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*Literacy for Life*

# **Pakistan: where and who are the world's illiterates?**

Munir Ahmed Choudhry  
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## Study/Report

### Where and Who are the World's Illiterates – Pakistan

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#### 1 Historical Scenario of Adult Literacy in Pakistan

1.1 Historically, a commitment to adult literacy has always been there in all Education Policies of Pakistan. In 1970s the Education Policy of 1972 and 1979 both took cognizance of this issue. In 1981 a Literacy and Mass Education Commission was established to promote literacy in Pakistan. In 1985 even a literacy ordinance at Federal level was passed to promote literacy through a package of incentives such as; grant of driving license, issuance of passport and employment in federal government only to those people who were literate. Unfortunately, this could not be implemented till to-day, despite that it became an Act after approval of the parliament in 1987. The main reason is non-availability of adequate facilities, infrastructure and services for adult literacy especially in remote rural areas due to inadequate funding and scarcity of resources for literacy. It indicates that there had been lack of political commitment for adult literacy.

1.2 In (1998) another “National Education Policy (1998-2010) was formed and fixed adult literacy target of 55% by 2003 and 70% by 2010. This was followed by Education Sector Reforms (ESR) 2001-2006, which within the Education Policy Framework re-fixed the target as 60% by 2005. The Poverty Reduction Strategy paper also supports this. In further continuation of the aforesaid policies and Dakar Framework of Action 2000 a “National Plan of Action on Education For All (2001-15)” has been prepared by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO. This focuses on three themes i) elementary education, adult literacy and early childhood education. The Adult Literacy targets as per NPA are as under;

i. Phase-I	2001-02 to 2005-06	=	61% (male 71.5% : Female 50.5%)
ii. Phase-II	2006-07 to 2010-11	=	68% (male 77% : Female 65%)
iii. Phase-III	2010-11 to 2015-16	=	86% (male 86% : Female 86%)

Around 81 million population of 10+ age group will become literate during the plan period (2000-15). The inputs and programmes planned to be initiated, interalia, include opening of Literacy Centres, opening of Non-formal Basic Education Schools (NFBES), Vocational and Trade Schools, Quranic Literacy Centers, and Community Viewing Centers. Total cost (development and recurrent) worked out to achieve 86% adult literacy rate is Rs. 180 billion (US\$ 3 billion).

1.2.1 All the four provinces and 2/3<sup>rd</sup> districts of the country (70 districts) have also prepared 15-year strategic EFA Plans with main focus on primary education and adult literacy.

1.2.2 EFA Units and EFA Forums at national, provincial and district level have been established to facilitate implementation of EFA plans.

### **1.3 Trends of Literacy and Illiteracy:**

#### **1.3.1 Literacy definitions and corresponding literacy rate:**

It needs to be highlighted that from census to census the definition of literacy has been undergoing a change, resultantly the literacy figure has vascillated irregularly during the last 5 census. An update of the five censuses is as under:

	<b>Census Year</b>	<b>Definition of Literacy</b>	<b>Literacy Rate</b>
a)	1951 Census	One who can read a clear print in any language.	16.4%
b)	1961 Census	One who is able to read with understanding a simple letter in any language	16.3%
c)	1972 Census	One who is able to read and write in some language with understanding.	21.7%
d)	1981 Census	One who can read newspaper and write a simple letter	26.2%
e)	1998 Census	One who can read a newspaper and write a simple letter, in any language.	43.9%

#### **1.3.2 Present Literacy and Illiteracy Rate:**

The average increase in adult literacy rate from 1981 to 1998 (inter-census period) had been 1.1% i.e. 18 percentile point increase in 17 years (26.2% to 43.9%). Since 1997-98 number of programmes and projects in adult literacy and basic education have been launched such as opening of adult literacy centers under Education Sector Reforms (ESR), launching of development projects in primary education and opening of primary schools in private sector. As a result, it is estimated that growth in literacy rate has increased to around 2% per annum after 1998. The present (2004) projected adult literacy rate in Pakistan is 54% (male 66.25% : female 41.75%) (Source: Economic Survey of Pakistan 2004-05). The pattern/trend of increase/decrease in literacy/illiteracy rate since 1972 to 2004 (selected years) is highlighted in the following table.

**Literacy Rates (10+) by Sex & Urban and Rural Areas of Pakistan  
1972-2004 (Selected Years)**

Years	All Areas			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
1972	21.7	30.2	11.6	41.5	49.9	30.9	14.3	22.6	4.7
1981	26.2	35.1	16	47.1	55.3	37.3	17.3	26.2	7.3
1998	43.92	54.81	32.02	63.08	70	55.16	33.64	46.38	20.09
2004	54	66.25	41.75	72.37	79.9	64	43.84	58.4	30

Source: Education For All Wing, Ministry of Education

#### 1.4 The Challenges in Literacy:

Adult literacy has suffered primarily due to low rates of participation at the primary level, which in turn relate to poverty and lack of access. However, other causes of low literacy rates include financial constraints and ineffective/failed strategies such as:

- i. Resources/funds earmarked for adult literacy programmes were hardly 1% of the education budget. Furthermore, funds could not be provided on time.
- ii. Primarily, adult literacy has suffered due to lack of political will and absence of consistency in policy. There has been wide divergence from the formal textual contents of the policy on literacy which was manifest in the absence of formal financial allocation for literacy up to the 5<sup>th</sup> Development Plan of Pakistan. Political Governments never took literacy as an important vehicle of development mainly because of their feudal and elitist mindset. It has not been given the needed/desired priority in EFA programmes. Only a few projects on adult literacy could be launched during the post Jomtien period, which had limited coverage and were restricted to not more than 10% of the target group.
- iii. There is an absence of a strong coordination and organizational structure with the result that interaction among the principal actors in the field of adult literacy remained weak.
- iv. The professional base of adult literacy initiatives remained under-developed due to lack of training of instructors; lack of formalized curriculum; and a virtual non-existence of effective research.

- v. Monitoring and evaluation mechanism at the grassroots level could not be strengthened, which adversely affected the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the literacy programmes and projects.
- vi. Population explosion, lack of community and civil society participation; irrelevance of literacy programmes and curricula are some other challenges and issues in literacy.

It may be mentioned that all literacy programmes in Pakistan are conducted in respective regional languages and requisite standardized material is amply available in the market.

## **1.5 Main Concentrations of Illiterates:**

The main concentrations of illiterates in Pakistan are remote rural areas; mountainous regions such as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), the rural areas of Balochistan province and NWFP; slum areas (Katchi Abadies) in urban areas; deserts of Sindh and Balochistan provinces and pockets of refugee population in NWFP and Balochistan provinces.

### **1.5.1 Provincial Comparison in Literacy/Illiteracy Rates**

At present (2004), the highest adult literacy rate is in Islamabad Capital Territory (82%) followed by Punjab 56.14%; Sindh 51.48%; NWFP 46.17% and Balochistan 37.18%. The province of Balochistan is the most disadvantaged as regard literacy rate with 63% over-all illiteracy and 77% female illiterates. The table on provincial literacy rates is at Annexure-I.

Around 90% rural females in Balochistan province are illiterate. Male literacy rate is higher than females in all the provinces and regions of the country. Number of factors may be attributed to low literacy rate of rural females. These, interalia, include; lack of awareness regarding importance of education and literacy, lack of easy access to schools and literacy centers and local social taboos/customs etc.

Total number of illiterates of the 10+ age group in Pakistan are around 50 million against 54 million literate. Out of it 30 million are women and 20 million men.

### **1.5.2 District Comparison in Literacy/Illiteracy Rates**

Based on the literacy profile, the districts in Pakistan can be grouped into three categories i.e. districts with high literacy rate i.e. above 70%; districts with medium literacy rate i.e. 50%-69%; and districts with low literacy rate i.e. less than 50%. Almost all the districts of Balochistan, FATA and FANA, most of the districts of NWFP and Sindh fall under the third category. In Punjab the districts with the lowest literacy rate are Rajanpur (28%), Muzaffargarh (33%), Dera Ghazi Khan (37%) and Rahimyar Khan (38%). The literacy rate of district Tharparker (19%), Thatta (24%), Jacobabad (28%) and Badin (28%) are the lowest in Sindh province.

In the NWFP province the districts with lowest literacy rate are Kohistan (15%), Shangla (20%), Batagram (25%), Upper Dir (29%) and Bunir (31%). In Balochistan, districts with lowest literacy rate are Musa Khel (14%), Nasirabad (15%), Kohlu (17%), Jhal Magsi (17%), Kharan (19%), Awaran (20%), Bolan (21%), Killa Saifullah (24%) and Jaffarabad (25%). Musa Khel, Kohistan, Kohlu and Jhal Magsi are the districts with the highest illiteracy rate in Pakistan. Whereas, the districts with the highest literacy rate are Karachi Central (90%), Karachi East (88%), Islamabad (86%) and Rawalpindi (79%).

Number of factors may be attributed to low literacy rate of rural females. These, interalia, include: lack of awareness regarding importance of education and literacy; lack of access to schools and literacy centers; social taboos and customs etc. etc.

## 2. **Pakistan's Illiterates:**

The illiterates of Pakistan, their characteristics and reasons/factors responsible for their illiteracy, interalia, include as follows:

### i. **Rural People:**

According to 1998 Census, two third (67%) population of Pakistan lives in rural areas. Some of the rural areas of the country especially remote rural areas lack basic facilities of life such as roads, education and health facilities etc. Besides, having a feudal set-up, usually rural population is not encouraged to receive education. Awareness campaigns are lacking, hence illiteracy. Resultantly, literacy rate in these areas especially of rural females, is very low. Literacy rate among rural females of Balochistan and FATA is less than 10%.

### ii. **Poor and Disadvantaged People:**

Illiteracy rate amongst poor people is very high. At present 35% population in Pakistan lives below the poverty line. In rural areas it even ranges between 45-50%. Besides, because of low income, they are more interested in supplementing their family income than sending children to school. Besides, the requisite higher focus on deprived population is lacking. Poverty and high opportunity cost inhibit access to literacy and education. Hence, most of them are illiterate. Slum dwellers and inhabitants of Katchi Abadies in urban areas; people working on agricultural farms i.e. tillers of land; and household workers etc are the people who are poor and illiterate.

### iii. **Ethnic Minorities:**

Illiteracy is high among ethnic minorities due to lack of access to educational facilities and services, as well as, due to their peculiar customs, traditions and taboos.

### iv. **Nomads and Refugees:**

Another segment of population, mostly illiterate, is nomads and refugees. Scarcity of resources, non-availability of literacy centers and educational

institutions; temporary settlements and lack of awareness regarding worth and value of education and literacy are the factors that exclude these people from literacy.

v. **Handicaps and People with Special Needs:**

Most of the handicaps and people with special needs in Pakistan are illiterate, due to non-availability of literacy centers and educational institutions specially required for them. Besides, there are only a few organized efforts on the part of the public sector to provide special schools for such children both because of higher cost and skeptical return.

vi. **Girls and Women:**

Literacy rate is low among girls and women in Pakistan. Female literacy rate is 42% against 66% male. Similarly, girls participation rate at all levels i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary level is very low. Hardly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of present educational facilities and services i.e. institutions and teachers are for girls. Besides, some social norms, institutions and traditions deny access to girls and females. Hence, higher rate of illiteracy among girls and women.

3. **Policies to Tackle Illiteracy:**

The present (1973) Constitution of Pakistan under article 37-B envisages that state shall **“remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period”**.

The Current National Education Policy (1998-2010) was framed in the perspective of historical developments, modern trends in education, and emerging requirements of the country. Basic education has been assigned top priority in the Policy. The main policy provisions for Adult Literacy are as follows:

**Adult Literacy:**

- The policy envisages democratization of education through the expansion of elementary education including formal and non-formal methods and expanded programmes of adult education, literacy and functional literacy programmes, as a basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure and for providing equality of opportunity for all citizens.
- Pakistan’s international commitment to double the rate of literacy by the year 2000 cannot be accomplished without achieving universal primary education (UPE). This will be achieved by complementing the formal primary school system with a strong non-formal basic education initiative.
- A massive Non-formal Basic Education Programme on a war footing will be launched to provide access economically and expeditiously to all the 5.5 million primary school age (5-9 years old) children who are at present out



of school. The 10-14 years old adolescents and youth who have missed primary education will be given a second chance through a crash condensed course to enable them to complete primary education cycle in 2-3 years time.

#### **4. Programmes and Practices to improve literacy:**

Main projects and programmes launched in Pakistan for adult literacy since 1990 are as follows:

##### **4.1 Nai Roshni School and Iqra Project**

A National Literacy Plan was prepared in 1983 and launched in 1985. The Programme was implemented for 9 months only and 99,000 adult literates registered and mostly passed. Though, with the change in the Govt., NLP was abandoned and two new programmes viz: Nai Roshni School and Iqra Program started in 1986-87 for out-of-school children and adults. 15,000 Nai Roshni Schools were opened and 400,000 students registered who benefited from this programme. On an evaluation it was found that 95% schools were functioning. Likewise, Iqra centres also made 18,000 persons literate. These findings were brought out by the tripartite evaluation carried out in 1987. As always, with the change of Govt., both programmes were wound up and assets created to the tune Rs. 840 Million went waste.

##### **4.2 Eradication of Illiteracy from Selected Areas of Pakistan**

This project was launched by the Prime Minister's Literacy Commission, at a cost of Rs. 72.83 million from 1992-94. The target was to make literate 1,74,460 adults (both male and female) through 3,460 face-to-face and 200 TV, literacy centres in 5 select districts of all provinces.

Under this project 1,38,025 (79%) adults were made literate against the target of 1,74,460. Out of these 1,20,082 (87%) were females and 17,943 (13%) males.

##### **4.3 Quranic Literacy Project 1992-94**

The subject project was initiated in 1992 at a cost of Rs.4.06 million to make females literate through their knowledge and reading skills of the Holy Quran. The project was tested in five union councils in 4 districts surrounding Islamabad. To implement the programme 494 face-to-face centres were established, at places provided by the community. The teacher was paid honoraria of Rs.500 per month. Four cycles of 6 months each were completed. 10,867 female of 10+ age-group were made literate through this project.

The project was effective, successful and sustainable. Especially for rural females such projects need to be replicated at large scale.

*Source of information 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 – “Quest for Literacy” a report written by Dr. A. Ghafoor, Ex-chairman Pakistan Literacy Commission*

#### **4.4 Establishment of 10000 Non Formal Basic Education (NFBE) Schools**

The Prime Minister’s Literacy Commission in 1995 formulated a project titled "Establishment of 10000 Non-formal Basic Education Schools" with the total cost of Rs. 1,263.375 million. The project, based on the idea of a home-school to be run through NGOs and CBOs, was to be implemented within a period of five years. However, the project suffered due to financial constraints. The Education Policy (1998-2010) recommended to expand the programme at a larger scale, by opening 75,000 NFBE Community Schools during the next three years.

At present, around 9,000 NFBE Schools are functioning throughout the country having an enrollment of 300,000 students. The programme/project is successful and sustainable.

#### **4.5 Crash Literacy Programme**

The Ministry of Education planned a Crash Literacy Programme in May 1998. The purpose of the programme was to increase participation rate by making maximum use of the available resources like school buildings and teachers during summer vacations and evening hours. This programme was aimed at promoting literacy and basic education in the country.

Under the Federal Areas Crash Literacy programme, about 87 literacy centers were opened in three phases. The total enrolment of these centers was around 1500. The assessment/evaluation test conducted by the Ministry indicated that 82% qualified/passed.

The Punjab programme was also successful. A target of 5550 students was fixed and the Department was able to meet 96% of the target.

Encouraged by the results of this programme, the Government of the Punjab undertook Phase II of the programme with a tenfold expansion. The target enrolment was 50,000 students, for which 1668 centers of 30 students each were opened.

#### **4.6 Adult Literacy Centers (2001-06)**

One of the priority areas of Education Sector Reforms (2001-06) is adult literacy. ESR envisages to open 270,000 literacy centers in 5 years time to achieve the target of 60% literacy rate by the year 2006. However, due to financial constraints only 6,000 literacy centers could be opened throughout the country. Each center has completed 2 cycles of 6-month duration at the average intake of 20-25 learners per center per cycle. Total people so far made literate under this programme are around 240,000. Most of these

centers are for females. Besides that, around 2,500 literacy centers have been opened by National Commission for Human Development – a support organization of the Ministry of Education. Some of the districts also opened literacy centers out of their own budget/resources. At present 13,000 literacy centers, both in public and private sectors, have been opened. NWFP government has allocated funds to NWFP Elementary Education Foundation for opening of 18,000 literacy centers in collaboration with National Commission for Human Development. Literacy and Non-formal Education Department Punjab has launched a total literacy project in 4 selected districts of southern Punjab.

Opening of literacy center project is effective and successful in case of females but ineffective and failure in case of males.

#### **4.7 Literacy Programmes by NGOs**

The programmes launched by NGOs in basic education and literacy at the provincial and local levels are in addition to the above. Some of the programmes run by well-established NGOs are reported to be very effective and productive.

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been actively involved in the promotion of literacy and adult education since 1990. In 1992 NGOs were involved in the project namely "Eradication of Illiteracy from the Selected Areas of Pakistan". Thereafter, NGOs have been coming forward in the field of literacy and non-formal education. Adult Basic Education Society (ABES) and BUNYAD in Punjab. SHOAA in Balochistan and Khyber Welfare Association in NWFP were the NGOs, involved in the Pilot Literacy Projects of 1992. BUNYAD has opened number of literacy centers in Punjab and also got International Literacy Award.

### **5. Conclusion/Sum up:**

Pakistan is facing a serious challenge of prolific illiteracy, low participation rate and high drop-out. Due to gross neglect, low priority, feeble financial provision in the past around 50 million adults are illiterate. Some of the districts of the country have more than 80% illiteracy rate. Illiteracy is highest amongst rural women, nomads, refugees, ethnic minorities and tribal population.

A vast variety of programmes and projects have continued to be launched in different parts of the country. Some of them were effective and useful. However, their scope was very limited, in view of, massive challenge of illiteracy.

Succinctly increasing awareness of the importance of education and literacy in human development, setting up of separate system and structure of literacy and non-formal basic education, increased financial allocations, declining population trend, extensive mobilization of NGOs and CBOs are a beacon of hope for achieving a break through in the realm of literacy in Pakistan. However, there are odds such as lack of research and training; non-existence of management

information system for literacy; lack of integrated approach (integration of basic literacy, functional literacy and skill development) to make literacy relevant and meaningful; and inadequate funding are some of the main weaknesses which need to be overcome to achieve the envisaged targets.

**Province-wise Literacy Rate by Urban & Rural Areas (10+ Age Group)**  
**1972 - 2004 (Selected Years)**  
**Pakistan**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Both Sexes</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Punjab</b>	1972	20.7	29.1	10.1
	1981	27.4	36.8	16.8
	1998	46.56	57.2	35.1
	2004	56.14	66.83	45.52
<b>Sindh</b>	1972	30.2	39.1	19.2
	1981	31.5	39.7	21.6
	1998	45.29	54.5	34.78
	2004	51.48	60.95	41.15
<b>NWFP</b>	1972	15.5	23.1	4.7
	1981	16.7	25.8	6.5
	1998	35.41	51.39	18.82
	2004	46.17	65.54	27.39
<b>Balochistan</b>	1972	10.1	14.8	4.3
	1981	10.3	15.2	4.3
	1998	26.6	36.5	15
	2004	37.18	49.72	23.31

### **List of Abbreviations**

ESR	Education Sector Reforms
NPA	National Plan of Action
UPE	Universal Primary Education
NFBES	Non-formal Basic Education Schools
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FANA	Federally Administered Northern Areas
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
CBO	Community based Organization
ABES	Adult Basic Education Society
BUNYAD	Name in Urdu means Basic
SHOAA	Name in Urdu means Ray of Light