
Institutional Approaches of Formal and Non-Formal Institutes to Foster Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Basic Education

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Abstract

Around the globe, almost 258 million children are not going to school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019). To attain the sustainable development goal (SDG4) “a quality education for all by 2030” there is a worldwide move on improvement of literacy activities. There is growing emphasis on the development of strategies and programs to improve literacy rate for target groups by using lifelong learning initiatives. Lifelong education is necessary for sustainable development of communities around the globe. In this regard, formal and non-formal education providers are supposed to play a key role in expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, especially in disadvantaged groups. This research project plans to address the focus area of lifelong learning (LLL) opportunities in basic education, by making a comparison between roles of formal versus non-formal institutes so that a workable plan of action may be recommended for expansion of LLL in literacy/basic education with the focus on the enhancement of the lifelong learning environment. Hence, the primary question of this research was to discover the lifelong learning opportunities in basic education within two higher education sectors a) formal education context; and b) nonformal education context. To address the above research question, this study built on an analysis of three critical aspects, concerning the institutional strategies to promote lifelong learning; practical steps taken to implement lifelong learning; programs/courses to enhance lifelong learning. This research employed a quantitative approach in which a questionnaire was conducted with a selective sample of the institutions from formal and nonformal streams of education.

Key Words: *Lifelong Learning; Institutional Strategies on Lifelong Learning; Basic Education, Formal Education, Non-formal Education*

Introduction

Pakistan being a developing country is facing many social, educational, and economic problems. Among educational challenges, out-of-school children and adult illiteracy are very important areas which can be tackled through non-formal initiatives. In 2017, literacy rate in Pakistan was around 59%. Adult literacy rate was then reported at 59% of the total population which is alarming and a growing challenge. This is affecting rural areas and particularly different target groups i.e., women, out-of-school children etc. (Statista, 2020). In Pakistan, school-age children are 50,158,104, out of which 37 percent children do not attend school (Nizami,2020). Regarding out-of-school literacy, Pakistan is second largest country after Nigeria in out-of-school children population (22.8 million out-of-school children). This situation may be either due to lack of formal educational opportunities and access or dropping out from school due to families’ financial problems and a need to contribute to an impoverished family situation (Wikipedia, 2020). In a report by UNESCO, Nizami (2019) highlighted that in developing and lower economic countries around 220 million children are out of school. UNESCO conducted household surveys in these countries and reported that 40 percent of out-

of-school children showed their willingness to attend school if their families receive financial assistance.

There are many challenges which hinder in literacy improvement and access in Pakistan. These include poor educational planning in all the provinces. Cultural disparities, gender discrimination, inadequate formal education curriculum, lack of coordination between education service providing agencies, lack of need assessment of learners, lack of physical facilities, low social acceptance level for girl's education, lack of access to schools, low trained staff, adoption of old teaching methods, lack of educational technologies use in education, lack of assessment of adults need, financial constraints etc. another important challenge which Pakistan is facing since independence is growing number of adult illiterates and out of school youth which is creating a high gap in literacy and lifelong learning. Before expanding lifelong learning opportunities, it seems necessary to find out the reasons for gender disparity for educational provision in illiterate adults and out of school children. According to Bari (2019, para 2-3)

“The current stock of children who are out of school (22 million) will, in all probability, now enter adulthood without receiving an education. This is the stock problem we have, and it will have to be dealt with through adult literacy and other such programs. Then there is the flow issue. We still do not enroll all five-year-olds in schools. This means we keep adding to the number of five- to 16-year-olds who are out of school. This issue can only be resolved if all young children start going to school by the age of five. But all of the above, given the numbers, require a lot of work and resources. Twenty-two million out-of-school children do keep the number in mind. This is more than the population of Karachi. This is more than the combined populations of Lahore and Faisalabad. If you want the entire population of Lahore and Faisalabad to attend school, in addition to the children who are already going to school, it will require a lot of commitment, planning and resources to be able to do so”.

To meet this big challenge, focus should be given to lifelong learning activities. Lifelong learning (LLL) is flexible, and its diverse organization helps to meet the diverse and multifold learning needs of adults, out of school children, youth, and women. LLL also promotes acquisition of basic literacy skills i.e., reading, writing and numeracy. It can also be a substitute for formal schooling and a second chance to get educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2013). The role of education in society has been changed by the recognition of importance of lifelong learning. Being an important indicator of shaping, extending and expanding knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals throughout their life long, LLL has become necessity of individuals. It is now recognized as one of the key paradigms of modern education systems. Its importance has therefore been one of the major concepts in the reforms in globalization, education, changes in demographics, and the training and labor integration policies in the world (Alla, 2024).

The multi-dimensional aspect of the phenomenon put forward scholars and international organizations to come up with different definitions of lifelong learning. The historical traces of the phenomena can be traced to ancient philosophical traditions where continuous growth of individual was given importance. The ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle stressed the role of education for moral and intellectual development of individuals. However, in the 20th century, the contemporary theory of lifelong learning was developed by the ideas of educational theorists and efforts of international organizations. During this period, the report “Learning to Be”, became a landmark which suggested the concept of a learning society. The idea of such society was necessitated to allow people to participate in the process of learning throughout their lives to overcome social and technological transformations.

The concept of LLL was originally highlighted in the 1972 Faure Report "Learning to Be", which was afterwards extended by UNESCO in 1996 in its report "Learning: The Treasure Within". This report had four pillars: a) learning to know, b) learning to do, c) learning to live together, and d) learning to be. These pillars focused on the potential role of education to not

only emphasize overall human development but also utilize all means of education. This emphasized the idea that “learning should be a continuous "heartbeat of society" rather than a phase confined to youth”. So, lifelong learning became an important part of international education policy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The international agencies like OECD and European Commission also advocated the concept of lifelong learning to promote economic prosperity, skilled and competent manpower development (European Commission, 2001). Although varied definitions differ in terminologies or expressions, however, they all focus on the nature of LLL being continuous, comprehensive and inclusive. Lifelong learning is usually taken as the personal, voluntary, and continuous learning or knowledge for personal and professional development. International organizations, i.e. UNESCO and OECD, recognized role of LLL as an important indicator in the development of sustainable and inclusive societies. It covers learning processes that take place at all life stages and under various conditions such as formal, non-formal and informal (UNESCO, 2025).

There are different interrelated dimensions of LLL as they depict the variety of contexts and intentions of learning. These consist of informal, formal and nonformal education which covers whole life span of individuals. Informal learning involves learning under normal circumstances because of everyday experience, socialization, and individual pursuits and in everyday life. Formal education is conventional and institution-based form of learning where learning is usually based on structured curriculum, face-to-face teaching sessions, classroom activities, formal assessment procedures and result in qualified or certified credentials. Non-formal education is an organized and structured educational activity which is carried out from formal setups. Its curriculum and nature of education is flexible where there is flexibility of admission and variety of curriculum choices, professional training programs, community educational programs, workshops, and vocational training etc.

Among all the forms of education, formal and nonformal education are considered more important to impart basic education. In Pakistan, lifelong learning is promoted mainly through formal, nonformal, open distance learning institutes and different NGOs. However, basic education is imparted through formal education as well as through nonformal education. Under NFE, basic education is delivered by different NGOs and government organizations. In this regard, role of Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) is notable. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training founded Basic Education Community (BEC) Schools which play a critical role in promoting basic education in Pakistan. BECS offer a flexible community-based model of basic education to under-resourced regions where provision of basic primary education is either not available or cannot be accessed. These schools provide free, primary-level education in economically marginalized areas to over 547,000 out-of-school children through non-formal education. According to Directorate General of Basic Education Community Schools (2025) “BEC Schools are based on non-formal basic education system having a single teacher in school (Class I-V) where the premises is provided free of cost by the community. Single teacher is responsible for classes I to V of a school by adopting multi-grade teaching methods. The teachers’ honorarium, Teaching Learning Material (TLM) and textbooks are freely provided by the Government of Pakistan. Directorate General of Basic Education Community Schools is executing free basic community schools in the far-flung areas in Islamabad (ICT), Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir”. This study will be significant for stakeholders of basic education as it aims to explore lifelong learning strategies at institutional level by shedding light on the ways to adapt the strategies which would help to accelerate lifelong learning. This study would be an “exploratory” which will offer educators/academia of both institutions to explore the new and innovative educational courses, strategies, plans of action etc. on lifelong learning at different levels with comparative insights.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, proper implementation of lifelong learning for basic education at mass level is a big challenge. Formal and nonformal basic education institutes have failed to combat ever increasing illiteracy in the country. To attain SDG 4, it is needed to foster lifelong learning at basic level. There is a need to address the issues of lifelong learning for expanding basic education through both sectors of education. So, the study focused on “Fostering Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Basic Education: A Comparative Study of Formal and Non-formal Institutes”.

Objective

- To explore institutional approaches of formal and nonformal educational institutes to foster lifelong learning for basic education.

RQ1: what is the level and quality of governance of LLL of formal and NFE institutes (i.e. partnerships/networking, institutional architecture, regular monitoring etc.)?

RQ2: What sort of curriculum development approaches are used to foster LLL?

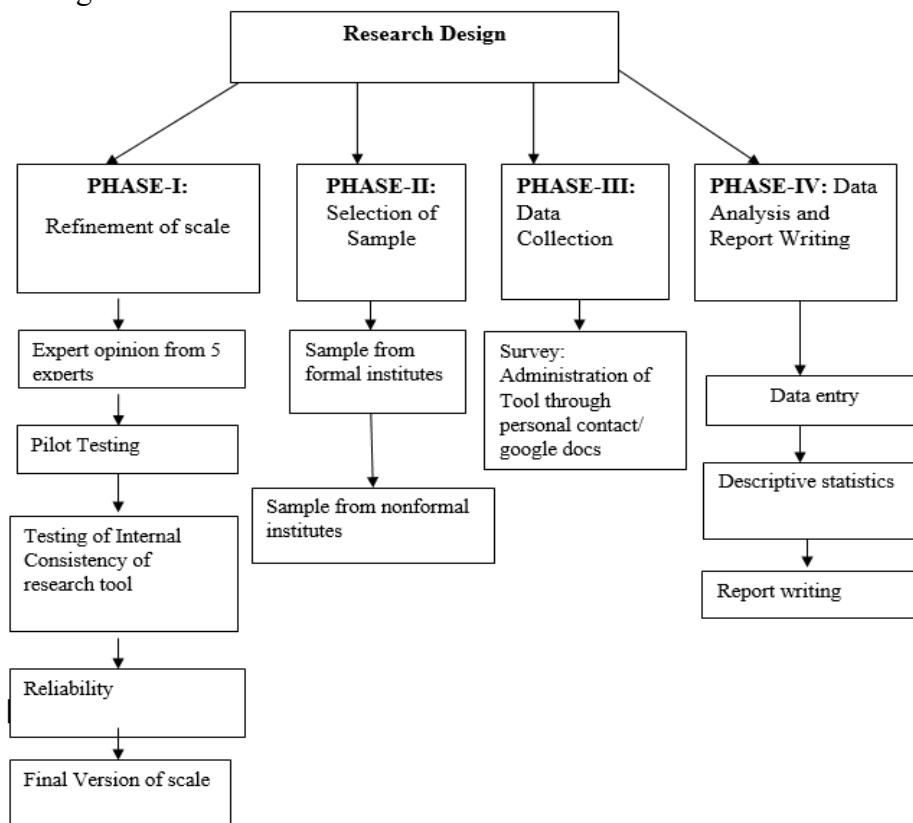
RQ3: What sort of pedagogical innovations are adopted to foster lifelong learning for basic education?

RQ4: Which assessment model is used to evaluate students?

Methodology

Following was the methodology of the study:

Research Design: The study was quantitative in nature and employ surveys. Following was the research design:



Population and Sample. The population of this research was primary level teachers from formal education schools (2,454 schools) and Basic Education Community (BEC) Schools (57 schools). The area was delimited to schools from Rawalpindi and Islamabad regions.

Random sample technique was used to select 40 schools from each type of institute. Then primary level teachers from both types of school were selected which constituted a total number of 240 teachers (120 teachers from each type of institute).

Research Instrument. Questionnaire was developed by the researcher and administered on participants after thorough development and testing psychometric properties. It comprised of items regarding different types of lifelong learning institutional approaches of formal and nonformal educational institutes to foster lifelong learning for basic education. Parameters of the scale focused on quality of governance of LLL, curriculum development approaches, pedagogical innovations, and assessment model. There were two parts of the scale, demographic information and main body. Language of questionnaire was English, and response pattern was five-point Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability. Face/Content validity was checked through opinion from 5 educationists. Their views were analyzed in terms of Content validity index (CVI) analysis .94*. Pilot testing was done on a matching sample of 50 teachers. The results of alpha reliability coefficient were .89* which was a good psychometric value to administer the scale on actual participants.

Data Collection. Data was collected through personal contact and google docs.

Data Analysis. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics and t-test.

Results

Following tables indicate the institutional approaches of formal and non-formal educational institutes to foster lifelong learning for basic education. There were four research questions made under this objective. Research question 1: what is the level and quality of governance of LLL of formal and NFE institutes? Research question 2: What sort of curriculum development approaches are used to foster LLL? Research question 3: What sort of pedagogical innovations are adopted to foster lifelong learning for basic education? Research question 4: Which assessment model is used to evaluate students? Each research question contains 1 subscale. Details are mentioned in the table 1 to table 4.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis and Difference between Teachers' Responses on Level and Quality of Governance, of LLL of Formal (N=104) and NFE institutes (N=143)

Subscale	Items	Institute	N	Mean	SD	Range		t-value	P-value
						Min	Max		
Quality of Governance	Defined roles in managing LLL	FE	104	3.4	1.0	1.00	5.00	-3.299	.001
		NFE	143	3.72	.82	2.00	5.00		
	Quality monitoring mechanisms	FE	104	3.1	1.0	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.55	.82	2.00	5.00		

In this table, descriptive as well as t-test is applied to explore institutional approaches in terms of "Quality of Governance" of formal and nonformal educational institutes to foster lifelong learning for basic education. Descriptive analysis on "Quality of Governance" mean score of

NFE institutions is high than FE in “defined roles in managing LLL” (Mean FE=3.4, Mean NFE=3.72), and in “quality monitoring mechanisms” (Mean FE=3.1, Mean NFE=3.55). Results of t-test on this subscale also indicate statistically significant difference between both institutions’ quality assurance mechanisms (t-value= -3.299, p-value= .001). Overall, BECS are better at handling LLL in terms of governance than formal educational institutions.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis and Difference between Teachers’ Responses on Curriculum Development of LLL of Formal (N=104) and NFE institutes (N=143)

Subscale	Items	Institute	N	Mean	SD	Range		t-value	P-value
						Min	Max		
Curriculum development	Competency based approach	FE	104	3.4	.990	1.00	5.00	1.743	.083
		NFE	143	3.76	.709	2.00	5.00		
	Subject centred approach	FE	104	3.4	.952	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.78	.703	2.00	5.00		
	learner centred pedagogy	FE	104	3.51	.944	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.72	.685	2.00	5.00		

Results on this table are on “Curriculum Development” which indicate that both institutions had high mean on all items in competency-based curriculum (Mean FE=3.4, Mean NFE=3.76), subject-centred approach (Mean FE=3.78, Mean NFE=3.51) and learner-centred pedagogy (Mean FE=3.51, Mean NFE=3.72). It indicates that these institutions are equally working towards realigning curricula with LLL principles. However, descriptive analysis of mean scores of institutions indicates that the highest mean (Mean FE=3.78, Mean NFE=3.51) was obtained in the subject-centred approach, indicating that the traditional models of curriculum remain prevalent. Inferential statistics also indicated no statistically significant difference between both institutions’ curriculum development approaches (t-value= -1.743, p-value= .083) and both institutions are working towards realigning curricula with LLL principles.

Table 3

Descriptive Analysis and Difference between Teachers’ Responses on Pedagogical Innovations of LLL of Formal (N=104) and NFE institutes (N=143)

Subscale	Items	Institute	N	Mean	SD	Range		t-value	P-value
						Min	Max		
Pedagogical innovations	Collaborative learning activities	FE	104	3.57	.963	1.00	5.00	-.210	.834
		NFE	143	3.82	.597	2.00	5.00		
	Experimental learning pedagogy	FE	104	3.72	.918	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.69	.724	1.00	5.00		
	Classroom discussion	FE	104	3.72	.875	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.65	.805	2.00	5.00		

Descriptive analysis of Subscale “Pedagogical innovations” indicates that all items have high mean scores. The mean score of NFE institutions is high and almost equal to FE in “collaborative learning activities, (Mean FE=3.57, Mean NFE=3.82), experimental learning pedagogy (Mean FE=3.72, Mean NFE=3.69) and classroom discussion (Mean FE=3.72, Mean NFE=3.65) indicating that interactive teaching methods are common. Inferential statistics also indicated no statistically significant difference between both institutions’ Pedagogical Innovations (t-value= -.210, p-value= .084) and both institutions. Overall, it reflects that both types of institutions are no longer adhering to the traditional teaching techniques but are shifting to more interactive, participatory and learner-centred pedagogies to promote lifelong learning.

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis and Difference between Teachers’ Responses Assessment Models of LLL of Formal (N=104) and NFE institutes (N=143)

Subscale	Items	Institute	N	Mean	SD	Range		t-value	p-value
						Min	Max		
Assessment Model	Written assessment	FE	104	3.63	.836	1.00	5.00	-1.807	.072
		NFE	143	3.52	.87	2.00	5.00		
	Practical assessment	FE	104	3.76	.864	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	3.98	.68	2.00	5.00		
	Oral assessment	FE	104	3.99	.908	1.00	5.00		
		NFE	143	4.08	.633	2.00	5.00		

Results on the “Assessment Model”, indicate that both institutions had high mean on all items in this subscale. Descriptive results indicate high mean scores on written assessment (Mean FE=3.63, Mean NFE=3.52), practical assessment component (Mean FE=3.76, Mean NFE=3.98) and oral assessment (Mean FE=3.99, Mean NFE=4.08). This indicates high levels of use on oral assessment and practical assessment in NFE and FE which implicate a multi-method approach to assessment. Inferential statistics indicated no statistically significant difference between both institutions’ assessment mechanisms (t-value= -1.807, p-value= .072) as both institutions assessment systems are extensive and effective. Even though institutions use a variety of assessment techniques, the prevalence of oral assessment indicates reliance on traditional assessment methods.

Findings and Discussion

Overall, this study found that FE institutes and NFE institutes are extensively working to flourish LLL, however, “Quality of Governance” of NFE institutions is better than FE. Both types of institutions follow proper “Curriculum Development” with more emphasis on subject-centred approach. The “Pedagogical innovations” are followed by FE and NFE institutes in terms of collaborative learning activities, experimental learning pedagogy and classroom discussion. Assessment Model appeared to be multi-method approach focused on oral assessment and practical assessment in both institutions.

- It was found that there is a variation in the quality of governance especially in the formal and non-formal education sectors. The nonformal institutes were BECS, so the quality of promoting lifelong learning is better in NFE sector to promote basic education.

Findings of this study are supported by Khan (2024). The BECS institutions offer better governance to promote lifelong learning, which may be because they are operating under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in Pakistan. They function as a non-formal education system aimed at educating out-of-school children (OOSC) in marginalized areas and mostly use community-based educational practices. BECS mostly emphasize basic levels of learning through foundational literacy in reading, writing and numeracy. So, these schools are usually founded on the dynamic approach to teaching and follow a localized approach of learning to address the needs of marginalized communities.

- Regarding curriculum development, it is found that across institutions a hybrid curriculum framework is embraced in which both traditional and modern methods co-exist. The outcomes according to the greatest mean scores show that the most prevalent models are still the traditional subject-centered (Mean FE=3.78, Mean NFE=3.51). Yet, there is also remarkable drift towards more advanced curriculum models indicating high mean scores of learner-centered pedagogies (Mean FE=3.51, Mean NFE=3.72) and competency-based curriculum models.
- Regarding pedagogical innovations, overall, it reflects that both types of institutions are no longer adhering to the traditional teaching techniques but are shifting to more interactive, participatory and learner-centred pedagogies to promote lifelong learning. In both sectors of education, there is a great tendency to use the participatory and interactive methods of teaching in pedagogical innovations NFE institutions is high and almost equal to FE in “collaborative learning activities, (Mean FE=3.57, Mean NFE=3.82) . Classroom discussion and collaborative learning rank as the strategies used very often. On the other hand, practical and real-life learning experiences are not always a part of pedagogy as experiential learning is less used in classrooms to promote lifelong learning.
- Regarding assessment models, the study found that in FE and BECS, there is emphasis on oral assessment. Even though institutions use a variety of assessment techniques, the prevalence of oral assessment indicates reliance on traditional assessment methods. Simultaneously, the considerable application of practical assessment component (Mean FE=3.76, Mean NFE=3.98) and oral assessment (Mean FE=3.99, Mean NFE=4.08) are an indicator of the use of different methods of evaluation. The average values indicate that assessment systems are properly established and are used in the middle of the lifelong learning programs. In comparison, assessment models are the most developed region, then pedagogical innovations, and curriculum development, and lastly governance structures are the least developed.
- Overall, the results imply that the current teaching and assessment practices are sound, but institutional governance frameworks need to be reinforced to be able to facilitate lifelong learning. Further, the findings are extremely statistically significant which means that these institutional strategies are adopted throughout both formal and non-formal education sectors.

Conclusions

The study concludes that in NFE sector where Basic Education Community Schools operate under Federal Ministry of Education, the governance related to advancement of lifelong learning to promote basic education is more structured and effective than formal education institutions of Rawalpindi and Islamabad regions. BECS under NFE sector contribute towards better performance in terms of clear role definition and relatively better monitoring systems. So, strengthening governance frameworks of both formal and nonformal education is essential to effectively promote lifelong learning in Pakistan’s basic education system.

Formal and NFE institutions use a hybrid curriculum framework. There is use of both traditional and modern curriculum models. However, the most prevalent models are still the traditional subject centered. Yet, there is also remarkable drift towards more advanced curriculum models indicating learner-centered pedagogies and competency-based curriculum models. This may be concluded as inconsistency in using one curriculum model and its implementation indicating the need for more standardised curriculum.

Pedagogical innovation in FE and BECS is not deeply institutionalized yet moderately practiced across three dimensions: collaborative learning activities, experiential learning pedagogy, and classroom discussion. This concludes that pedagogical innovation needs further strengthening across both sectors of education.

In both formal and non-formal education sectors assessment strategies are diverse and moderately well-developed. However, both types of institutions focus more on oral assessments than competency-based and other modern formative assessment practices.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended to develop clear governance frameworks equally for NFE and FE to promote LLL initiatives among primary level students.
2. Introduce robust and up to date monitoring systems to bring efficiency, standardization and transparency.
3. Teachers' and administrators' capacity building sessions may be regular feature in FE as well as in NFE to enhance understanding of practices related to lifelong learning initiatives.
4. There is need to integrate LLL into provincial and national policies with clear implementation guidelines for teachers to promote basic education through LLL approach.
5. To reduce gap of governance, there may be regular monitoring of FE and NFE sector basic education institutes to evaluate the progress.
6. There is a need for developing standardised curriculum guidelines to reduce inconsistencies.

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