questions were included to find drawbacks and suggestion to improve non formal education in Cholistan. The research instrument was pilot tested to ensure the validity and reliability. The researcher collected the data personally from the selected areas of 3 districts (Cholistan).

The collected data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20. Close ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics i.e. frequencies, percentage and mean score while open ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings were reported after obtaining the results from the analysis of collected data. Appropriate measures were recommended on the basis of obtained findings.

Findings

Before opening non formal school in Cholistan, base line survey was conducted to collect out of school children data.

Non formal schools were established in those localities of Cholistan where formal school did not exist.

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Non formal schools were opened in all union councils of Cholistan. Center kit and learner kit were provided in non formal schools of Cholistan. Community neither owns the schools nor provides building for non formal school. School building is mostly provided by the teacher concerned. Community participation in the parent's teachers meetings for quality education is moderate. Some parents come to visit the school others do not. Free pre primary education is given in non formal schools. The data revealed that low honorarium of non formal teacher, house room as a classroom, SNC syllabus, single teacher, poverty, overlapping of departments, illiteracy and non availability of non formal elementary schools were the problems of Cholistan. It was also pointed out that the scattered population, shortage of water; sandy land and non availability of electricity were hindrances of education system in Cholistan which are the major causes of students' dropout. Respondents suggested that the government should provide proper school building or allocate rent for building, Cholistan based curriculum and financial support to learners and their parents for new enrollments to increase literacy rate in Cholistan.

Discussion

Cholistan is located in division Bahawalpur of Punjab province. Cholistan consists on desert area with less than 40 percent literacy rate. Formal schools are less in numbers and they are unable to fulfill the educational needs of Cholistan due to scattered population. Government and NGOs worked on non formal education to increase literacy rate and tried to provide quality education in Cholistan. Other Asian countries also worked on non formal education. In Bangladesh different initiatives were taken to increase literacy rate. Boat schools were opened in hoar areas where water remains throughout the year. The situation in Cholistan is totally different as people migrate in search of water hence mobile schools will be helpful to impart education in Cholistan. Bangladesh government passed a non formal education act in 2014. Its main features were providing basic education with vocational education, loan with education, establishment of non formal educational board, stoppage of marriage before 18 year age for both boys and girls and linkage of basic education with university graduation certificate (sabar, 2007). For Cholistan, no educational act is present; however the Punjab government launched 1st non formal educational policy. There is a dire need of a non formal educational act for Cholistan in which similar steps should be taken. Neighboring country India also worked on non formal education to increase literacy rate. India included life skills in non formal schools and engaged social science researchers to conduct external evaluation of non formal schools and gave reports to improve the system (mitra, 2007) . In non formal schools of Cholistan life skills should be included to attract the learners. Universities of Bahawalpur Division should be linked with Cholistan. The experts of education faculty and researchers have to monitor and evaluate non formal schools to maintain quality of education in these schools. On their suggestions and recommendation, Cholistan non formal education policy should be framed. In the province of Sindh, School Education Department and Literacy Department is a combined department. So School Education and Literacy Department Sindh decide which location is feasible for formal school and which is suitable for non formal school. Salary of non formal teacher in Sindh is 25000 PKR. In Punjab, formal schools are under the School Education Department while for establishing non formal schools, separate

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department named 'L&NFBED' was established in 2002. Salary of non formal teachers in Cholistan and other parts of the Punjab is 8000 PKR. There is no proper joint collaboration between these two departments at provincial level. Literacy & Non Formal Basic Education Department should be part of School Education Department like in Sindh otherwise there must be joint collaboration between these two departments to avoid overlapping.

Recommendation

Non formal schools in Cholistan are imparting basic education to drop out and out of school children of deprived areas but not covering all the drop outs. Government and NGOs should open more non formal schools in Cholistan especially in greater part. Medium of instruction should be in mother tongue or in national language in spite of English as teachers and learners will feel easy to express their feelings and learn more about their environment and social norms.

Non formal institutions in Cholistan are working under different departments and ministries with different directions. Cholistan Non Formal Education Authority should be established like District Education Authority under Local Government with the responsibilities of identifying out of school children, selection of feasible sites for non formal school, hiring of teachers, enrollment and monitoring. People of Cholistan are poor, they have to work with their children to run the house and as a result they have low interest in education. Federal government should link Non Formal Schools of the Cholistan with Benazir Income Support Program. Only those parents can avail the facility to register in Benazir Income Support Program who enrolls their children in non formal school. In this way literacy rate may be increased and drop out ratio decreased in Cholistan. To promote gender equality in Cholistan, Punjab government should announce stipend for girls of non formal schools with the condition of 80% attendance ratio.

Non availability of electricity and clean water are the main issues of Cholistan. Punjab government should encourage NGOs to install Solar system in non formal schools to save students from extreme weather and solar water filtration plant to ensure hygiene of students. It was found that the people of Cholistan migrate in search of water and drop out ratio increased due to migration. Mobile non formal schools should be opened in greater Cholistan with the collaboration of NGOs. Community is reluctant to own non formal schools of Cholistan and teachers have to run the school in their own home room. District administration should take steps to involve community, it is recommended that names of non formal schools should be named with prominent person of that area to ensure quality education, monitoring and for fulfilling missing facilities. Non formal schools are giving only primary education in those areas of Cholistan where formal schools are not available. This study recommends that Punjab government should open Non Formal Elementary Schools with technical and vocational education in Cholistan for purposeful and sustainable education. It is also recommended that the salary package of non formal teacher should be fixed in accordance with the Punjab government minimum wages policy to increase the efficiency of teacher and quality of education.

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