



# A Critically Review of Pakistan Education system compare with Iran Education system

---

---

Hani Fatima<sup>1\*</sup> and Aleen Fatima<sup>2</sup>

*Women Fatima Jinnah University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan*

\*Corresponding author: zainulabidenmalik786@gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

This paper compares the education system of the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan by critically reviewing secondary sources of data related to both the countries. It examines and compares the history, laws on education, school levels and structure of the education sector, universal primary education, quality of education, language and the education of women of Pakistan and Iran. This comparison reveals how Iran has achieved rapid growth in its education sector especially after the Revolution while Pakistan lags far behind Iran in all realms of education. Hence, this paper also serves to highlight the current situation of the educational system of Pakistan and the flaws that it suffers from.

**Keywords:** Education level, women, system

---

With a whopping population of over 170 million, which is growing at the estimated rate of 1.8% every year, as stated by the World Bank 2010 statistics, Pakistan had a dismal literacy rate of 56% (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund 2010). Although the statistics above are from 2010, it is not likely that when the latest figures will be released, the situation of Pakistan's literacy level would be any better; since its inception, the problem of literacy in Pakistan is analogous to a snowball effect where education in Pakistan is being considered a "crisis" (Noorani; Khan 2010) or an "emergency" (Pakistan Education Task Force 2011) by many.

However, how can one consider the current literacy level of Pakistan abysmal as it has in fact improved over the years? A clear example of this is the data obtained from the first ever and the most recent census in Pakistan in 1951 and 1998 respectively in which the literacy rate rose from 16.4 to 43.9% although the rise could be deemed erratic (Choudhry 2005, p 4). The

answer lies in a number of indicators, one of them being the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI). The GCI is an indicator of how a country fares economically across the globe. Along with other aspects, the CGI also tells how a country competes in education with the rest of the world. Overall, the GCI 2010-2011 placed Pakistan at 123 from a total 139 countries and one of the pillars which has led to Pakistan's placement at the bottom 12%, is education. Compared to its five comparator countries – Sri Lanka, Brazil, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia – which are economically or geographically comparable, only Pakistan has fallen in rankings.

According to "The State of Pakistan's Competitiveness Report 2010-2011" which gives the aforementioned information, Pakistan's primary, secondary and tertiary enrollment levels are extremely low and an improvement in all three would translate into a better economy (CSF and J.E. Austin Associates Inc. 2010). Another country which was added to the GCI 2010-2011 and which shares a close proximity with Pakistan is the Islamic Republic

of Iran. Its GCI rank was 69 and if we compare its pillars of education in particular, with Pakistan, its high rank would not come as a surprise. While Pakistan's overall primary education and health and higher education and training rank is 123, Iran's primary education and health rank is 54 and its higher education and training rank is 87; both the primary and higher education pillars of Iran which would lead to economic wellbeing are well above Pakistan's (Sala-i-Martin *et al.* 2010).

Iran's population might be less than Pakistan's (more than 73 million stated by the World Bank in 2010) but there was a time when its literacy rate was as low as Pakistan's. Two years prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the literacy rate was 28.7% (Ali, 2010, p 6) and if we consider the literacy rate in 2010, it was 85% (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund 2010)! Hence, in a time span of about half of Pakistan's age, how has the literacy rate of Iran risen to such a phenomenal level? Can Pakistan emulate the aspects, after Iran's revolution, that have had contributed towards the economic growth and development of the Islamic Republic of Iran? This paper will review factors in the Iranian education system and try to identify by means of comparison whether they are lacking, present or in need of improvement in the Pakistani education system. Perhaps it is time that we share much more with Iran in the current era other than the controversial gas pipeline! Some of the research questions that this paper aims to answer during the course of this paper include; (1) what are the histories of Iran and Pakistan? (2) Have these histories had any effect on the education system of both the countries? (3) What is the status of both the countries with respect to primary education which is being stressed upon globally? (4) Is the quality of education the same in both the countries? (5) Is there any disparity in the literacy rates of women in Iran and Pakistan?

### **Brief Overview of Iran's History**

We consider the civilization of Mesopotamia as one of the oldest, but Iranian culture predates Mesopotamia and even prehistoric times. The Median Empire established by the Aryans which included Iran, was later conquered by Cyrus the Great and led to the formation of the

Persian Empire in 550 BC-a time of great expansion and prosperity for Iran.

However, in 330 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Persia and from there on Persia came under different dynastic rules until 650 AD when it was conquered by Arab Muslims. Islam then replaced Zoroastrianism and Arab caliphates began to rule Persia. The Safavid Dynasty rid the country foreign invaders like Genghis Khan in 1501 AD and was the time when culture and economy flourished under the rule of Shah Ismail I; Shi'i Islam was also made the official religion during this time. The Safavid Dynasty ended in 1736 when Nadir Shah became the monarch. The monarchy in Persia proved oppressive for its people of Persia and in 1906 a constitution was created which put tight control on the power of the monarch a period marked as the "Constitutional Revolution". The last monarchy that ruled Persia was that of the Pahlavis.

As far as education is concerned, the "Pahlavi era" was the period when education was made highly secularized, on the lines of the French education system. Many attempts were made to increase education in the country and this was also a time for the expansion of higher education in the country by the establishment of several universities including the famous University of Tehran (Metz 1987). However, during Muhammad Mossadeq's prime minister-ship in 1953, a power struggle between Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Mossadeq led to the former fleeing Iran, only to return after Mossadeq was overthrown through a coup masterminded by America and Britain. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi then began attempts to modernize Iran and his policies upset the religious clergy; the Shah's "White Revolution" caused massive unrest in the country which resulted in the Islamic Revolution of 1979 headed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini an Islamic fundamentalist.

Thereon Iran came to be known as the Islamic Republic of Iran and has had a predominantly conservative leadership though reformist Khatami was elected as president for two terms (BBC News 2012; Iran at the Crossroad of Civilizations n.d). After the Islamic Revolution, the attempts made during the Pahlavi period to modernize the education system were put

to an end and a process of “desecularization” and the Islamization of education began; textbooks were modified, new teachers were hired, coeducation was stopped and all attempts were made to give the education system a predominantly religious character (Morita 2002; Metz 1987). 1980’s was the beginning of an eight year war between Iran and Iraq which severed ties between both the countries although this hostility no longer exists. Ties between the United States and Iran have however always been on rocky with Iran being the victim of several sanctions over the years (BBC News 2012; Iran at the Crossroad of Civilizations n.d.).

### **Brief Overview of Pakistan’s History**

Like Iran, Pakistan also has a rich historical past which can be traced back to 2500 BC with the Indus Valley Civilization. When the Aryan race conquered Persia, the area of Pakistan was also included in the conquests and later with the conquests of Cyrus the Great, Pakistan also became part of the Persian Empire. Pakistan was later conquered by Alexander the Great in 326 BC and till the Arab invasion of Pakistan in 712 AD, it was ruled by several emperors the famous Buddhist, Asoka. With the Arab invasion of Pakistan Islam was introduced to the region still exists in this region. Pakistan was then ruled by five different dynasties of Turkish origin as part of the Delhi Sultanate from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century and from then onwards till the nineteenth century, the Mughals ruled over Pakistan. The British then laid foot on this territory and began their rule as colonizers which would eventually lead to the creation of Pakistan (Geographia, 2012; Nisar, 2012).

The British rule ended in 1947 with the division of the region they had ruled into India and Pakistan; the efforts of the Muslim League had proved fruitful and a separate homeland for the Muslims had finally been acquired. Unfortunately, the man who had spearheaded Pakistan’s independence drive- Muhammad Ali Jinnah- died soon after its independence and what followed was a democratic chaos where Pakistan came under military rule several times.

In 1951, the first prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan was killed and within two decades of this unfortunate event, by 1971, Pakistan had experienced

two martial laws, a war with India over Kashmir as well as a civil war which culminated in the creation of Bangladesh.

In 1973, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became president of Pakistan, only to be replaced by General Zia-ul-Haq before the end of his duration, and hung in 1979. During Zia-ul-Haq’s regime Islamic law and an Islamic system was forced in the country. However, in 1985, martial law ended and eventually Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s daughter Benazir, became prime minister in 1988. For the next decade power shifted back and forth from Benazir’s party to Nawaz Sharif’s party. From 2000 to 2008, General Pervez Musharraf established himself as president after a military coup and after resignation, Asif Ali Zardari the widower of Benazir who was killed in a bomb attack a year earlier in 2007 - was elected as president; he continues to be president to date. Environmental challenges in the form of a massive earthquake in 2005 and floods in 2010 have also shaken the country apart from the rocky political history of Pakistan (BBC World 2012).

Moreover, Pakistan is now also under severe economic pressure with heavy loans and a huge debt to repay to the International Monetary Fund. Islamic militants linked to the Taliban have created further unrest within the country. Pakistan’s political instability has affected the education system in Pakistan whereby its numerous educational policies which can be translated as futile attempts on paper to achieve educational growth, are reflective of the lack of continuity and stability in Pakistani politics. Moreover, as stated by Choudhry (2006) political leaders have never laid emphasis on education because of their own elitist and feudal way of thinking.

Pakistan’s colonial past has also led to a serious disparity within the educational system in the form of English and Urdu medium schools. The existence of English and Urdu medium schools within Pakistan, enhance the non uniformity that already exists in the education system.

### **Laws on Education**

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran clearly states in Article 30 of its Constitution that it is the duty

of the government to provide free or cost education to its people. The Second-Five year plan of the country (1995-1999) in different Articles, also makes it the State's responsibility to make education not only but also *compulsory* from primary to lower secondary level which would include children from six to thirteen years of age. Article 52 of the Fourth Economic Social and Cultural Development Plan further reestablished education as obligatory in 2005 when the plan was approved by the Cabinet (UNESCO, 2011). There are several Articles in the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan which relate to education specially Article 37b which states that the State shall endeavor to remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within a restricted time frame. Article 37a states that the educational and economic interests of the people belonging to the backward areas will be advocated while Article 34 specifically states that steps will be taken to ensure that women are active participants in all affairs of the country. Article 38d makes it clear that education shall be provided to all citizens irrespective of their gender, cast, creed or color (Ministry of Education 2009). In 2010, the President of Pakistan approved the Eighteenth Amendment Act which makes it the constitutional right of each child to receive education. This change in the constitution comes in lieu of the Millennium Development Goal by the United Nations to ensure that all children would achieve universal primary education by 2015 (Pakistan Education Task Force 2011).

Moreover, a "Compulsory Primary Education" Act has been approved for three provinces and the Islamabad capital although its implementation in these regions is lacking (UNESCO-IBE 2011). The laws and other regulations in both Iran and Pakistan state that education must be compulsory and free for children up to a certain level. Furthermore the governments of both the countries are entrusted with this duty and both have agreed with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal on education mentioned above.

### Schooling Levels

In Iran, schooling starts from the optional pre-primary level and it is meant for children for four to five year of

age. The first compulsory levels of education are part of primary education from grades 1 to 5 with grade 1 students being allowed admission at the age of six. The secondary education level is divided into two stages, where lower secondary education lasts for three year and upper secondary education lasts for another three years. Secondary schools offer students the option of choosing academic, technical or vocational education. Both primary and lower secondary education together which comprise a total of five years, account for basic education in Iran and are mandatory. When students complete upper secondary education after having gained academic education in the former, they must enroll in a pre-university course which lasts for about a year if they want to enter university.

However, those students who chose vocational or technical education can obtain the associate degree of technician by taking a certain two year course. Pre-university can be considered another level of education in the Iranian education system. Higher Education includes universities, colleges and other higher education centres which can offer bachelor, master and doctoral level degrees (UNESCO 2011).

In Pakistan, the education system is not as homogenous as Iran's because of the presence of private schools and Deeni Madaris however, according to Lynd (2007) school levels range from preprimary to higher. The preprimary education level includes children from the ages of three to five and although it was never considered a part of the schooling system in Pakistan, the National Education Policy 2009 recognizes it and the district and provisional governments were also provided with adequate funds for including preprimary or Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the schooling system. Most commonly, ECE is known as "*katchi*" class in the public sector schools (National Education Policy, 2009, p 27; Blood, 1994). Primary education in Pakistan like Iran, is from grades 1 to 5 and is for six to ten year old children; middle education comprises grades six to eight while secondary education is from grades nine to ten and higher secondary education from grades eleven to twelve (Lynd, 2007). Previously grades eleven and twelve were part of colleges but the National Education Policy (2009, p. 29) states that these two grades shall be

merged into the secondary schools. Higher education is beyond grade twelve and can go on for as many years as the kind of degree one wishes to acquire.

### **Education Sectors**

According to Kamyab (2004), the education sector in Iran is “highly centralized”. The Supreme Council of Education is the body which is related to the legal aspect of education in Iran and it approves all the policies and regulations which pertain to education till the secondary level. The Ministry of Education is responsible for almost everything concerned with primary and secondary education including, administration and finance.

However, it would be difficult for the Ministry to coordinate at the basic level and so it hires officials at the provincial and district levels, each with a different role, to ensure that everything runs smoothly. While the head of the Provincial Organization of Education is hired by the Minister of education, the head/director of the District Organization of Education is hired by the head of the Provincial Organization. At the higher education level, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology holds responsibility for the science, art and technology universities, while the Ministry of Health and Medical Education is responsible for medical schools and universities. Non formal vocational education is in the hands of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, while other basic non-formal education and literacy programmes is handled by the Literacy Movement Organization (UNESCO-IBE, 2011).

In Pakistan the education sector can be termed as “partially centralized”. According to the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, the provinces have been assigned with the matter of education. As a result, the provinces of Pakistan have their own departments of education headed by the Minister of Education, who along with the Provincial Education Secretary, is responsible for the administration of schools within his domain. After the Devolution of Power Ordinance 2001 however, much of the administrative powers of the provincial governments were passed on to the district governments with the authority to plan and make decisions, now vested to them (Riddell, 2006). The federal Ministry of Education is responsible for the

education of the areas under its administration and is the overall “policy-making, coordinating, and advisory authority” in the education sector. In particular, the Ministry of Education comprises of six wings and several other bodies and is responsible for making sure that the education sector runs smoothly and that there is uniformity in the entire education system of the country. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) is the main body responsible for private and public higher level education in Pakistan. Some of its responsibilities include the funding of higher education institutions, policy formulation, planning and maintenance of quality throughout the higher education sector.

Hence, while the education sector of Iran is highly centralized, the education sector of Pakistan is decentralized. Decentralization aims to promote “transparency and accountability” (Riddell, 2006 p.10) but in the case of Pakistan, as stated in the new National Education Policy (2009, p 27) a problem that has been noted as a result of devolution and decentralization is the lack of clearly assigned roles and responsibilities at the federal, provincial and district level; this overlap of roles and responsibilities is creating redundancy, inefficiency and a misuse of resources within the sector. Moreover, a portion of private schools and Deeni Madaris which constitute the private sector of Pakistan’s education system, remain unregistered with the provincial authorities and so do not fall within the parameters of the presiding educational bodies in the country. This further complicates matters as these schools do not coordinate with the educational authorities and follow their own rules and regulations (Ministry of Education 2009).

### **Universal Primary Education**

For those who realize the value of education, it is not a surprise that the entire globe is heading towards achieving the goal of universal primary education in the twenty first century. Primary education, in particular has been stressed upon by international organizations because they realize that it sets one on the path of economic prosperity. Bruns, Mingat and Rakotomalala (2003, pp. 26-28) assert the importance of primary education in their paper by giving empirical evidence

of how it has benefited in the past. They state how primary education improves individual incomes and helps in achieving a global private return of twenty-seven percent. Primary education also leads to more technological advancement and higher levels of productivity from the labor force. It is most definitely positively correlated to economic growth and is the stepping stone for further education. Interestingly, it has also been noted that primary education can also lead to politically stable countries and greater management of natural resources which includes the protection of the tropical rain forest! In short, primary education is crucial in bridging the gap between the haves and the have nots and countries all over the world are realizing this. Due to the importance of primary education, one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is to make sure that girls and boys everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling by 2015 and both Pakistan and Iran have pledged to it.

Similarly, the Dakar Framework of Action for Education for All (EFA) states that all children, particularly the marginalized ones – girls, ethnic minorities and so on – will have the opportunity to complete primary education by 2015; it further states that this primary education will be free and compulsory (Bruns, Mingat & Rakotomalala 2003, p 25). Both Pakistan and Iran have also committed to achieving this goal of primary education for all. In Iran, according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2010) statistics, the primary school gross enrolment ratio for boys is 102% while that of girls is 103%; in Pakistan, the situation is not so rosy – for the same year, UNICEF gives the primary school gross enrolment ratio at 92% for boys and 77% for girls. The gross primary enrolment ratio (GER) is achieved by dividing the total population of primary school children by the number of children studying at the primary level “regardless of age”.

Hence, while Iran seems to have achieved the MDG and Dakar Framework Goals well before the targeted year, Pakistan is reeling behind and making desperate attempts to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In fact one of reasons the new educational policy of 2009 was created was to meet the MDG and Dakar Framework Goals.

However, as of today, there is a zero percent chance of Pakistan achieving primary education for all which has been admitted by government and implied in the recent national education policy (MDG Goals Report 2010, in Pakistan Education Task Force 2011, Ministry of Education 2009, p 28). One of the reasons why Pakistan will never be able to achieve universal primary education by 2015, is because one out of ten children who are not in primary schools globally, belong to Pakistan. This shocking ratio was calculated from the 2010 statistics of the World Bank by the Pakistan Education Task Force (2011). Hence if 3.1 million boys and 4.2 million girls are not in schools in Pakistan by 2010, a miracle could only ensure their completion of primary education by 2015. And while primary education in Pakistan is at such a low level, it is has the highest percentage of enrolment compared to other levels of education in the country (Lynd 2007).

This further indicates how the education system of Pakistan as a whole is incapable of performing its duties for the masses. If we consider the case of Iran, we learn that Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) which is calculated by dividing the country's primary school going children of the right age, with the entire population of children of that age, has steadily increased over the years. If we take the NER from 1990 to 1998, it has steadily increased from about 92% to 98% respectively. This increase, given that Iran also has marginalized areas, can be attributed to various efforts made by the state. Achieving this phenomenal success in primary education has not been easy for Iran and it has had to make a lot of efforts culturally, socially and physically to achieve the aforementioned.

From redirecting pupils from isolated villages to populated ones, establishing primary classes even in schools where the maximum number of students are 7, increasing the intake of 6 year olds, incentivizing transfers of teachers from urban to rural areas, creating equal educational opportunities in all provinces to changing the mindset of people about education and enabling more girls to acquire education by opening all girls schools and shutting co-educational ones, Iran has directed all its efforts towards achieving universal primary education (Sadri, 1999).

### Quality of Education

Quality of education can be determined by a number of factors such as teaching facilities, teachers, textbooks and curriculum. However, this paper will look at one of the factors- teachers because according to Andrabi *et al.* (2007, p 58) years of research have revealed that a school with “leaking roofs, no textbooks, and uninvolved parents can still produce good learning outcomes for students if the teacher is motivated and committed”. In Iran, there is lot of attention given to the standard of teaching. Therefore it is a prerequisite for teachers to acquire qualifications of a certain level in order to begin teaching.

Furthermore teacher-training centres (TTC’s) have been established all over the country and are responsible for training teachers at the primary and lower secondary level training; these TTCs provide certificates which equip teachers with the skills and knowledge that will help them in teaching Teachers at public schools are employees of the state and many steps are taken to ensure that teachers are satisfied with their profession and continue to teach with dedication; one of the steps taken to ensure this, is competitive salaries – similar to those of public employees (UNESCO-IBE 2011).

According to Sadri (1999), Iran took many more initiatives such as the establishment of in-service training centres, collaboration with the University of Iran to provide training in various fields, allotting funds for short and long term courses and formulation of policies to promote high standards of teaching. And as a result of such endeavors, all public school teachers had acquired certificates to teach at the primary level in the late twentieth century.

In Pakistan, public schools are not the predominant source of education as in the case of Iran. According to Lynd (2007) private basic education enrolls more students compared to most other countries and only ten countries that having a larger population than Pakistan, have a higher enrolment rate in private primary and the status of teacher training in these schools is below par. Approximately more than half the proportion of teachers in private schools are untrained and do not have any professional qualification.

However, in public schools, the situation is not so deplorable and teachers do bear a professional qualification with only 5% having no training. The presence of trained and qualified teachers in the public sector however can be questioned given that the latest National Education Policy (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 33) considers the improvement in teaching standards one of the crucial factors in the improvement of the overall quality of education in Pakistan. One of the reforms suggested in the new National Education Policy for the improvement of the quality of teachers is their salary. However, a comparison of the salaries of public and private school teachers in the LEAPS report (2007) shows those government teachers are paid three to four times more than private teachers (Andrabi *et al.* 2007 p. 59).

Moreover, the Pakistan Education Task Force’s report (2011, p 68) also states that a public teacher earns four times as much as the average parent, a ratio calculated after gathering information from reliable sources. The belief that public school teachers in Pakistan are not underpaid is also validated by the serious issue of “ghost schools” that are thronging within Pakistan. These ghost schools, as the name suggests, are virtually non-existent, mere school buildings or not even those, where there are neither students nor teachers. Such schools merely exist “on paper” to get government funds for teachers’ salaries. In some cases, teachers are working elsewhere but are getting salaries from the ghost schools as well which makes their salaries double (Save the Children 2010). A recent case of teachers getting salaries from ghost schools was exposed in Balochistan where teachers in the province’s ghost schools were paid salaries approved by the “higher-ups” in the National Education Foundation (NEF) (Muhammad 2012).

### Language

The official language of Iran is Farsi Persian and it is the language used in schools apart from the media and the government (UCLA, Language Materials Projects, n.d.). Though foreign language is introduced at the secondary level, it is not limited to English (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). In fact, the Ministry of Education most recently introduced five more languages in schools- German, Italian,

Spanish, Russian, and French; the ministry does not feel any qualms in stating that these new languages have been introduced apart from English so as to break the dominance or monopoly of the English language (Tehran Times 2012). It should be reiterated at this point that after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, all that was considered Western or modern and had been promoted by the Shah was purged to a great extent and to date, Iran tries its best to get rid of Western influence in the education system (Erdbrink, 2011; Morita, 2002). With respect to Pakistan and its stance on the medium of instruction in schools, it is quite obvious that preference is given to English. The National Education Policy (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 19-20) accepts that it is an obstacle for individuals who lack English language skills to find a well paying job and that it is the distinguishing factors in Pakistan between the elite and non-elite.

Hence, a few of the policy actions that have been stated after asserting that English is one of the causes of differences in the level of education, is the provision of English language learning opportunities for the economically disadvantaged as well as making English the medium of instruction from beginning from class six in the sciences and mathematics. Before class six however, the policy states that it is up to the different provinces to decide what the language of instruction shall be.

It seems that Pakistan is still haunted by its colonial past whereby preference is given to English language and this preference is further strengthened by the increase in globalization. There have been times when Urdu was promoted such as the 1960's when pro-Urdu activities were initiated and Zia's regime when Urdu was made the language of instruction and English medium schools were shut. However, the current educational policy speaks of the value of English and unlike Iran's schools, the national language is not the preferred medium of instruction in Pakistan irrespective of the fact that according to the World Data on Education concerning Pakistan (2011, p 3). Urdu is spoken and understood by 75% of Pakistanis. A problem does encounter Iran's schools where Persian is used as the medium of instruction and non-Persian speaking students are numerous, the problem is one which is centered around

the languages spoken within the country such as Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and so on (Hameedy, 2005); it is not an issue that concerns a foreign language such as is the case of Pakistan.

### **Education of Women**

Education of women is imperative for a nation. It does not only lead to women's empowerment and equality between the sexes which is also one of the Millennium Development Goals, but is also necessary for ensuring a healthy nation. According to Bruns, Mingat and Rakotomalala (2003, p. 28) research has shown that the education of females has led to improvement in health, productivity and nutrition.

Furthermore, female education has also improved family well-being and ensured a check on infant and child mortality rates. Like Pakistan, Iran has a predominantly Muslim population and religious and cultural taboos exist in both countries regarding the education of females. Problems such as that of co-educational schooling, dearth of female teachers in rural and village areas, families' preferences to keep girl in the house for babysitting and housekeeping or to use them to generate income for the house are some of the problems although mentioned in a report by Sadri (1999) occur in Pakistan as well.

However, the Ministry of education in Iran has tried to take many steps to overcome the aforementioned issues which are an obstacle in increasing the education of women. Some of the steps taken by the Ministry of Education on behalf of the state which led to an increase in the Net Enrolment Ratio between the years 1990-1998 from 88.4% in 1990 to 95.3% in 1998 can be attributed to the establishment of all girls schools and the closure of coeducational ones, hiring more female applicants for local teacher training courses and most importantly changing the mindset of parents regarding the education of their children to help overcome their reservations regarding the education of females (Sadri, 1999). These efforts and many others, have led to the increase in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of females in primary schools to a 102% in 2010 according to UNICEF and in 2005 the Gender Parity Index (GPI) which can be defined as the ratio of females to males in Iran in 2009 according

to the UN was 0.99 at the primary level and 0.95 at the secondary level, both of which are healthy ratios since 1 means an equal ratio of females and males in schools. In retrospect, it is true that the revolution that took place in Iran played a great role in raising the literacy rate of female education throughout the country. All primary and secondary schools were made separate for boys and girls after the revolution and since this move was not pre-planned, for some time classes for boys took place in the morning while those for girls took place in the evening since school buildings fell short after coeducational schools were banned (Morita, 2002, p 77).

Apart from this, post revolution policies included the assignment of female teachers for female students and male teachers for males students, changing textbook content and illustrations to represent the role of men and women in Iran, making veils compulsory for females students and directing females to acquire education in fields suitable for their sex (Mehran, 2003, p. 19).

However, female education has also passed through many phases after the revolution and the divide between female and male oriented fields of study does not exist anymore. According to Wright, (2000, p 143) and thousands of women in Iran are engineers, doctors, scientists, lawyers and even clerics. Women have also become prominent in fields that are uncommon and are writers, directors, artists, photographers, painters, athletes and so on. Women entering all sorts of professions have eliminated the "stereotypical image" of women and have further motivated families to educate their daughters (Mehran, 2003, p. 18).

In Pakistan, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for females at primary level was 77%, while the GPI for primary level enrolment was 0.84 and 0.79 for secondary level enrolment (UN Data 2012). The aforementioned indicators are evidence of the deplorable level of women's education in Pakistan and the fact that Iran fares better than Pakistan in the education of women.

Choudhry (2005) while listing the illiterates of Pakistan includes women and girls in the list. He states how the enrolment rates of women are low at all levels of schooling, how only one-third of the school facilities and teachers cater to women's education and how social

and cultural taboos impede the education of women in the country. Choudhry's inclusion of women in the list of illiterates apart from ethnic minorities, rural people, the poor and disadvantaged, throws light on the Constitution of Pakistan and how its commitment to education in the form of Article 38d which ensures provision of education to all and Article 34 which states that women should equally represented in all walks of life, has sadly not been met. The 2009 National Education Policy of Pakistan also admits to the fact that gender equity is lacking in the education sector of Pakistan by referring to several figures and recognized that the reason behind this has been the lack of implementation and debilitating social customs.

## DISCUSSION

The comparison of Pakistan and Iran's education system reveals that Pakistan is lagging behind Iran in the educational domain. While Iran can attribute its rise in literacy rates to the revolution which took place in 1979, Pakistan has had no such historical event which could help to improve its education system. In fact lack of political stability and intermittent military rules have done more towards harming the education system of Pakistan than improving it.

Moreover, Pakistan's legacy of colonialism has left it in awe of English such that most it is thought above Urdu and the other local language; this in turn is creating disparities within the education system of Pakistan. Indicators such as low primary school enrolment, disparity in female enrolment rates and a substandard level of teaching staff in Pakistan as opposed to Iran can be attributed to many reasons: For one thing, Pakistan's budget for education far below Iran's; while Pakistan barely spent 2.69% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Iran was spending a total of 4.68% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education as of 2009 (trading economics 2012). And although the cabinet approved increasing the percentage of GDP to 7% after approving the new National Education Policy (Ghumman, 2009) the results are yet to be seen. Having a larger population than Iran and lesser expenditure on education, it is not a surprise that Pakistan is below Iran in education. Moreover, high dropout rates which Bray (1983) had

mentioned in his article, still exist to date. According to the new educational policy, about 31% children dropped out from primary levels and 16% dropped out from the subsequent, middle, secondary and higher secondary level during the 2004-2005 academic year (Ministry of Education 2009, p 61).

Another reason for Pakistan's low literacy level is the lack of accountability within the education system. This lack of accountability has led to the rise in thousands of "ghost schools" which although non-functional, are getting government funding for teachers. About 30,000 ghost schools have been found all over Pakistan (Nooani n.d.). Such schools are counterproductive to Pakistan's educational growth as fruitful expenditure on education is further reduced. Iran is alien to the concept of ghost schools which indicates more accountability within the education system compared to Pakistan. While most of the schools in Iran are public schools run by the state (Mehran, 2003, p. 11), Pakistan has both private and public schools where public schools account for 64% of the total enrolment while the remaining 34% are in the hands of the private sector. This ratio speaks of the inability of the state to provide education to the Pakistani population (Ministry of Education 2009). Perhaps if only one political party in power had truly understood the importance of education, it would have increased its educational capacity as in the case of Iran after the 1979 revolution.

### Limitations

It is noteworthy that while this paper comprehensively makes a comparison of the Iranian and Pakistani education system, it has suffered from certain limitations. Firstly this research paper has been compiled on the basis of secondary data and therefore lacks any personal first hand data. Addition of such data could have added further reliability of this paper although the sources used have been highly reliable. Secondly, although a lot of data could be obtained on regarding education in Pakistan, was a limited data back of information concerning education in Iran. Thirdly, a lot of data concerning Iran to a major extent and Pakistan to a minor extent could not be included in the paper because of its lack of objectivity.

### Implications

This paper has serious implications for Pakistan as it shows how Pakistan's stagnancy in the education sector could have grave consequences for the future of the country. Concerned officials as well as intellectuals must actually be proactive in improving Pakistan's literacy level as the time for drafting policy statements does not exist anymore. All resources must be mustered towards the cause of bringing Pakistan at par at least with countries it is economically competitive with in education and much can be learnt from the case of Iran. Furthermore, in the wake of globalization and international stress on education (in the form of MDGs and the Dakar Framework for Action) Pakistan needs to make a Herculean and sincere effort in improving literacy because it leads to stability and prosperity as can be seen in from Iran. Given that Iran and Pakistan are neighboring countries, collaborative efforts between both the countries should be increased so that Pakistan can benefit from the wealth of education in Iran.

### Future Recommendations

Further research can be conducted based on first hand or primary data. Moreover, research on how collaboration between countries has improved literacy rates can also be conducted.

### CONCLUSION

A comparison of the education system in Iran and Pakistan was drawn in this paper. This comparison proved really helpful in determining the situation of both the countries—where Iran's endeavor to improve education in the country has led to quantitative and qualitative improvements within the country while Pakistan's faces a serious predicament in its education scenario. In particular, literature indicates that while Iran is within the target of universal primary education, Pakistan will not be able to meet its goal; the standard of teachers in Iran is improved through training centres and qualifications but in Pakistan teacher quality is in need of serious reforms; Iran uses Persian as the medium of instruction in all its schools but Pakistani schools face a language dilemma; and while Iran's women enjoy high literacy rates, Pakistan has not been able to provide

its women with equal educational opportunities. The comparisons have also been made in the light of the history of both the countries, where Iran's education system was positively affected by its revolution, while Pakistan's history of political instability has negatively impacted education within the country.

## REFERENCES

- Ali, A.K. 2010. *Iranian Women after the Islamic Revolution*, Conflicts Forum.
- Andrabi, T., Das, J., Khwaja, A.I., Vishwanath, T. and Zajonc, T. 2007. *Pakistan Learning and Educational Achievements in Punjab Schools (LEAPS): Insights to inform the educational policy debate*, Washington DC: World Bank, viewed 10 June 2012, <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PAKISTANEXTN/Resources/Publicationsand-Reports/367132-1208398596098/2008LEAPS.pdf>>.
- Ashraf, H. 2006. 'A Study of English Language Learning as an Element Affecting the Social Capital of the People of Pakistan', National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad.
- BBC News, 2012. *Iran profile*, BBC News, viewed 1 June 2012, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14542438>>.
- BBC News, 2012. *Pakistan profile*, BBC News, viewed 1 June 2012, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12966786>>.
- Blood, P. (ed.) 1994. *Pakistan: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington, viewed 2 June 2012, <<http://countrystudies.us/pakistan/>>.
- Bray, M. 1983. 'Universal Education in Pakistan: A Perpetually Elusive Goal?', *International Review of Education*, 29(2): 168-178.
- Choudhry, M.A. 2005. *Pakistan: where and who are the world's illiterates?*, Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006 Literacy for Life.
- CSF and J.E. Austin Associates Inc. (JAA), 2010. *The State of Pakistan's Competitiveness Report 2010-2011*, Competitiveness Support Fund and J.E. Austin Associates Inc, Washington.
- Erdbrink, T. 2011. 'Iran overhauls education system to erase Western influences', *The Washington Post*, viewed 26 May 2012, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/01/AR2011010101345.html>>.
- Geographia, 2012. *Pakistan*, inter-Knowledge Corp., viewed 1 June 2012, <<http://www.geographia.com/pakistan/>>.
- Ghumman, K. 2009. 'Cabinet approves new policy: Literacy target 85pc by 2015: Education to get 7 pc of GDP', *Dawn*, viewed 30 May 2012, <<http://archives.dawn.com/archives/42044>>.
- Hameedy, M.A. 2005. 'Bilingualism of Home and School in Iran: Conditions and Consequences as Showcased in PIRLS' *Social Science Journal*, No, 54. University of Azzahra, Iran.
- Kamyab, S. 2004. 'Education in Iran : An Overview', *College and University Journal*, 79(4).
- Lynd, D. 2007. *The Education System in Pakistan: Assessment of the National Education Census*, UNESCO, Islamabad.
- Mehran, G. 2003. *Gender and education in Iran*, Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, "The Leap to Equality".
- Metz, H.C. (ed.) 1987. *Iran: A Country Study*, GPO for the Library of Congress, Washington, viewed 1 June 2012, <<http://countrystudies.us/iran/>>.
- Ministry of Education, 2009. *National Education Policy*, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.
- Morita, T. 2002. 'Islam, Education, and Human Right in Iran', *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, 5.
- Muhammad, P. 2012. 'Balochistan NEF initiative: School teachers keep pocketing salaries', *The Express Tribune*, viewed 9 June 2012, <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/319130/balochistan-nef-initiative-school-teachers-keep-pocketing-salaries/>>.
- Nisar, Z. 2012. 'History Of Pakistan', *All About Pakistani*, weblog, viewed 1 June 2012, <<http://allaboutpakistan.wordpress.com/2012/03/11/history-of-pakistan/>>.
- Noorani, D.M. n.d., *Education in Pakistan: A Looming Crisis*, The Citizens Foundation, viewed 30 May 2012, <[http://www.tcfusa.org/news\\_and\\_resouces.php](http://www.tcfusa.org/news_and_resouces.php)>.
- Riddell, A. 2006. *Decentralization of Education in Pakistan*, UNESCO, Paris.
- Sadri, A. 1999. *The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Reports*, Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Iran, viewed 3 June 2012, <<http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/iran/contents.html#cont>>.
- Save the Children, 2010. *Case studies on the role of politicization of education in conflict-affected countries'* Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011.
- Social Desk, 2012. 'Iran to introduce 5 new foreign languages in schools', *Tehran Times*, viewed 9 June 2012, <<http://www.tehrantimes.com/component/content/article/66-iran-social/96996-iran-to-introduce-5-new-foreign-languages-in-schools>>.
- The Pakistan Education Task Force, 2011. *Education Emergency Pakistan*, viewed 30 May 2012, <[educationemergency.com.pk](http://educationemergency.com.pk)>.
- UN Data, 2012. *Gender Parity Index in primary level enrolment*, United Nations Statistics Division, viewed 9 June 2012, <<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=GENDER+PARITY+INDEX+primary+level+enrolment+iran&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a611%3bcountryID%3a364>>.
- UNESCO-IBE, 2011. *World Data on Education 2010-2011*, UNESCO, viewed 1 June 2012, <[unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211304e.pdf](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211304e.pdf)>.

UNESCO-IBE, 2011. *World Data on Education 2010-2011*, UNESCO, viewed 10 June 2012, < [www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/.../WDE/.../Pakistan.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/.../WDE/.../Pakistan.pdf)>.

UNICEF 2010. *Iran Islamic Republic of-Statistics*, UNICEF, viewed 1 June 2012, <[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran_statistics.html)>

UNICEF, 2005. *Gender Parity and Primary Education*, No. 2, The United Nations Children's Fund, viewed 9 June 2012, <<http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2005n2/gender.php>>.

UNICEF, 2010. *Pakistan-Statistics*, UNICEF viewed 1 June 2012, <[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/pakistan\\_pakistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/pakistan_pakistan_statistics.html)>.

Wright, R. 2000. 'Iran's New Revolution', *Foreign Affairs*, **79**(1): 133-145.