Social Enterprise Development Centre

Policy Brief

FEMINIZATION OF TEACHING: AN ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

Following the introduction of National Education Policy (1998-2010) and the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, Pakistan accelerated its efforts of expanding educational outreach and access to its citizens. The universalization of primary education (MDG 2) combined with the efforts towards women empowerment (MDG 4) have led to the so-called feminization of the teaching profession. This trend has been evident in the increase of female teachers in primary schools alone from 28% in 1971 to almost 50% in 2014. While the influx of female teachers indicates progress, a deeper analysis of this trend may present a number of implications for both the goals of women empowerment and educational expansion through the restriction of women to low-paid private schools and lower hierarchies of the profession, as well as a compromise on the quality of education. This brief will highlight the importance of acknowledging these policy implications and conclude with suggestions that will include teacher training programs, teacher unions, regulation of the private sector, and the inclusion of women in the upper hierarchies of school governance.

Context and Importance of the Problem

While feminization of the teaching profession is an evident phenomenon especially in the context of Pakistan, it is imperative to ask whether the mere inclusion of women in the education sector is vital enough to be categorized as empowerment. As noted in a UNESCO report on 'Women and the Teaching Profession' in 2011, teaching provides a lot of women in Pakistan, especially those belonging to conservative backgrounds, with their primary and in many cases the sole source of income. However, joining teaching is noted as a matter of necessity for most of the women rather than a matter of choice. This need arises from the deteriorating economic conditions in Pakistan that have forced women to step into the labor market to financially support their households (Bibi and Afzal 2012). Despite this move towards inclusion, women are allowed a very limited access to the labor market and are presented with a narrow variety of options, such as teaching or nursing. The reason for this is the close association of teaching with maternal and feminine traits of caring and nurturing, which help preserve the gender division of labor while allowing women to access the public sphere (Kelleher 2011). This propagation of societal norms is achieved through the gender-based segregation of occupations as masculine and feminine. Thereby leading to the horizontal segregation, the recruitment of

men and women into different jobs, as well as vertical segregation, the confinement of women to the lower strata of a specific sector, in the labor market (Crompton and Sanderson 1990).

As a result of the association of teaching with feminine traits, the profession itself gets labeled as a woman's work and starts being considered as a "semi-profession" (Bolton and Muzio 2008), leading to the exclusion and reluctance of men to join the profession. This trend is particularly the case for primary schools where the main role of a teacher is to care for and socialize a child, consequently leading to almost 78% of female and 22% male teachers in the primary grades (Akhtar, 2012: 263). As the school years progress, the focus shifts from domestication to discipline and grooming, a task that is thought of as a man's job (UNESCO, 2011: 75). Hence, leading to the increasing percentage of men as the grade level increases.

Another important observation is the concentration of women in teaching rather than the administrative and decision-making roles that are mostly taken up by men. This results from the perception that men are better equipped with leadership qualities, and that the administrative tasks themselves are incompatible with the domestic responsibilities of a woman, including traveling to far off places and working till late hours (UNESCO, 2011: 10). This restriction to the lower hierarchies of the school administration further asserts the limitation of agency and choices granted to women in a field that they are thought to dominate.

Moreover, the prevalence of capitalistic ideals in education sectors globally further encourages the employment of women. With Structural Adjustment Programs and MDG's being introduced in Pakistan, there has been a significant roll back of the state's role in the provision of services. Education is one such service that has been outsourced to the private sector, leading to the recruitment of cheap labor in order to minimize costs and maximize profits. Andrabi, Das and Khawaja explain in 'A Dime a Day: The Possibilities and Limits of Private Schooling in Pakistan' how women are used as an abundant source of cheap labor in Pakistan. They are paid less due to their role as the 'secondary' earners or helpers rather than the primary breadwinners, a responsibility that is unique to men in the Pakistani society (2008: 338).

The profit-seeking nature of the private sector is also demonstrated in the divide of gender ratios in private and public schools. The percentage of male teachers, which is approximately around 56% in public schools, drops sharply to 25% in private schools (AEPAM, 2017: 85 and 86). While private schools primarily recruit teachers willing to work at low wages, public schools provide their staff with various benefits such as higher wages, pensions and medical benefits, etc. Wages in private schools drop to as low as 600 rupees, as compared to 10,000 rupees in public schools (UNESCO, 2011: 32 and 33). A result of this divide is the employment of mostly young, unmarried, and under-qualified women in private schools (Azhar, 2014: 41) and a majority of men in public schools. By hiring cheap yet under-qualified staff, the standard of education being delivered is compromised, and thus the focus is shifted from quality to profit maximization.

Policy Inaction

The existing educational policies acknowledge the enabling role of women in increasing female enrolment (Ashraf, 2013: 167) as well as the overall educational outreach. However, such an approach can be considered instrumental at best, that views women as a vital tool in achieving a goal. The direct concern with the impact of participation on women's socio-economic standing is lacking in the existing frameworks. This further causes indifference towards the progress or struggles women face once they have been employed in the education sector. Exceptions in this regard are the National Education Policy 1998-2010 that called for a relaxation of the age limit of female teachers and incentivization of their participation (Ashraf, 2013: 166), and the introduction of laws against harassment to make workspaces safer for women (Noreen and Musarrat 2013). Apart from these, there is generally a disregard for the special and different needs of both the genders.

Consequently, policy-makers are currently gender-neutral in their approach towards teaching. However, in a society such as Pakistan where women still lag behind in terms of mobility and economic participation, a gender-equitable rather than gender-neutral policy is needed to better support and enable the roles of both women and men. Using a gender sensitive lens in policy formulation would aid policy makers to take into consideration and address the different realities and obstacles faced by the key actors in the policy.

Furthermore, policy makers are currently employing the 'preference theory' formulated by Catherine Hakim, thereby viewing teaching as a matter of preference and choice on the part of women. This excludes the understanding or analysis of socio-economic constraints that may be limiting women's access to other career paths, thereby taking a stagnant approach towards empowerment by working on women's inclusion in a limited capacity, viz., and the education sector only.

Policy Recommendations

As noted earlier, the primary concern of private schools to hire teachers at low wages leads to the employment of underqualified teachers, greatly compromising the standard of education being delivered. It is thus imperative to set the minimum qualification necessary to become a teacher. Moreover, the private sectors should be regulated by the state, regarding revising wages, budget allocation, and quality assessments, in hopes to help the private schools in improving their quality of services and narrowing the wage gap between the public and private schools.

Teachers themselves should be able to voice their concerns and demands to the education system at large. Teacher associations and unions like Punjab Teachers Union and Education International (UNESCO, "Status of Teachers in Pakistan", 2013: 46) should be established and expanded so that teachers themselves can lobby against gender-based discrimination in terms of allocating wages or administrative seats and voice their personal experiences in the education sector. This may also help the teachers working at low wages in private schools to demand certain services and benefits from their employers so as to improve their working and financial conditions.

Moreover, teacher training should not just be provided as separate programs or courses, rather should be taught at universities and colleges as a career choice. This will help revamp the status and prestige of the profession as that requiring skill and dedication, not just the 'feminine' traits of caregiving and nurturing. Providing training in teaching as well as leadership roles would further help women contend for the administrative positions, thereby enabling their upward mobility within the system.

In areas with extremely low female percentage in the leadership roles, such as the rural areas, a quota system can be introduced so that women gain representation in the decision making positions and challenge the socially produced gender roles that confine women to the private or lower strata of the society. However, the reserved seats should be allocated to women solely on the basis of their qualification and merit in order to ensure quality performance.

Furthermore, the current policy concern with female recruitment should also be accompanied by a concern for the promotion of teachers to higher positions, thus unveiling and addressing any gender-based biases that may exist within the management or administration. Annual reports can be conducted for this purpose, which ensure that the increments and promotions being given to school staffs are not gender-biased and are indeed following credentials of merit.

Moreover, responsibilities that constrain the upward mobility of women on the economic ladder, more specifically in the education system, should be challenged through campaigns that focus on destigmatizing working women and providing equitable facilities like daycare centers and paid maternal leaves. This may garner social acceptability and open more options and career paths for women to pursue.

The stated recommendations can aid policy makers in addressing the constraints and discrimination being faced by women in the educational sector and formulate policies that promote their progress and mobility. This can serve the dual purpose of increased literacy and women empowerment and lead us towards a more equitable form of development.

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