

A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE NEED OF MASJID MAKTAB SCHOOLS: A COST EFFECTIVE MODEL FOR UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE PROVINCE OF PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: *This study explored effectiveness and importance of Masjid Maktab Schools in Pakistan. Being signatory of UN declarations, Pakistan is bound to achieve 100% enrolment at primary school level by the end of 2015. But the target seems to remain a dream till the end of year. This lagging behind is due to many factors which need to be addressed timely, otherwise the current situation can prevail long for the years to come. Financial constraints contribute to worsen the situation. The experiment of Masjid Maktab schools of 1978 was cost effective to achieve the goal of 100% literacy rate. The original idea of Masjid School was up to class three, but it should be increased up to fifth grade so as to achieve the goal. This idea needs its resurrection with some modifications due to many reasons. This study was qualitative in its nature and aimed at exploring in depth views of major stakeholders with the major focus on the research questions. In depth interviews and focus group discussion were arranged to gather in depth view of the stakeholders. About thirty representatives of Parents, teachers, Qaris, Imam Masjids, community members and of non Muslims were sample of this study. Thematic analysis was done to reach some conclusions. Most of the respondents declared it cost effective as no new physical infrastructure is required. Imam Masjids are always ready to work at low salaries. Local participation will ensure success rate of the idea and modern education will prevail in a local context. This idea can minimize the power of opposing elements against literacy campaigns and that of formal schools. Most of the times, Imam Masjid is the centre of this distracting movement. These can be used as an oppressive instrument against such negativity. The literacy rate can be enhanced even in the remote areas as Masaajid are located everywhere in the country. Masjid committees comprising local members will be available to look after matters and solve related issues at local level which will bring a new model of check and balance system. This will present a unique combination of modern as well as traditional forms of studies.*

Keywords: *Literacy, Primary Level, Imam Masjid, Maktab School, Education, Stakeholders*

INTRODUCTION

Islam gives much importance to acquisition of knowledge and considers ignorance as an antithesis to Islam [1, 2]. If the present system of education of any Muslim country is not fulfilling the needs of the country, then old system of education given by the great Muslim scholars should be implemented which kept them above all in scholarship. Khan [2] has rightly pointed out this fact in the words: "Islam was not merely a set of rituals, but a code of life which encompassed the whole spectrum of moral, spiritual, social, cultural, political, economic and legal values....The tragedy is that due to ignorance or a bias motivated by political and economic dominance of other nations, Muslim educationists had adopted an attitude of denial of the system through which they themselves had attained the worldly heights."

The oppressors themselves admit the fact, as Lord Macaulay[3] in his Minutes of Education said: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". So the English intentionally spoiled our traditional system of education which was based on Mosques and Madaris[1]. The British snatched the rule from the Muslim Emperors, so they always were afraid of Muslims. They intentionally propagated that Islamic education system was less productive because they wanted them to remain illiterate. The missionary schools were established as a strategy to make local people submissive to the British [1].

Looking back at history, there were about nine Mosques in the city of Madina and twenty in the surrounding Arab areas during the period of the Holy Prophet, where education was being provided along with the boarding and lodging facilities [4].

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic State and is bound to provide its citizens an atmosphere where the rules of Islam can be practiced freely in the light of Objectives Resolution placed as preamble of Constitution of Pakistan. According to article 25-A of The Constitution [9] it is mandatory for the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children between 5 to 16 years of age. The wording of this Article is given below: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such a manner as may be determined by law".

However, Pakistan remained unable to achieve the target of 100% literacy rate set forth by the constitution and forced by the international commitments time and again. According to a report of Economic Survey of Pakistan [5] 43% people in the country were illiterate, and only 57% children of age 5-9 were enrolled in primary schools. Hence, some alternate and permanent solution to the problem of illiteracy looks mandatory. Use of Mosques to impart knowledge is time tested and fruitful in terms of efficacy and reliability [2, 4, 18, 22]. The present study is an effort in the same direction as it explores traces from Islamic history and in depth views of representatives of major stakeholders regarding effectiveness of Mosque schools for reduction of prevailing sinister illiteracy.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Islam teaches its followers to acquire knowledge and wisdom from cradle to grave. The importance of education in Islam can be judged from the fact that the very first word revealed in Holy Quran was "Iqra" which means "read". Education is a religious obligation for Muslims without any discrimination on the basis of gender, race or creed. According to Islam getting education is vital for its followers and they are ordered to seek knowledge from any part of the world. Islam has guided its followers to seek worldly knowledge through experiences and spiritual knowledge revealed in the form of the Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)[6]. In the early days of Islam Mosque was the centre of education [7, 22].

Education is thought to be among the best tools of the world to resolve issues at all levels. Education, if provided on strong footings, brings prosperity and development in any society of the world [1]. Keeping in view this importance of education, the world community acknowledged the basic education as the right of every human being on this planet and stressed upon all the societies to make proper arrangements for access to free basic education to all the citizens of any nation[8]. All the 189 member countries of UNO felt the importance of education in the Millennium Summit in the year 2000 and established eight goals for comprehensive development throughout the world. Achieving the target of Universal Primary Education by the end of the year 2015, secured second position in all the eight Millennium Development Goals and also a prominent position in action framework. Resultantly Early Childhood Education and Universal Primary Education movements came forwarded. These movements stressed upon the developing nations to make special arrangements with respect to education and health related aspect of their people.

According to MDGs, Pakistan needs to achieve 100% literacy rate by the end of 2015[9, 10]. However, the available figures present an alarming situation in this regard. According to Pakistan Economic Survey report for the year 2012-13, net national primary level enrolment rate by the year 2011-12 for children (5-9 years) was 57% and for the Punjab province 64%. Male literacy rate for national level was calculated to be 60% and for Punjab 65%, whereas female literacy rate for children (5-9 years) was calculated to be 54% and 62% at national and Punjab level respectively^[9]. The progress to achieve the goal is much slower as the net primary enrolment rate (5-9 years) was 42% in 2001-02, 52% in 2004-05, 55% in 2007-08, 56% in 2010-11 and 57% in 2011-12. More regretfully, the completion/survival rate of grade 1 to 5 shrank instead of expansion as it was 57.3% in 2001-2, 67.1% in 2004-05, 52.3% in 2007-08, 49% in 2010-11^[9]. The present literacy rate of Pakistan is nearly 56% and on the health and education sectors, it is lagging behind other neighboring countries like India, China, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka on (GCI) the Global Competitiveness Index [11].

Reasons of Lagging Behind

Pakistan is spending 2.09% of its GDP, which is quite less than its neighboring countries [12]. Number of primary schools was decreased by 3.8% over the period of six years from 2007-08 to 2012-13. The reasons for this decline include merger of some schools due to lack of teachers or

lack of enrolment and closing of some other schools due to their non-functional status [12].

Limited budgetary provisions, lack of schools, lack of reliable statistics and research, wadera system, weak community participation, poor follow up of programmes, dependence on foreign aid, over-crowded classrooms, corruption and lack of adequate facilities such as clean water, electricity etc. are some of the causes of high illiteracy rate in our country.

This low literacy rate is always coupled with many problems in the society. Overpopulation, infant and maternal mortality rate, unskilled workforce, low per capita income, political instability in the country, child labour and poor international image of the country are some of the prominent effects of illiteracy prevailing since long in the country[13].

How to Bridge the Gap

Syed, Asif, & Yousaf^[10] presented three options for providing Primary Education for every child near his or her residential area. These options include (i) using government buildings available in the vicinity which are in the usage of VIPs, (ii) motivating philanthropists to provide land or arrange for buildings and (iii) using mosques as primary schools and literacy centers for adults.

The idea of using Mosque schools is not new and same was endorsed in most of the national education policies and Five Year Plans [2]. The Islamic History is full of examples which describe the presence of Mosque school from very initial period of Madina. Government of Pakistan through its National Education Policy (1998-2010) recommended to expand the existing programme entitled Non Formal Basic Education (NFBFE) to a larger scale, by opening 75,000 new NFBFE Community Schools during the next three years. This programme recommended the use of mosques as NFBFE Community Schools[14,19].

Idea of Maktab Schools

Schools for elementary education were termed as *Maktab*s whereas *Masjid* (Mosque) became the place for higher learning in Indian subcontinent before the emergence of madrassahs. These Maktab were informal institutions of learning^[15].

The Government of Pakistan aimed to establish 5000 new Mosque schools for boys in its National Education Policy and Implementation Programme of 1979[4,16]. Again special focus was given to utilization of mosques to accommodate students from class one to class three in the sixth five year plan (1983-88) of the Government of Pakistan^[4]. National Literacy Plan (1984-86) aimed at establishing 4000 Mosque Literacy Centres under supervision of Auqaf Department. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-98) declared that Mosque schools will be opened for smaller settlements having a minimum of 25 children of primary school age. Once again National Education Policy (1998-2010) took stock of the situation and declared that there were 37000 mosque schools at that time and stressed upon utilization of these Mosque schools to increase literacy rate[4].

Formation of Maktab Schools

Maktab schools are established in mosques and no new infrastructure like buildings, water and sanitation arrangements are required. The sitting arrangements are already there in the mosques. The teachers will be provided by the government and Qari Sahib should be nominated by

the local community. Both will be paid by the local Government. Local community members, including members of mosque committee will supervise the education system and will make arrangements to ensure 100% enrolment of the native children.

Benefits of Maktab Schools

Maktab schools are need of the hour and are important for many reasons [2, 18]. NFBE programmes are flexible and cost effective [13]. They are cost effective as no recurring and new expenditure is required in the head of building maintenance and renovation. The education will be according to the real needs of the society as ethics, moral values and spiritual training will be the part of curriculum of such schools. Adult literacy program can be run in the evenings as most of the adults are free at this time and the goal of 100% literacy rate cannot be achieved without adult literacy programs. Adults will not hesitate coming mosques as they can hesitate to go to school for learning in their old age [21]. Local participation will check the absenteeism, both for teachers and students. Moral values will prevail in the learners of Maktab systems. With the help of regular training of Qari Sahib, extremist elements will channelized to bring positive change in the society and the atmosphere of terrorism will come to an end.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research study is an effort to find some workable and cost effective solution to the problem of low literacy rate in the province. Hence the objectives of this study include to:

- (i). Explore the views of Imam Masjids and Ulema about the effectiveness of Masjid Maktab Schools.
- (ii). Explore the views of Teachers about the effectiveness of Masjid Maktab Schools.
- (iii). Explore the views of Parents about the effectiveness of Masjid Maktab Schools.
- (iv). Explore possibility of implementation of Masjid Maktab Schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions to elicit responses from the sample of the study include (i) How do the teachers perceive effectiveness of Masjid Maktab Schools? (ii) How do the parents perceive the idea of Masjid Maktab Schools? (iii) What are the views of Imam Masjids regarding Masjid Maktab Schools? (iv) What are the views of stakeholders about implementing the idea of Masjid Maktab Schools in the country?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is qualitative in its nature and aims at eliciting in depth responses of major stakeholders regarding need and effectiveness of Masjid Maktab Schools. The sample of the study includes Imam Masjids, Ulama (religious scholars), teachers and parents of the students. About 10 Imam Masjids, Ulama, 10 teachers, five parents and five non Muslims were interviewed. The views of the respondents were gathered with the help of semi structured interview schedule. The sample of the study was taken conveniently. However, the researchers tried their best to make the sample true representation of the population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews were transcribed into written documents and analyzed descriptively and thematically. Ten teachers (33%), ten Qaris, Imams and Ulama (33%) and five parents (17%) and five non Muslims (17%) were interviewed for

the purpose. Keeping in view the importance of topic, almost every one fully cooperated the researchers. They were asked some leading questions which further facilitated the interview procedure. The thematic analysis of these questions is given below:

Education in the Mosque

All the respondents were asked the question "Is education of children allowed in the mosque?" all of the respondents replied yes to this question. There was no discrimination among teachers, parents and religious leaders on the permissibility of educational activities in the boundaries of mosques. One of the teachers argued: "The non-Muslims are doing the same in their churches and monasteries and their missionary organization are well established all over the world including our own country. They are getting tremendous results and their institutes are much established that some of the Muslim parents prefer to send their children in those institutes like Convent, St. Marry, Catholic and such other schools."

Almost all of the teachers requested the government to start primary level education in mosques. One of the religious leaders argued in the words: The very first school of the Islamic History was established in the Holy Mosque of the Holy Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) with the name of Suffah. It is proved by the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him). Hence, there should not be any question regarding education of the children in the mosques.

One of the parents said that schooling up to primary level should be in the mosques. This has many benefits. The students will learn basics of our religion and will become responsible citizens. He further added that, "This is already in practice in almost all of the villages, especially and in some of the city mosques that children come twice in the mosques for their lessons of the Holy Quran."

Permission to Come in Mosque

The participants were asked about the possibility of regular attendance of children in the mosque. Their replies were encouraging. One of the Qaris said, "Our own madaris are working in mosques and we are providing religious education like Hifz-e-Quran in these mosques without any hesitation. Therefore, there should be no question about education of children in the mosques."

However, one of the Parents questioned the sanctity of the mosques as these are places of worship for the Muslims. Again, one of the Ulama responded to the question and replied that children would be taught to remain pure and clean. "They would be taught rules and regulation of coming mosques. This would be an extra benefit for students to learn how to remain neat and clean in the home of their Lord and they will become gradually pure at both body and soul."

Type of Education

The next question was asked "What type of education can be given in the mosques?" the thematic analysis of the responses clarify that parents, teachers and religious leaders have the same views regarding the nature of education. The participants of the study think the every type of education can be taught in mosques. Only those types of education are not permitted in mosques which are unlawful and forbidden for the Muslims to learn e.g. music. Except for forbidden genres, every type of education can be provide to children at primary level in mosques. One of the Ulama

said, "Any type of education can be given to students in mosques under the direct supervision of teachers except for those who are (Ghair Sharee) unlawful. Islam motivates its followers to impart every type of beneficial education and knowledge to the coming generation so that they can survive in a respectful manner in the family of nations of this world."

Types of Subjects

Next, the participants were asked about the range of subjects to be taught at primary level in mosque schools. The variety of subjects was told by the respondents. However, there was no discrimination among the respondents regarding teaching of English, Mathematics, Urdu, Quranic Studies. One of the respondents said, "The education should be given in mother language. Teaching of Holy Quran with its meaning and thought should be compulsory in these schools. The stories of heroes of Islam should be included in text books."

Another respondent requested in the words, "The lessons should be changed. The stories that prosper English culture should be replaced with local stories and stories from Islamic and Pakistani perspective. Moral Values and Ethics should be taught at length and students should be trained with examples of teachers. The ablution (Wazu) and prayers at time will teach punctuality."

One of the Qari Sahibs said that in their time of schooling, a regular program entitled "Bazm-e-Adab" was compulsory on every Friday. This was helpful for students in many ways. They could learn delivering speech, recitation, facing audience and could participate in many quiz programs. This activity must be included in "Nisab" curriculum.

One of the senior teachers stressed upon including science subjects in the curriculum. Science subjects should be given proper importance in the curriculum as children have a more investigative approach and can learn science in an interactive way. The science education must be part of regular curriculum[17].

Education of Girls in Mosque

Next question was about education of girls in the mosques. The respondents gave different possibilities for the purpose. However, none of the respondents opposed the idea of teaching girls in the mosques up to primary level. One of the parents said, "Every village and city has more one mosque. One of these mosques can be used as boy's primary school and the other can be used as girl's primary school. This will allow female teachers and students to work with full freedom."

One of the serving teachers gave his views regarding this issue in the words, "Combined education for both girls and boys is already in practice at primary level. Therefore, it can be given at mosques as Quranic education is already given jointly in some of the mosques." One of the Ulema gave a different point of view in the words, "The existing primary schools should be specified for girls only and the boys of these schools should be shifted to mosque schools. This plan can work even for classes above primary level. And there would be no chance of traditional threats of mixing of boys and girls as well."

Timings of Schooling in Mosques

The respondents were united regarding this issue. Every one of them suggested that normal school timings should be regularized in mosque schools. However, students and teachers should say their prayer in congregation which will

create in them a sense of unity and sympathy. One of the female teachers added that these mosques can be used for adult literacy program in the evening as most of the adult persons are free at that time after earning their livelihood.

Role of Qari Sahib

The role of Qari Sahib will be very important in this regard. The thematic analysis of the responses reveals that Qari Sahib should be given due respect and responsibility in this regard. The respondents agreed that he must be nominated by the government and must be paid according to his duties by the government. The Qari Sahib will motivate neighboring parents for education of their children in these schools and will handle all the opposing elements at society level with the help of other members of the society. One of the female teachers stressed upon the training of Qari Sahib in her words, "He must be given proper training at some teacher training institute for short courses and must be issued a certificate for that. He must have some basic qualification, preferably matriculation as basic qualification for teaching. He should be paid salary, according nature of his job by the government as well. This will create a sense of responsibility and respect in his mind about his new assignment."

Some General Views

The respondents give other views as well. They urged upon active role of mosque in the society building and opposed the practice of locking mosques all the day. The mosque should play the role of community centre to nurture the coming generations on sound footing with high standard morality building. Maqsood [20], has also stressed upon the same role of mosques in UK. The majority of the respondents recommended regular funding from government to free the mosques from local control and sectarian groups. The participants urged for the implementation of this idea as the students will become more polite, civilized and enlightened. They will adopt habits of cleanliness and resultantly the mosques will also become more neat and clean due to regular usage. Generation gap can be mitigated as the elders attend the mosque five times a day and many cultural traditions are learnt without any serious effort. Most of the parents never go to the schools and are unaware of the progress and type of education imparted to their children. However, in mosque local participation can ensure the right type of education for the children. All the respondents agreed that this will be cost effective as no new infrastructure will be required. The mosques are regularly renovated; hence government will be free from such recurring expenditure. Mosque committees should be given the limited authority of check and balance. Being in the mosque will make teachers and students regular and punctual as they will have to avoid telling lies. Local participation will enhance literacy rate and the goal of 100% literacy seems achievable with the help of mosque schools. All of the respondents agreed to upgrade the level of Maktab school from class three to class five. There was consensus upon the cost effectiveness side of mosque schools.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of finding and thematic analysis of the responses, the researchers are able to conclude that mosque schools are the need of the hour to guarantee 100% literacy rate in the country. Mosque schools model is cost effective

and result oriented. There is no controversy among major stakeholders on the possibility of schooling in the mosques in the Punjab province. Modern education coupled with religious education can bring about a positive change in the society and eliminate extremism with the help of local participation. Training of Qari Sahibs will make them moderate and make them able to listen to views of different schools of thought. There is a dire need to promote this workable solution to the problem of achieving 100% literacy rate within shortest possible duration. Girls can attend mosques for education and normal subject can be taught in mosques.

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