

Causes of Education Quality Deterioration in Secondary Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This descriptive study was carried out in six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province. The focus of the study was on analysing the causes of education quality deterioration at the secondary school level in KP. Of the purposively selected study population of 1006 secondary school teachers and 20676 students of 9th and 10th grades, the sample included 302 (30%) teachers and 6203 (30%) students. Two self-constructed opinionnaires containing 45 items each were used for gathering data from the teachers and students. This paper focuses on discussing students' perspectives on the causes of quality of education issues at the secondary school level. The main findings of the study are that deterioration of quality at the secondary school level is due to in-adequate mechanism of monitoring and supervision, defective examination system, lack of needed infrastructural and physical facilities, over-crowded classrooms, shortage of qualified teaching staff, un-warranted political interference, obsolete teaching methodologies and lack of modern instructional facilities. Some crucial indicators for quality improvement are appointment of competent teaching staff, proper training of teachers and principals, and provision of infrastructural and instructional facilities.

Keywords: Education Quality, Students, Secondary Schools, Deterioration, Instructional Strategy, Teaching Methodologies, Monitoring, Supervision

Introduction

Secondary education has been recognised as one of the most crucial stages of students' lives. This stage contributes to developing attributes and characteristics of student personalities, leading them to performing productively and becoming useful members of the society. Secondary education sector has assumed the role of an industry, which employs a large segment of population that contributes to the productivity of the country. It is the qualitative aspect of education, which is related to the holistic development of the personality of students. Secondary education plays a fundamental role in preparing the youth for higher studies and employment.

The effectiveness of a national system of education depends upon the quality of its education at the secondary level. In order to keep pace with the fast changing world, quality education is considered the key for the survival and prosperity of Pakistan. Both access and quality are important in the education system of Pakistan, but education has to be qualitatively improved in order to receive acceptability in the market and with

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stakeholders in education. Consequently, quality deserves first consideration without which education is not likely to serve its real purpose.

Review of Literature

Chapman and Adams (2002, p. 5) explained quality education in terms of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. The inputs have to deal with the number of teachers, in-service and pre-service training and textbooks. The processes are related to the duration of the instructional period whereas, the active learning and outputs include measurement of performances, i.e., obtained marks in school subjects and the rate of grading. The last component, which is outcome, concerns the ability of individuals to use the knowledge and skills acquired to secure employment, which has the potential of poverty reduction.

Gbenu (2012, p. 7-11) documented that quality education always remained a base for development in the world. Nations, throughout the world, have agreed upon the fact that quality education is the only remedy to all of their problems. In many developed countries, technical, vocational and scientific knowledge have been the major forms of education, which have transformed their economies. It has been observed that the main reason of differences between the economies of developed and developing countries lies in the quantity and quality of education offered to their masses. The quality of education imparted in the developed countries enables the recipients to create jobs instead of relying upon others for the provision of employment opportunities. According to National Education Policy (2009, p. 17) of Pakistan:

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

UNESCO (2000, p. 14-18) has considered quality of education as the most important determining factor of 'Education for All'. It proclaimed in 'The Dakar Framework for Action' that access to quality education was the right of every child. It pledges to ensure that by 2015 all the children living in difficult circumstances and those hailing from ethnic minorities have access to free and compulsory education of good quality. Moreover, the sixth Dakar goal includes commitments to reforming all aspects of education quality so that every child can avail the opportunity of better learning experiences especially in literacy, basic knowledge of mathematics and essential life skills.

Concerning education quality parameters, Garvin (2014, p. 1-5) suggests eight dimensions which include performance, features, reliability, conformance durability, serviceability, aesthetics and perceived quality. Performance refers to the characteristics and measurable attributes of a product. In education, it applies to teachers' and students' performance in various academic and co-curricular activities. Features are additional characteristics of a product. They can be translated as visible positive changes expected

to occur in the behaviour of learners. Reliability indicates that the product (learners) will not fail to deliver good to people in society, whereas conformance gives indication of fulfilling the specified criteria for maintaining quality in education. Durability and serviceability manifest the productivity of skilled graduates supplied to the market in terms of their valuable service and contribution to national economy. Aesthetics reflects public response and appreciation of the performance and achievements of the skilled human capital. Lastly, perceived quality is the image and reputation associated with an educational organization to produce excellent academic results based on students' gains.

Factors Contributing to Education Quality

Several parameters contribute to education quality. However, few of these factors, if adopted properly in educational institutions, result in sustained development of education quality. According to Abaalkhail and Irani (2012, p. 94-97), the principal factors, which act as pillars of the quality-based education system include strong and visionary leadership, professionally trained educators, well-planned and updated curriculum, alignment of national objectives with textbooks, research based teaching, knowledge management, quality pedagogy, academic achievement and adequate change management system.

Similarly, Sallis (2002, p. 1-2) viewed that the best institutions – public or private – must understand the secret of imparting quality education to youth. The secret lies in a number of factors, which include, among others, high moral values, competent teaching faculty, excellent academic results, parents and community support, availability of needed resources, use of information technology, leadership skills of heads and a balanced curriculum. In a similar vein, Imran (2008, p. 44-45) stated that the quality of education depends upon a number of factors, of which mention can be made of high quality staff, relevant and flexible curricula, students' academic accomplishment, infrastructural facilities, required financial resources and teaching methodologies. Chohan (2010, p. 3-5) documented that quality education consisted of some essential factors, which educational organizations should take into consideration to make their functions meaningful. These factors include mission and vision of school leadership, effective management, promotion of quality culture in school, implementation of process-based approach, establishing performance measures and setting up quality control unit.

Reasons for Delivering Quality Education

Quality education is an important issue discussed and researched nationally and internationally. Whether developed or developing, countries desire to maintain and sustain quality in their educational system. Ncube (2004, p. 45-52) stated various reasons for delivering quality education at the secondary level, which included state's legal responsibility, economic and social development, reward for invested money, interlinking quality with quantitative expansion, technological advancement, political direction of leaders, market needs and intense pressure of globalization. According to the Dakar Framework for Action (2000, p. 14-18) it is required to achieve "Education for All" by 2015. It requires all nations not only to utilize their resources for quantitative expansion but also try their best to improve all aspects related to quality education and ensure excellence in order to achieve measurable outcomes of learning. In fact, the spirit of

Dakar Declaration makes it mandatory for all nations of the world to introduce quality concepts in their respective education systems. Quality can be created in an atmosphere where parents, teachers, community leaders, planners and educationists work together to provide students with future academic needs and fulfil societal demands.

Mishra (2007, p. 13-15) viewed that quality in education means that the educational process ensures the achievement of national goals and thereby fulfils the needs of society and brings about national development. He pointed out various concerns and reasons, which include competition among institutions, urge to maintain standards, accountability, motivation and fame. All these elements are driving force for maintaining quality in educational institutions. Due to healthy competition, accountability of funds and constant motivation, an institution can make efforts to improve educational quality. However, the study has ignored mentioning evaluation and examination as a valid reason to improve quality of work in schools.

Indicators of Education Quality

Indicators are variables used to measure the change and help in knowing whether the objectives have been achieved or not. The definition and concepts of quality in education make it clear that there are several indicators, which ensure that quality has been maintained by an educational organization. Natarajan (1993, p. 11) (as cited in Ncube 2004, p. 57) listed nine indicators of quality education, which include literacy ratio, enrolment of students in different age groups, dropout and retention rates, increasing the reservoir of world knowledge, emergence of distinguished personalities, social relevance of education, production of skilled manpower, prestige of teaching profession and examination systems to check the caliber of students.

Similarly, Gujjar (2011, p. 1-7) suggested various quality indicators for school education, which include experienced teaching staff with required professional skills, instructional pedagogy, use of information technology, class size, academic environment, examinations and assessment as well as students' feedback. These school quality indicators show that how well students are learning. However, these indicators cover only two areas of school, which include characteristics of teaching faculty and quality of teaching-learning process. The two significant areas of indicators i.e. infrastructural facility and spending of financial resources have not been taken into consideration. Despite these shortcomings, it can be agreed that the above-mentioned indicators contribute to student learning.

In a similar vein, Vos (1996, p. 3-5) proposed four types of indicators, which are: input indicators, access indicators, output indicators and outcome indicators. The *input indicators* contain number of teachers, building, teaching material, cost and level of expenditure on education. The *access indicators* comprise variables of the supplied services such as the geographical distance of school from home, family background of students, and direct personal expenditure on education by parents. The *output indicators* include enrolment ratio by gender and region, retention and completion rates, achievements and result scores. They measure as to what extent the national objectives

are achieved. However, the *outcome indicators* contain productivity by an individual, income of graduates and better employment opportunities.

Causes of Deterioration of Quality in Secondary Education

A report of the National Education Assessment System (NEAS) of Pakistan (2008, p. 1-12) stated that there is a significant deterioration in educational quality, confirming perceptions of the people of Pakistan. For raising the standard of education, there is a dire need to bring innovations in teaching practices, curriculum contents, evaluation system, infrastructure and learning atmosphere in the institutions. The quality of teaching, guidance and counselling as well as leadership skills are the most important factors in shaping the destiny of education and youth. Unfortunately, the education system of Pakistan is lacking in many of these factors. According to Ahmad *et al.* (2013a, p. 85-93) the system of education in Pakistan is ranked as the lowest in terms of quality in South Asian countries. There are various causes, which lead to deterioration of quality education at the secondary level. These include insufficient financial support, political interference in appointments and transfers, lack of social recognition, non-availability of accommodations, meagre professional development opportunities, estranged relations among staff, lack of parental participation in school affairs, unrealistic working conditions, lack of physical and learning resources, weak supervision, and curriculum issues.

Rashid and Mukhtar (2012, p. 332-339) found that the main reasons for declining standard of education include low allocation of funds for education, wide disparity of system among different regions, medium of instruction, non-availability of committed and potential candidates for teaching, inadequate pre- service and in-service training, dry curriculum, gap between teachers and curriculum design, corruption, lack of accountability, teachers' absenteeism, obsolete teaching methods, rapid mushroom growth of private schools, and poor examination system. The authors recommended that there is a dire need to focus upon teachers' professional development, revising curricula, developing quality textbooks revolutionizing examination system, improving students' learning and making classroom environment conducive to education.

Suleman *et al.* (2012, p. 324-328) viewed that there are various causes which affect the quality of education negatively and lower the standard of education at the secondary level. These causes include lack of physical facilities, unattractive salary packages, overcrowded classrooms, poor financial status of teachers, inadequate teaching material, lack of required training and refresher courses, autocratic environment of schools, non-availability of standard laboratories and well-equipped libraries. The study also found that shortage of teaching staff, excess of workload, teachers' part time engagements, posting in remote areas and different administrative duties assigned to the teachers to collect data or to facilitate the administrative heads and provocative and aggressive attitude of the students also deteriorate the quality of education at the secondary level.

Ahmad *et al.* (2013b, p. 324-329) stated that Pakistan lagged far behind the developed nations of the world in science and technology due to its weak education system. It could

neither equip the youth with skills required to face the challenges of life nor enrich their minds with new ideas leading to creativity in different fields. Ahmed *et al.* (2013b) cited a number of factors contributing to education quality issues, which include lack of financial resources, financial corruption, structural and management problems, poor policy implementation, lack of supervision and assessment, outdated examination system and mal-practices, political instability, ineffective communication between staff and administration, teachers' absenteeism, lack of professional development, acute shortage of learning resources, absence of sound mechanism of accountability, lack of co-ordination between schools and administrative officers, curriculum issues, political interference leading to nepotism and culture of multi-medium of instruction.

In a similar vein, Saeed *et al.* (2013, p. 172-173) documented that education had never remained a priority of governments of Pakistan. In terms of quality, the education system of Pakistan ranks one of the lowest in comparison to countries internationally. There are numerous causes contributing to deterioration of quality in teaching-learning process at the secondary level. These causes include inadequate financial support, politically selected incompetent staff, involvement of political actors in school affairs, lack of social recognition for teachers, frequent transfers, teachers' incompetency to cope with challenges in the field, shortage of staff and work load, teachers' involvement in promoting personal businesses, lack of friendly relations between staff and administration, lack of proper supervision, absence of co-ordination and co-operation, curriculum issues, non-availability of quality textbooks and lack of motivation among teachers towards teaching profession.

Jabeen and Malik (2003, p. 89-91) stated a number of causes for deteriorating standard of education, which include non-availability of trained and qualified teaching staff, insufficient financial resources, obsolete teaching methodology, lack of teachers' training and orientation workshops, shortage of qualified teaching staff in rural areas, irrelevance of curriculum to real life situation, multi-medium of instruction, which create class differentiations, politically motivated appointments, lack of proper physical infrastructure and cultural taboos. Saleem *et al.* (2012, p. 242-249) stated that the literacy rate of Pakistan and the development in the social sector was one of the lowest in the world. Almost one-third of the population lives below the poverty line because the education sector of Pakistan has failed to curb illiteracy and promote quality education. The authors refer to various causes responsible for poor quality of education, which include misuse of public funds, sharp division in the educational system, poverty, un-bridged gap between teachers and curriculum design, lack of professional development, absence of safe and orderly environment, material constraints like well-constructed and well-furnished buildings, uncontrollable class size, lack of vision and goals on the part of leadership.

Similarly, Parveen *et al.* (2012, p. 81-84) found that the causes which plague education system of Pakistan and consequently deteriorate education quality at the secondary level include lack of resources, population explosion, scarcity of qualified human resource, inconsistency in the policies of various regimes, political intervention, instability, inefficient educational management system, wastage of resources, poor implementation

of educational activities and programmes, inadequate admission standard and poor quality of teachers. Moreover, the authors also show that unmotivated teachers, overcrowded classrooms, impoverished infrastructure facilities, communication gap among teachers, parents and community and ill-equipped laboratories have also impacted upon quality of education.

The analysis above shows that political interference has severely affected education quality. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism is in disarray and timely solution for the problems is required. The contents of curriculum taught in the schools do not match the market demands. The budgetary allocations for this sector are also insufficient. Moreover, the teacher training institutes do not equip our professionals with adequate training and professional skills to make them at par with the standard at international level. Dual medium of instruction further divides the society in the different classes and categories.

Methodology of the Study

A quantitative research methodology was used for exploring the perceptions of students regarding quality in education issues. For this purpose, an opinionnaire containing 45 items was used for gathering data from randomly selected secondary school students of classes 9 and 10. Of the purposively selected study population of 1006 secondary school teachers and 20676 9th and 10th class students, the sample included 302 (30%) secondary school teachers and 6203 (30%) students of 9th and 10th classes. The instrument was first pilot-tested for ensuring and addressing validity and reliability concerns. The data analysis was done with the help of tables and frequency percentages.

Results and Discussion

The results suggest a clear pattern emerging from the students' perspectives. The findings show that a majority of the respondents agreed that school building, laboratories, classroom, playgrounds and utilities were available in the schools. Moreover, students shared that the teachers were competent, had mastery of their subjects and the principals managed their schools effectively. However, a number of teaching and learning quality parameters had not been viewed as fulfilling the requirements of learners. These include syllabus, curriculum, examination, school inspection and co-curricular activities.

Table 1 **Students' Perceptions about Education Quality Deterioration in Schools**

S. No.	Statements	SA	%	A	%	UD	%	DA	%	SDA	%
1	The quality of education has deteriorated due to unsatisfactory teaching learning process.	4095	66.0	1120	18.1	67	1.1	491	7.9	430	6.9
2	The quality of education in schools is reportedly deteriorated.	4410	71.1	961	15.1	103	1.7	329	5.3	400	6.4
3	Your teachers apply appropriate teaching methodologies according to	416	6.7	800	12.9	107	1.7	2890	46.6	1990	32.1

	the needs of students.										
4	Your learning needs are fully attended by the school.	240	3.9	280	4.5	98	1.6	3190	51.4	2395	38.6
5	You are satisfied with the checking of your monthly tests and marking of your answer books by your teachers.	700	11.3	936	15.1	66	1.1	3280	52.9	1218	19.6
6	Your teachers complete the prescribed syllabus within given time of an academic year.	500	8.1	751	12.1	92	1.5	3190	51.4	1670	26.9
7	Your teachers use teaching aids to make the lesson effective.	520	8.4	624	10.1	70	1.1	3619	58.3	1370	22.1
8	Your teachers plan their lessons according to the prescribed syllabus and follow scheme of study.	300	4.8	569	9.2	111	1.8	3751	60.5	1472	23.7
9	Your teachers have mastery over the subjects they teach.	3811	61.4	1675	27.0	40	0.6	300	4.8	377	6.1
10	Your teachers observe high level of attendance and reach the classes in time.	3143	50.7	1272	20.5	92	1.5	748	12.1	950	15.3
11	Your school has purpose-built building.	3060	49.3	1399	22.6	109	1.8	800	12.9	835	13.5
12	Your school has a computer lab and internet facility.	320	5.2	512	8.3	94	1.5	3280	52.9	1997	32.2
13	Your school has science laboratories with sufficient chemicals and equipment.	4020	64.8	1630	26.3	7	0.1	248	4.0	298	4.8
14	Your school has library with sufficient books.	2511	40.5	1384	22.3	7	0.1	250	4.0	2051	33.1
15	Your school has adequate physical facilities like hall, auditorium, toilets and clean drinking water etc.	159	2.6	200	3.2	44	0.7	3200	51.6	2600	41.9
16	Electricity is available in your school.	3600	58.0	1590	25.6	33	0.5	480	7.7	500	8.1
17	Your school has spacious classrooms to accommodate students.	3593	57.9	1485	23.9	33	0.5	292	4.7	800	12.9
18	There is a playground in your school.	3691	59.5	1960	31.6	32	0.5	250	4.0	270	4.4
19	There is sufficient furniture available in your school for students and teachers.	3920	63.2	1200	19.3	5	0.1	376	6.1	702	11.3
20	Your school has appropriate instructional facilities.	2290	36.9	1880	30.3	17	0.3	716	11.5	1300	21.0
21	Your school arranges co-curricular activities like Debates, Quiz, Art and Craft, Science Exhibition, Essay Writing and Musical concert etc.	273	4.4	101	1.6	159	2.6	3870	62.4	1800	29.0
22	Your school provides the facility of in-door and out-	3600	58.0	671	10.8	18	0.3	913	14.7	1001	16.1

	doors games.										
23	Your school has adequate teacher student ratio to establish close relation between teacher and student.	290	4.7	320	5.2	22	0.4	3700	59.6	1871	30.2
24	Your school has high completion rates of secondary school certificate exams.	2600	41.9	411	6.6	30	0.5	1500	24.2	1662	26.8
25	Your school has Parent Teacher Council to discuss school affairs and students' problems.	3510	56.6	826	13.3	26	0.4	900	14.5	941	15.2
26	Your parents visit the school monthly to discuss your academic performance with teachers.	577	9.3	600	9.7	36	0.6	3800	61.3	1190	19.2
27	Your school provides scholarship to the needy and intelligent students.	2711	43.7	871	14.7	43	0.7	778	12.5	1800	29.0
28	You visit science laboratories for practical work weekly.	206	3.3	299	4.8	27	0.4	3681	59.3	1990	32.1
29	Students are admitted in your school on merit, based on test and interview.	301	4.9	370	6.0	21	0.3	3511	56.6	2000	32.2
30	The teachers and students of your school observe discipline in school premises.	3101	50.0	1143	18.4	20	0.3	739	11.9	1200	19.3
31	Your principal monitors the classes regularly to check the performance of students and teachers.	2100	33.9	1400	22.6	81	1.3	822	13.3	1800	29.0
32	The Principal looks after all the important matters regarding your academic achievements and discuss with your parents.	2090	33.7	1399	22.6	60	1.0	754	12.2	1900	30.6
33	In-adequate supervision and monitoring of schools by district level officers is a big reason for poor quality of education.	3690	59.5	1698	47.4	43	0.7	272	4.4	500	8.1
34	The mal-administration in your school is the major cause of deterioration of quality in education.	1430	23.1	1390	22.4	530	8.5	1348	21.7	1505	24.3
35	The monitoring cell/inspection committee visits your school to assess students' overall performance.	280	4.5	317	5.1	16	0.3	2600	41.9	2990	48.2
36	The curriculum of secondary level education taught in your school meets your requirements.	250	4.0	405	6.5	28.	0.5	3700	59.6	1820	29.3

37	The curricular contents are flexible and correspond to the mental level of average students.	220	3.5	217	3.5	26	0.4	3800	61.3	1940	31.3
38	The curriculum is revised on a regular basis.	430	6.9	429	6.9	33	0.5	3600	58.0	1711	27.6
39	The curriculum develops students' creative thinking and analytical skills.	340	5.5	430	6.9	43	0.7	3500	56.4	1890	30.5
40	The present curriculum captivates students' interest and prepares them for better career.	281	4.5	400	6.4	22	0.4	3100	50.5	2400	38.7
41	The existing system of examination at secondary level is questionable and does not evaluate actual knowledge of students.	3500	56.4	1170	18.9	61	1.0	65	1.0	1407	22.7
42	The examination system of Pakistan improves the analytical skills of students.	223	3.6	221	3.6	18	0.3	3800	61.3	1941	31.3
43	The examination system of Pakistan provides feedback on pedagogy and ensures achievement of curricular objectives.	400	6.4	253	4.1	19	0.3	3420	55.1	2111	34.0
44	The use of unfair means and mal-practices in examination has resulted in overall deterioration of quality of education at secondary level in Pakistan.	2490	40.1	1870	30.1	21	0.3	910	14.7	912	14.7
45	The examination system of Pakistan tests rote learning and memorization.	2591	41.8	1742	28.1	12	0.2	999	16.1	859	13.8

Table 1 above suggests a clear pattern emerging from the respondents' data. Thus, while a majority of the students were of the view that material resources and physical infrastructure related factors were not fully available to them, they strongly agreed with the statements that quality of education deteriorated due to teaching, school environment and culture related factors. Statements 01 and 02 show that 84% students reported that deterioration in quality of education was because of unsatisfactory teaching-learning process and more than 85% students thought that education quality reportedly deteriorated. The analysis of statement 03 reveals that according to the students, the majority of secondary school teachers (i.e. 78.7%) did not apply appropriate teaching methods according to the needs of the students.

As regards statement 04, most respondents (i.e. 90%) were of the view that their learning needs were not fully attended to by the schools. This suggests that despite the many physical and material provisions, teachers, curricular activities and school and classroom culture were not catering to the learning needs of the students. Similarly, statement 05 depicts that a majority of the respondents (i.e. 72.5%) were not satisfied with the checking of their monthly tests and teachers' marking their answer books. Similarly, in

statement 06, 78% respondents were of the view that their teachers did not complete the prescribed syllabus within the given academic year. Moreover, statement 07 suggests that a majority of the students (i.e. 80.4%) expressed that their teachers did not use teaching aids for making their lessons effective. Analysis of statement 08 shows that 84.20% respondents declared that the teachers did not plan their lessons according to the prescribed syllabus and followed the scheme of studies. Yet, statement 09 shows that most students (i.e. 88.4%) saw their teachers having mastery over the subjects they taught. This suggests that while teachers had competency, the students did not see their teachers as taking keen interest in their academic work, teaching and student learning. A majority of the respondents (i.e. 71.2%) expressed in response to statement 10 that, their teachers observed high level of attendance and reached the classes in time.

About school buildings, the respondents (around 72%) shared that a majority of the schools had their own purpose-built buildings (statement 11). However, analysis of statement 12 reveals that 85% respondents expressed that they did not have computer laboratories and internet facility in their schools. However, statement 13 suggests that 91% respondents were of the view that a majority of the schools had science laboratories with sufficient chemicals and equipment. Moreover, 62.79% respondents agreed that their schools had libraries with sufficient books (Statement 14). However, statement 15 reveals that, most schools (93.5%) did not have adequate physical facilities like halls, auditoriums, toilets and clean drinking water etc. Nevertheless, statement 16 suggests that 83.67% respondents shared that electricity was available in their schools. Statement 17 shows that around 82% students thought that a majority of the schools had spacious classrooms for accommodating students. Moreover, in statement 18, most students (i.e. 91.10%) shared that playgrounds were available in their schools and 82.5% respondents believed in response to statement 19 that sufficient furniture was available in the schools for the students and the teachers. For statement 20, 67.23% students agreed that their schools had appropriate instructional facilities. However, in response to statement 21, most students (i.e. 91.4%) revealed that their schools did not arrange co-curricular activities like debates, quiz, art and craft, science exhibition, essay writing and musical concerts for them. However, for statement 22, a majority of the respondents (68.8%) viewed that their schools provided the facilities of in-door and out-door games.

The analysis of statement 23 reveals that in most schools (i.e. 89.8%), student-teacher ratio was not adequate. This may be one of the reasons that, more than fifty percent (i.e. 51%) respondents thought that students drop out and do not complete their secondary school certificate examinations (statement 24). For statement 25, 69.9% students affirmed that their schools have parent-teacher councils for discussing school affairs and students' academic problems. In response to the statement whether parents visited schools monthly for discussing academic performance of their children with the teachers, 80.5% students disagreed or strongly disagreed (statement 26). The analysis of statement 27 shows that 58.4% respondents believed that the schools provided scholarship to the needy and intelligent students. For statement 28, most students (i.e. 91.42%) shared that they did not visit science laboratories for their weekly practical work. The analysis of statement 29 reveals that most respondents (88.8%) were of the view that students were not admitted

to schools on merit, based on tests and interviews. In response to the statement (30) that the teachers and students observed discipline in the school premises, 68.4% respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

An analysis of statements 31 and 32 shows that slightly more than fifty percent of the respondents (i.e. 56.5% and 56.3%) indicated that the principals monitored the classes regularly for checking the performance of students and teachers and looked after all the important matters regarding student academic achievement, respectively. However, statement 33 shows that most of the respondents (i.e. 83.1%) were of the view that inadequate supervision and monitoring of schools by district level officers was a major reason for the poor quality of education. Moreover, around 50% respondents in statement 34 were of the view that mal-administration in secondary schools was the major cause of deterioration of quality in education. In addition, most respondents (i.e. 90.1%) thought that monitoring cell/inspection committee's infrequent visits to schools was considered having implications for education quality at the secondary level (statement 35). In response to statement 36, most students (i.e. 88.9%) shared that the curriculum at secondary school level taught in the schools did not meet the requirements of students. Moreover, most respondents (i.e. 92.6%) indicated that the curricular contents are not flexible and do not correspond to the mental level of average students (statement 37); and a majority of the students (85.62%) reported that curriculum is not revised on a regular basis (statement 38). Similarly, a majority of the respondents (i.e. 86.9%) shared that the curriculum at the secondary school level did not develop students' creative thinking and analytical skills (statement 38). Therefore, for most students (89.2%) the present curriculum cannot maintain students' interest and prepares them for better career (statement 40).

In response to statement 41, a majority of the respondents (i.e. 75.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that the existing system of examination at secondary level is questionable and does not evaluate actual knowledge of students. Similarly, most students (i.e. 92.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'the examination system of Pakistan improves the analytical skills of students' (statement 42). Moreover, around ninety percent respondents (i.e. 89.1%) again were of the view that the examination system of Pakistan neither provided feedback on pedagogy nor ensured achievement of curricular objectives (statement 43). In a similar vein (statement 44), a majority of the respondents (i.e. 70.2%) disclosed that the use of unfair means and malpractices in examination have resulted in the overall deterioration of quality of education at secondary school level in Pakistan. Again, concerning the statement (45) that the examination system of Pakistan tests rote learning and memorization, a majority of the respondents (i.e. 69.9%) agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyse students' perceptions about causes of deterioration in education quality at the secondary school level. The results have shown that despite the availability of properly trained and committed teachers the teaching-learning processes suffered at the secondary level in the province. In most cases, teachers did not pay

individual attention to every student due to large class sizes; above all, most respondents were of the view that teachers did not prepare or use lesson plans for ensuring implementation of the scheme of studies. The findings have shown that teachers did not apply appropriate teaching methodologies for their lessons. Students were not satisfied with the checking of their monthly tests and marking of their answer books by their teachers. However, the respondents viewed that teachers observed punctuality and had command over their subjects. A majority of the schools lacked physical facilities and modern techniques of teaching were not incorporated in classrooms. However, large number of schools had library and laboratory facilities but students were not encouraged to use them. Incentives in the form of scholarships and rewards were not available in schools for the needy students and teachers. It was acknowledged that indiscipline adversely affected quality of education. The respondents emphasized following merit in all matters of school affairs and emphasised more opportunities for student involvement in co-curricular activities. The students shared that mal-administration in the schools and lack of teachers' supervision and monitoring were the major causes of deterioration in education quality. However, the respondents expected Parent-Teacher Council to play its due role in promoting education quality. In conclusion, it appears evident that while a majority of the students were of the view that material resources and physical infrastructure related factors were not fully available to them, they strongly agreed that quality of education deteriorated due to teaching, school environment and culture related factors.

Suggestions and Recommendations

A number of suggestions are offered and recommendations made for improving the quality of education at the secondary level in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially and in Pakistan generally. School Heads should control teachers' absenteeism, handle disciplinary issues and utilize instructional time to promote learning outcomes of students. They should further ensure that teachers prepare lesson plans, follow scheme of studies and use teaching strategies according to the needs of students. Classroom lectures should be supported by student-centred activities such as presentations, group discussions, simulations and role-playing. Teachers need to ensure that they use audio-visual aids more frequently for teaching effectiveness. They should also prepare lesson plans on a daily basis to ensure full implementation of the scheme of studies. The appointing authorities should ensure to appoint adequately trained, qualified and committed teachers based on their aptitude and intelligence tests so that meritorious teachers could promote quality education.

Overcrowded classrooms put students at risk of lower achievement rate and lead them to disruptive behaviour. In order to overcome these problems and maintain close contact between teacher and the taught, the number of students in a class should not exceed 30 students. School heads and secondary school teachers must be made accountable for poor performance and unsatisfactory Board results. Quality infrastructural and physical facilities have great impact on student learning. Therefore, the missing facilities like science laboratories, computer labs, furniture, halls, auditoriums, toilets, clean drinking

water, electricity and instructional aids should be made available in schools by increasing budgetary allocations and mobilizing community to support public sector education.

Talent Hunt programme should be launched to provide scholarship to the needy and intelligent students. This would facilitate the deprived but deserving students to continue education. Incentives and rewards (such as medals, certificates of excellence, monetary benefits) should be given to hard working teachers to motivate them towards work and retain their interest in the teaching profession. Discipline should be maintained in secondary schools for providing students conducive environment for learning. Teaching staff transfers, appointments and other administrative decisions in schools should be made on merit for eliminating the element of favouritism and nepotism. Co-curricular activities like debates, quiz, art and craft, science exhibition, essay writing, music, indoor and out-door games should be planned and participation of every student be ensured for overall development of their personalities. The role of the Parent-Teacher Councils should be improved to ensure monitoring of the work and behaviour of teachers and students and use all measures for improvement of quality of education. Un-warranted political interference in recruitment, transfers and administrative affairs of schools should be stopped so that an environment of professionalism prevails in educational organizations. Special professional development programmes and refresher courses should be arranged for Secondary School Teachers because, without transforming them, the quality of education cannot be improved.

An effective system of supervision and monitoring should be ensured through monitoring/supervisory cell, composed of highly qualified and experienced professionals to increase the capacity of system. School administration should be improved by recruiting dynamic School Heads. Moreover, professional development courses should be introduced to improve managerial skills of School Heads. Constant efforts are required to make curriculum useful, effective and relevant to societal needs. The curriculum must be revised on a regular basis to address ideological, social and economic needs of the country. The examination system at the secondary school level must be made reliable so that it evaluates the actual knowledge of students. In order to stop mal-practices and unfair means in examination, there should be complete ban on pocket books, guides and cheating material of all sorts. Questions given in papers should be thought provoking and based from the entire course. In order to discourage memorization and selective study, there should be ban on preparation of model papers and guess papers.

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