

Principals' Perceptions of Deteriorating Quality of Education at Secondary School

Certificate Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

This descriptive study was carried out in six different districts of KP province of Pakistan and they were Mansehra, Malakand, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan, Charsadda, and Bannu. There was the common objection that the quality of education has declined at various stages of education. This study focused on the analysis of the main causes of deterioration of quality at the Secondary School Level in the province of KP, Pakistan. These major causes of deterioration of excellence in education were revealed by a review of the study. Some key factors, considered to be the foundation of quality education, were highlighted. The methodology of the study was properly described. The researcher himself visited the sampled institutions and administered the questionnaire to the respondents to collect the data. Out of six different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 440 Principals of Government Boys' Secondary Schools were selected as the population of this study. The sample contained 132 principals (30%). The tool of the study included a structured interview containing six open-ended items. Both qualitative and quantitative treatment was given to the analysis of data and presented in graphical and tabular forms. The study uncovered major causes of deterioration about quality at the secondary level, which is an ineffective system of monitoring and accountability, flawed examination system, insufficient infrastructural facilities, congested classrooms, lack of competent and trained teaching faculty, un-warranted political involvement, outdated teaching methods, and inadequate latest teaching facilities. The study also suggested various teaching strategies, which are suitable for various types of learners and could be applied in classrooms.

Keywords: Curriculum, Deterioration, Indicators, Methodology, Monitoring, Quality Education

Introduction

Secondary education is considered the most significant terminal stage of the whole education system of Pakistan. It not only generates employment opportunities for economic development but plays its role as a staircase for higher studies. It is a well-acknowledged fact that the standard of higher education depends on the type of education imported at the secondary school level. Therefore, it is required to redesign the secondary level of education so that it should not only prepare the youth for higher studies but also meet the requirements of society. Eubanks (2002) opined that secondary level education has been considered as vital for improving job efficiency, which enhances the skills of youth to perform remarkably as valuable citizens. Graduates with high accomplishments at the secondary school level can render valuable contributions to the social and economic growth of their nations.

Review of Literature

Iqbal (2005) stated that quality signifies the standard of enhancement in learning various skills and behaviors beneficial to the community, which are affected by some elements that the stakeholders want to strengthen. Quality also indicates the students' progress or achievement in various subjects taught at school. The general objection about deteriorating quality in Pakistan shows that standards of achievement are thought to have gone to the lowest point of attainment as it is exhibited through different assessments and evaluations. Moreover, other standards of measuring academic attainment are also believed to be fallen. Malik (2020) viewed that the effective task of principals lies in

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supervising and monitoring the schools, providing timely feedback to learners and educators, ensuring the provision of required resources, and acting as a role model in the institution. However, the absence of all these qualities in principals causes their poor performance.

The National Education Policy (2009) documented that the system of education in Pakistan is required to provide quality education to its youth to enable them to develop their potential and capabilities to contribute significantly to national development. This would not only create a strong sense of patriotism but would also strengthen the concepts of social justice, tolerance, democracy, and cultural values as described in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Chapman (2002) argued that quality education is the attainment of specific standards. It was considered that the standard of education relies upon the status of an educational organization in the particular course that it follows and the methodologies of teaching that cause changes in acquiring knowledge, social values, and human behavior. Sallis (2002) advocated three significant-quality ideas, which are Quality Control, Quality Assurance, and Total Quality Management. Quality Control identifies the sub-standard products. Testing and monitoring are the most common methods practiced in quality control, which are also applied to the teaching-learning process to ensure the fulfillment of the required standard. On the other hand, Quality Assurance is a process applied during the production of a product to prevent faults otherwise it may spoil the whole product. Total Quality Management is a scientific process to acquire desired quality to meet the requirements of the community. Mehrotra (2014) proposed that the idea of Total Quality Management can be applied in the teaching-learning process. Total Quality Management lays stress upon the firm relationship among teachers, administrations, and learners for the development of students' hidden capabilities along with moral values.

Indicators of Quality Education

The 'European Report on the Quality of School Education (2000) selected the following indicators:

Indicators on Attainment

These include learning basic functions in mathematics, fundamental science subjects, reading skills, application of information technology, learning foreign languages, ability to earn a livelihood, and preparing oneself for citizenship.

Indicators on Success and Transition

This category includes completion rate of secondary level education, dropout ratio of various age groups, and engagement in higher studies.

Indicators on Monitoring of Education

These indicators include assessment and monitoring of educational institutions and parents' engagement in school activities. The school heads, teaching staff, parents, and students are major stakeholders in school improvement.

Indicators on Resources and Structures

This category includes educational expenses per graduate, professional training of teachers, number of students per computer, and participation rate at the kindergarten level.

Major Causes of Deterioration of Quality in Secondary Education

Modisaotsile (2012) expressed various reasons which decline the quality of education. These are the absence of competent administration in school organizations, parents' lack of interest in their kids' education, the poor performance of the Parent-Teacher Council, insufficient financial resources, ill-equipped classrooms, and under-qualified staff. Frempong (2011) viewed that several factors result in weak educational achievement and downfall of quality at the secondary level. These factors consist of teachers' lack of interest in the profession, low qualification of teaching staff, professional incompetency, and class size, non-availability of required teaching-learning material, teachers' absenteeism, and flawed mechanism of monitoring.

Souck and Nji, (2017) documented that the school plant which signifies the school building is regarded as one of the most important physical facilities provided to the learners and the educators. In addition to this, classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, computer laboratories, health clinics, toilets, playgrounds, and AV Aids are quite significant to enhance students' learning. It is unfortunate that in secondary schools infrastructural facilities that are necessary for effective teaching-learning and academic performance of learners are not sufficiently provided.

Choy & Chua, (2019) declared that the principals are responsible for curricular and co-curricular activities in a school. The managerial skills of principals are thought to be very helpful to

mentor the teachers to work in a conducive learning environment which results in formal and informal outcomes for the school system. Mehta (2020) explored that traditional teaching methods are outdated and have limited scope. Consequently, they have failed at the national as well as international level. Therefore, learners demand new technologies and modern teaching methodologies to gain knowledge which not only makes them specialized in theory but also guarantees to provide practical knowledge, sharpen their skills and enable them to meet the requirements of modern times. Saeed (2013) indicated the flaws which have engulfed the system of education in Pakistan. Unfortunately, political figures decide the destiny of teachers and learners. Unnecessary political involvement has spoiled the whole sector of education. Political parties of Pakistan consider educational institutions as their nurseries to achieve their vested interest.

Sayed (2006) pointed that the current curriculum taught at high school in Pakistan contains subject matter of theoretical nature. On the practical side, it has an insignificant realistic approach and fails to equip learners with desired skills to fulfill societal needs. Further, it was added that the present curriculum does not move in an organized manner from general to specific. Rehmani (2003) stated that the examination system determines what has been taught in the classroom. It tests learners' understanding and assesses the acquired knowledge and skills. However, the present system of examination emphasizes rote learning, memorizing facts and reproducing them in papers to achieve high scores.

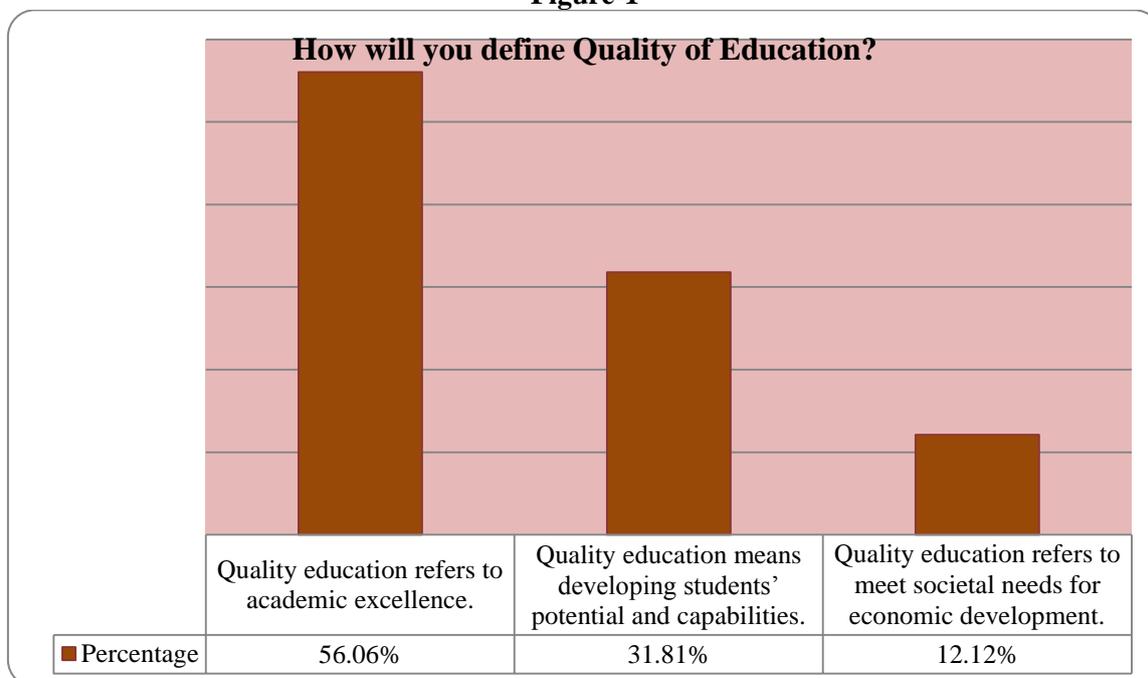
Methodology of the Study

Both quantitative, as well as qualitative research methodologies, were used for exploring the perceptions of principals regarding quality issues in education. For this purpose, a questionnaire based on 6 open-ended items of interviews was used for gathering data from randomly selected Principals of Government Boys secondary Schools. Out of six different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 440 Principals of Government Boys' Secondary Schools were selected as the population of this study. The sample included 132 (30%) principals. The data analysis was presented with the help of graphs, tables and then it was changed into a percentage before interpretation and discussion.

Result and Discussion

The gist of the 56.06% responses of principals revealed quality as educational excellence while ignoring economic prosperity and societal requirements. The responses were further explained in Figure- 1.

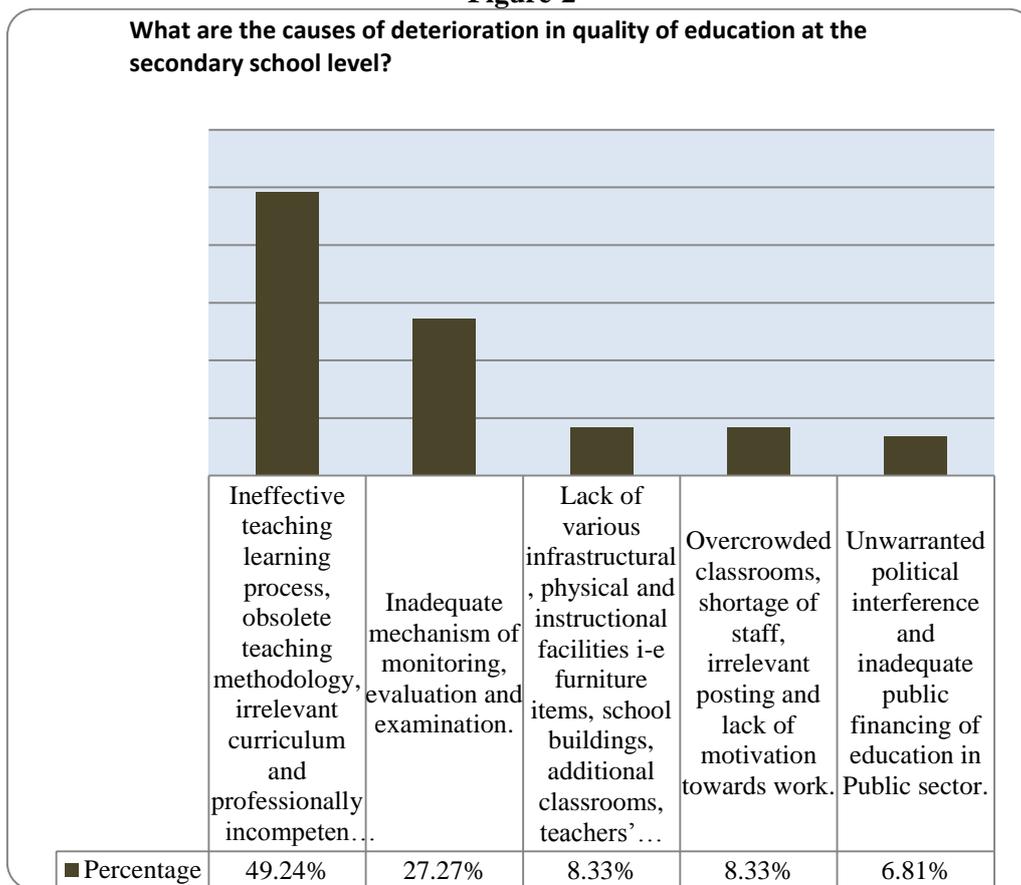
Figure-1



The interpretation of the responses of 49.24% of principals showed that unproductive teaching-learning process, age-old teaching methodology, shortage of professionally competent staff, and outdated curriculum were the main causes of quality deterioration.

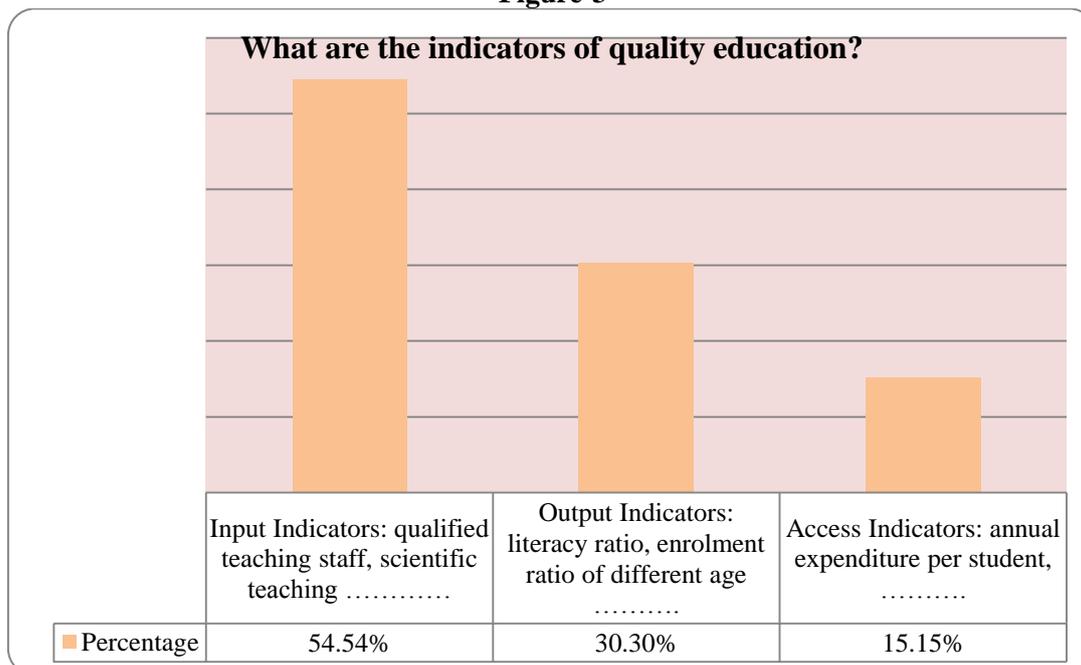
Figure-2 further interpreted the data.

Figure-2



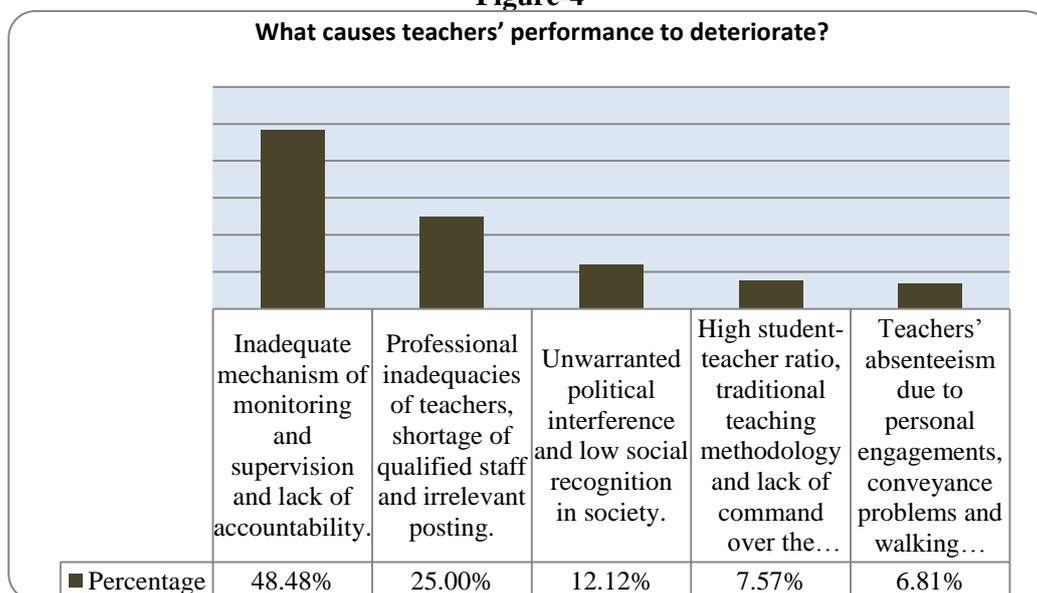
The outcome of the responses unveiled that 54.54% of principals considered highly educated and competent teachers, modern teaching methods, updated curricular contents, efficient examination system, and different physical items as the most vital quality indicators. Sizeable figures of 30.30% participants reported enrolment percentage of various groups, overall literacy rate, board results and annual pass percentage, and production of skilled graduates as the important indicators.

Figure-3



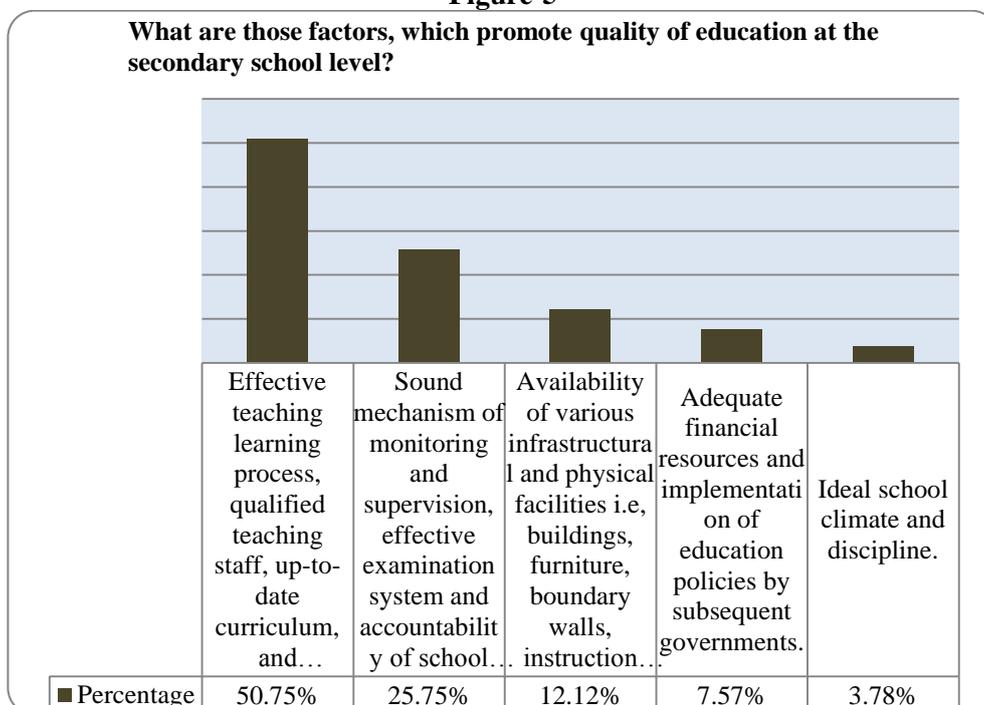
The data was further elaborated through the graphic presentation in Figure-4. The essence of the responses containing 48.48% of principals about teachers' poor performance disclosed that inappropriate systems of accountability, monitoring, and supervision were the factors that deteriorate teachers' efficiency and performance.

Figure-4



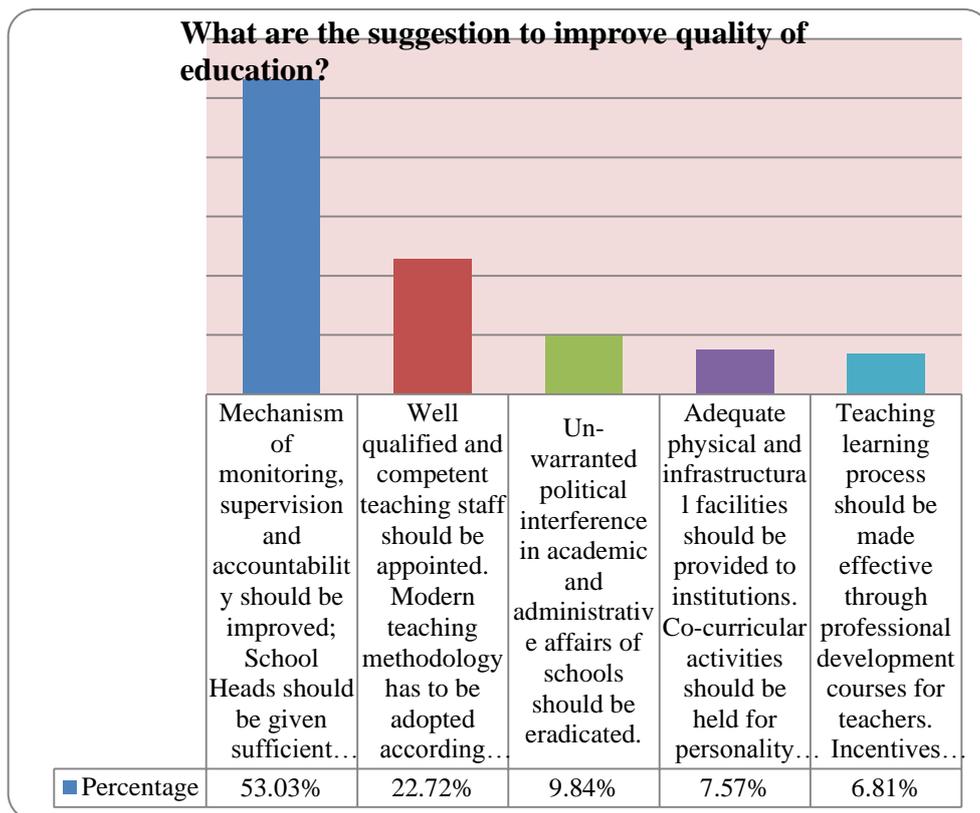
A majority of 50.75% of respondents identified that key factors for improving quality education include productive educational process, highly educated teachers, modern curricula, latest methods of teaching, a systematic system of monitoring, efficient examination system, and answerability of principals and teaching faculty.

Figure-5



The outcome of 53.03% responses disclosed that the principals laid stress on improving the system of monitoring, accountability, and supervision. They also suggested giving adequate authority to principals for administrative decisions. However, 22.72% of participants also reported that a highly educated teaching force may be recruited to implement the latest instructional methods in educational institutions.

Figure-6



Conclusion

- Principals individually answered a similar questionnaire having six items, regarding causes of quality deterioration at the secondary level.
- Principals independently explained their views regarding quality education as educational excellence linked to learners' achievements in Annual Exams of Boards.
- The respondents further elaborated that educational excellence signifies higher accomplishments of learners and staff in different subjects of school in terms of excellent grades and scores.
- Principals argued that examinations are considered as a yardstick to evaluate the worth of education.
- The grades and scores of students are reckoned in assessing the work of educational institutions, whereas few participants regarded it as the development of learners' hidden capabilities.
- Quality education promotes learners' ability and potential enabling them to reason logically, perform sensibly and respond instantly.
- Quality Education was also thought of as the standard of attainment in various Boards and competitive exams which is not only acceptable to all the stakeholders in the community but also fulfills the criterion of relevancy and competency at the local as well as international level.
- It was uncovered that the major causes responsible for the deterioration of quality were an ineffective system of monitoring, over-burdened classrooms, poor physical infrastructural facilities, flawed examination system, shortage of professionally competent staff, age-old teaching methodologies, unnecessary political interference, and lack of adequate financing for education.
- It is generally observed that physical facilities have a positive effect on pupils' educational accomplishments. However, the absence of infrastructural facilities like purpose-built school buildings, science laboratories, well-equipped computer labs, and well-stocked libraries brings about a significant downfall of education.

- The study highlighted that essential indicators are competent faculty, latest teaching methods, efficient examination system, relevant curriculum, annual Board results, sufficient infrastructural facilities, literacy rate, and educational expenses per graduate.
- The study disclosed the main reasons for teachers' pitiable performance which comprise the ineffective monitoring system, absence of answerability, incompetency of teachers, and shortage of well-educated teachers, frequent transfers, and absenteeism of staff, unnecessary political interference, over-burdened classrooms, and conventional teaching methods.
- The study revealed that the education system of Pakistan was extremely politicized as nepotism and political affiliation play a significant role in securing transfers and postings.
- The dilemma of social recognition in the society further decreased the motivational level of the teaching force and rendered them, poor performers.
- The study identified the most critical indicators i.e. suggestive of quality education which included, among others, modern curriculum, highly educated teaching force, latest teaching methodologies, adequate mechanism of accountability, ideal learning environment, allocation of required financial resources, and physical facilities.

Recommendations

Several suggestions are given and recommendations are made to enhance quality education at the secondary school in KP province particularly and in Pakistan generally. Evaluation and accountability are vital administrative means which are used to weigh the outcome and help in deciding educational institutions. Therefore, a sound mechanism of monitoring and supervision is required to make the teaching-learning process more effective, facilitate the process of decision making at the administrative level, hold teachers accountable, and present viable solutions to the problems highlighted during the inspection. It is well-established fact that teaching methodologies determine the academic achievements of students. Well-planned teaching activities can be carried out in the light of modern teaching methodologies in providing quality education as compared to conventional teaching methods. The teaching staff is required to use different innovative methods like creativity tasks, Individual Presentation, Group Discussion, Problem Based Learning, Query and Inquiry Method, Lecture and Project Method, etc. to encourage conceptual learning among students. Therefore, traditional teaching methodologies should be replaced by appropriate modern instructional strategies and approaches.

Physical infrastructure and encouraging learning atmosphere contribute significantly to quality education and students exhibit better performance. High-quality physical and infrastructural facilities exert a positive influence on pupils' learning process. Therefore, the lack of items like computer and science labs, various furniture, examination halls, bathrooms, pure water, power supply, and teaching kits should be provided to educational institutions by raising monetary allocation and motivating donor agencies to finance the education sector. By provision of these required facilities, the standard of education would improve ultimately. The success of the entire teaching-learning process is based upon the quality of teaching staff, who acts as the agent of change in society. Therefore, the competent teaching staff is required to be appointed who should also be given proper training for their professional development. Different teaching and administrative posts lie vacant for months and years in schools and offices. This wastes the precious time of students and also creates a vacuum in the hierarchy of provincial and federal teaching and administrative bodies of the education sector. To address these issues vacant posts are needed to be filled immediately. Unnecessary political interference has spoiled the quality of education and grace of the education system. Teachers should be appointed and transferred on merit policy. Rewards, prizes, appreciation letters, and other incentives should be given to teachers and students as well to develop motivation among them. Overcrowded classrooms lead to disruptive behavior among students. Therefore, the student-teacher ratio should be reasonable according to international standards. Teachers' absenteeism impacts students' performance adversely. Principals should be given sufficient authority to control teacher absenteeism. Moreover, the power should be delegated to them for transfer and recruitment.

The examination system develops a nation while sharpening the personal capabilities of its youth to enable them to compete in the market. Instead of testing rote-learning, it should inspire critical thinking among students and test their actual knowledge. Thought-provoking questions should be incorporated in question papers to assess students' higher cognitive ability and develop their analytical approach to learning. A complete ban should be imposed on the preparation, compilation,

and photocopying of guide books, test papers, and guess papers. This practice would discourage memorization and rote learning. Moreover, the paper-setters, while reducing the weight-age of subjective type questions, need to strike a balance between objective and subjective type questions. Irrelevant and outdated curriculum lacks the content to train the learners with the required skills to meet the challenges of the changing world. To make the curriculum more productive, useful, and relevant to societal needs, regular efforts are required on the part of policymakers, educationists, curriculum designers, and other stakeholders in the society. The curriculum needs to be revised constantly to accommodate the moral, ideological, and socio-economic issues of the nation. To develop critical thinking, analytical skills, and curiosity of knowledge, the curriculum has to be re-designed on regular basis in the education sector. Textbook boards should be assigned the duty to keep a vigilant eye upon national as well as international trends and issues to keep curriculum updated.

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