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Academic Value of “O” and “A” Levels Education System in Pakistan

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Abstract

Education is a process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual, which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities. Education, in its limited sense, included and influences deliberately planned, chosen and employed by the community for the welfare of its coming generations. The purpose is to modify the behavior of the child and to shape his personality in a more desirable form.

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the academic value of O and A levels, as viewed by students, parents and teachers. The population of the study was all O and A level schools, O and A level students, their parents and teachers in Pakistan. The sample of the study covered 45 schools, 230 teachers, 450 O and A level students and their parents. The sample of the study was drawn from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. For the collection of data, three questionnaires, one each for O and A level students, their parents and the teachers of O and A level were developed. Three structured interviews i.e. one each for O and A level students, their parents and the teachers were designed. Data were collected through personal visits. For the analysis of data percentage and chi square as contingency test were used.

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It was concluded through this study that Academic value of O and A levels education system in Pakistan was due to better learning, fair examination system, advanced and better curriculum, easy admission in foreign universities, provision of quality education, better learning environment, knowledge based education system, status symbol for family, flexible scheme of studies, up-to-date, comprehensive and informative courses, international acceptance and recognition, better professional careers and dynamic future for students. It was also found that O and A levels education system were expensive in Pakistan. Majority of the students belong to elite class of society.

Keywords: Academic Value, O and A Levels, Education System, Quality Education.

Introduction

The word *education* has a very wide connotation. It is difficult to define. There is no single objective, which can cover the whole of life with its various manifestations. Philosophers and thinkers from Socrates to Dewey have defined education in accordance with their philosophy of life with the result that there emerged divergent concepts and definitions of education. The concept of education is like a diamond, which appears to be of different colours when seen from different angles (Sadiq, 1981).

Education is closely related to social change, because generally inventions and discoveries take place due to education. Consequently, change comes in society also. The changed society again gives direction to education according to its new form. The education and social change have a sort of action and inter-action. It is the duty (function) of society to bring progressiveness in society and make the attitude of its members liberal and wide. It is very necessary to encourage inventions, discoveries, researches, and tests etc. For bringing progress in society through education, some check on this progress is also necessary so that undesirable elements do not increase in society as a result of changes due to progress and new gains. Thus the nature of education also continues to change and at the same time this changed form becomes pragmatic and the aim becomes preservation of old society and establishing of new values in society. In the absence of education, man cannot take benefit of progress due to inventions, discoveries and researches nor can he develop his personality. However, much a person may work hard and however much he may develop his culture and society by using his imagination, the fact is that frequently he cannot get pleasure and satisfaction with this progress without proper education and guidance, because he is not able to utilize it (Kumar, 2003).

Since 1951, the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination is being conducted at two main levels i.e. Ordinary level (O level) and Advanced level (A level) in the England. These are being offered since 1959 in Pakistan. There are many institutions in Pakistan which offer GCE O and A level courses to the pupils. An O-level is standard qualification usually taken at the age of fifteen/sixteen (The British Council, 1999).

In Pakistan, there are many institutions which offer O and A level courses to the students but the recognized institutions from the British council in Pakistan are 335. No significant research work appears so far to find out the social acceptability of O and A level education system in Pakistan. This study was designed to probe the issue at large.

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Academic Value of O and A Level Education System In Pakistan

There are many reason of rapid growth of social acceptance of O and A level in Pakistan, which are given below.

Quality Education of International Standard

The English O and A levels education system provide best education, in Pakistan. Although there are more education system in the world which are better than GCSE. But so for in Pakistan GCSE Education system is consider best. Because no other internationally recognized system is available in Pakistan up till now. The students of O and A levels are educated at international standards The O and A level education system aimed to provide range of comprehensive and quality education to the students. The teachers have foreign exposure in schools. In O and A level institutions in Pakistan many teachers are foreign qualified (Younis, 2004)

The basic amenities which are available in O and A level institutions are rarely present in public schools of Pakistan. On the whole, lack of well-designed and well-equipped classrooms and laboratories hinder the proper delivery of the level of education appropriate to secondary and intermediate stages (Ahmad, 1986).

Religious and modern education

O and A level education system Schools offered parents a unique education opportunity for their children by combining best of both the religious and modern education. Islamic studies are compulsory for Muslims students in all O and A level institutions in Pakistan. Students are given proper religious education by the Qari (A person who teaches the Holy Quran and conducts religious sessions). The O and A level education system aimed to provide the students with education that would enable them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Students need constant stimulation and their creative nature should be developed through art, music and drama. Physical development is also important (Sabir, 2002)

High academic standard with traditional values

On completion of the O level, the students got ample knowledge to enter in next grade. Successful completion of the A level would provide the requisite basis for further education. O and A level institution in Pakistan aimed to maintain sound traditional values, high academic standards and would encourage positive attitudes to work. O and A level education system provide a variety of subjects to the students, the core subjects as English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, Pakistan studies and Islamiyat.

English education system in Pakistan also expects from its students to achieve high standards of conduct, and expected from them to become mature members of the society. At O level student have to choose between 7 and 9 subjects to study by that stage. All students must

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adopt a serious approach to their work. GCSE would eventually lead to A Levels. The O and A level institutions follow the British national curriculum on the pattern of all schools in England and Wales (Maryum, 1993)

Flexibility of O and A level examination

O and A level examinations could be taken unit by unit and the obtained marks for each unit would be sent separately to the students. One of the benefits of the system is that one does not feel the burden. Secondly, if students are not pleased with their result in any particular unit, they could re-sit in the unit to improve their marks. Students do not have to wait until the end of the year 2 and could re-sit in examination. Their best result will be counted

- There is no limit to the number of subjects a candidate can attempt.
- The O- and AS-levels exams are conducted twice a year, in January and May.
- There is no age restriction for O and A level education (Peter, 2004).

Easy Access to Higher Education in Foreign Countries

After having passing out O level from the School, the students can apply directly with AS Level to UK, America, Arab States or else any other university in Europe (Iltaf, 2005).

Bifurcation into the Cambridge and Matric Streams

Bifurcation of students into the Cambridge and Matric Stream is carried out at the end of Class VII, keeping in mind the student's academic performance in the previous two years, their attitude towards studies and the preference of the parents. Students choosing to take up the Cambridge Stream will not be able to taken a transfer into the Matric Stream, if so desired, later (Fahim, 2000).

Acceptance and Recognition of O and A Level Programme

O and A Level are high profile qualifications. O level has exactly the same value in admitting students to institutes of further education and employment as the UK equivalent GCSE. O level is comparable with IGCSE and the GCSE O and A Level has an excellent reputation amongst many international schools and Ministries of Education

O and A Level Programme is recognized as a reliable record of attainment which counts towards entry to universities and colleges around the world, including all British universities (Eisenhart, 2004).

Standardized Assessment Method

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The assessment methods used in O and A level examinations consider better than other local examining boards in Pakistan. Pakistani students become able to compete on equal terms for entrance into leading academic institutions nationally and worldwide due to high standard of 'O' and 'A' level education system. Consequently, the country will evolve to a more competitive position in the global knowledge-based economy (Roehler, 1991).

Philosophy of People

The normally perception about O and A level in Pakistan is that the students of O and A level are superior than other students studying in local education system with respect to creativity, thinking and better understanding of concepts. Elite class of society in Pakistan sends their children in O and A level institutions as a sign of pride and status, but poor people can not afford the O and A level education's expenditure for their children (Rana, 2004).

Private Sector Charm

Private entrepreneurs have done well in providing education to high income group at high cost. O and A level education institutions earned high reputation for so called academic standard, conducive environment they maintained for their students and getting high reward in term of profit in Pakistan. They generate their own funds through high fee (Mothsan, 2004).

Conversion Of Foreign Grades / Marks

All the certificates and the grades awarded by the accredited Examination Board / Authority/ Syndicate and institutions recognized by the Education Authority of the country of origin is considered for equivalence

Criticism

Educational System plays a key role in the development of the nations and their future. The class dissimilarity between the educational systems in the subcontinent is the gift of the British during their occupation in the sub continent. Presently in Pakistan, the two parallel system of education are prevailing. One is for the upper class which is also called English medium where the children of the higher class are studying. While other is the Urdu medium education system where the most of our population students are studying which are form lower of middle class.

In fact due to the difference of the educational system, the higher class has been separated from the lower or middle class. The difference of the class has been taught at a very basic level and this is the major fault in our educational system. The future generation of ours would not be a nation but only a gathering of different classes who are living at a same country. Their ideas and notion could never match because of the ruthless flaws in the

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building of our character and the thoughts. At the level where there is the time to build character and thoughts they have been told that they are different than their other country men and the child of other classes (Khan, 2004)

An interesting aspect of the educational system at the school level is the Cambridge system which reflects the rather elitist and presumably qualitative aspect of schooling. It also unfolds the oft heard opinion that these are some of the manifestations of the double standards that Pakistani society has. English medium schools, with O and A levels being implemented, exorbitant tuition and other fee structures being upheld are one face of education and society here. The other face is the government school, Urdu medium, lower grade education, and where the fee structure is “low” (Nusrullah, 2005).

By supporting English through a parallel system of elitist schooling, Pakistan’s ruling elite acts as an ally of the forces of globalization, at least as far as the hegemony of English, which globalization promotes, is concerned. The major effect of this policy is to weaken the local languages and lower their status even in their home country. This, in turns, militates against linguistic and cultural diversity; weakens the ‘have-nots’ even further and increases poverty by concentrating the best-paid job in the hands of the international elite and the English-using elite of the peripheries.

Population

Three hundred thirty five (335) schools, two thousand three hundred (2,300) teachers and twenty three thousand four hundred and twelve (23,412) students of O and A levels and their parents in Pakistan constituted the population of the study.

Sample

The sample of the study was 45 O and A level schools, which were randomly selected from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Rawalpindi, i.e. nine schools were randomly selected from each city i.e. Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. 230 teachers were randomly selected from sample school to administer questionnaire and twenty teachers for interview schedule. Ten students and their parents were randomly selected from each sample school to administer the questionnaire and also twenty teachers, students and their parents were randomly selected from sample schools for interviews.

Research Instruments

The researcher prepared three questionnaires using five-point Likert scale after going through the related literature, consisting of books, journals, articles, reports, magazines with the help of honorable supervisor and members of supervisory committee. Their suggestions were incorporated in the questionnaires.

The following instruments were developed and used for the collection of data;

- a) Questionnaire for
 - i) Teachers
 - ii) Students

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iii) Parents

b) Interview of

i) Teachers

ii) Students

iii) Parents

Pilot Testing

For the improvement and modification of research instruments the questionnaires were administered to teachers, students and their parents of the local O and A level schools of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. In the light of the respondent's suggestions they were modified and reprinted for the administration on the whole sample.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to parents of students who were enrolled in O and A Level system of education and the opinions of parents of the students of this system were invited to know why this system was acceptable to them. The opinion of parents who did not/could not enroll their wards in O and A level education system may be left for future researcher who can manage the quantum of work with resources available to them.

Collection of Data

Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted. The data were conducted through personal visits by the researcher to the sample schools.

Analysis of Data

Data collected through above-mentioned instruments were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted category-wise compare responses of three groups (Parents/teachers, teachers/students and parents/students). To analyze the data, chi-square as a contingency test and percentage were used.

For statistical treatment chi-square as a contingency test was applied using the following formula:

$$\begin{aligned} O_i &= \text{Frequency observed or experimental determined} \\ E_i &= \text{Frequency expected} \\ df &= \text{Degree of freedom} \\ P &= \text{Probability of exceeding the tabulated value of } X^2 \\ &= \frac{O_i - E_i}{E_i} \\ &= \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \end{aligned}$$

$$\chi^2_{Obs} = \sum_{cells} \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

(Garrett, 1997)

Chi-square as contingency test was used to compare the frequencies of parents/teachers, teachers/students and parents/students.

The method can be illustrated as follows, using fictional data:

	Responses as Frequencies					Totals	Expected Frequencies				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree						
Group 1	10	23	47	21	33	134	15.7	25.9	49.7	17.8	24.9
Group 2	21	28	51	14	16	130	15.3	25.1	48.3	17.2	24.1
Totals	31	51	98	35	49	264					
Chi-square = 11.8 (df4)											

Here there are two samples, neither of which can be regarded as a control group. The samples need not be of the same size. The expected frequencies are found by taken the totals for each of the five choices as the best estimate of the control group and working out what proportion of each sample might be expected to make that choice. Thus, for 'strongly agree', 10 of the sample made that choice with group 1 and 21 with group 2. 31 overall made that choice. Thus, the expected frequencies are 15.7 and 15.3 (to the first decimal place). These are obtained as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Group 1} \quad \text{Expected frequency} &= 31 \times 134/264 = 15.7 \\ \text{Group 2} \quad \text{Expected frequency} &= 31 \times 130/264 = 15.3 \end{aligned}$$

The value of the degree of freedom for any analysis is obtained from the following calculations:

$$df = (r-1) \times (c-1)$$

On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of data, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made. It may be noted here that all responses were first taken in frequency then converted into percentage.

Results

Table 1

Item 1	O and A level education is perceived as worthwhile education					Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
	SA	A	N	D	SD				

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<i>Parents</i>	63	29	3	2	3	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	39.9	2	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	52	22	11	10	5	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	7.9	3	< 0.05
<i>Students</i>	53	27	11	3	6	<i>Parents/Students</i>	25.2	2	< 0.001

Parents hold a much more positive view than either teachers or students. This is consistent with the unhappiness with the O and A level system in England with teachers and students.

Table 2

Item 2	O and A level education system is related to our national ideology.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	38	29	10	15	7	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	0.4	4	n.s.
<i>Teachers</i>	40	28	10	14	7	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	5.8	4	n.s.
<i>Students</i>	36	32	12	10	10	<i>Parents/Students</i>	8.2	4	n.s.

All groups seem happy that the system is compatible with the national ideology.

Table 3:

Item 3	O and A level education enhance the Communication Skill of students.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	47	29	5	12	8	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	43.3	4	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	43	22	21	7	8	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	24.5	4	< 0.001
<i>Students</i>	36	38	12	5	9	<i>Parents/Students</i>	36.0	4	< 0.001

Parents are most positive, with their students least. A certain amount depends on what is meant by communication skills. Any examinations based system must encourage reading and writing skills. However, the O and A level system offers little opportunity for benefits for listening and speaking skills.

Table 4:

Item 6	Merit is strictly followed by all the matter.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	40	32	12	6	8	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	13.1	4	< 0.05
<i>Teachers</i>	35	43	6	10	7	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	19.6	4	< 0.001
<i>Students</i>	45	29	12	6	8	<i>Parents/Students</i>	1.6	4	n.s.

The teachers are less sure than the other two groups. This is perhaps important in that the teachers are those with the most detailed knowledge of the way merit operates.

Table 5:

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Item 8	O and A level education system inculcate more confidence in the students.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	31	44	12	8	5	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	8.9	3	< 0.05
<i>Teachers</i>	42	36	10	6	7	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	7.8	4	n.s.
<i>Students</i>	35	33	12	11	10	<i>Parents/Students</i>	16.6	3	< 0.001

All groups have positive views while teachers are most positive with respect to others. It shows that O and A level education inculcate more confidence in the students.

Table 6

Item 9	The teachers give feed back of the students in the monthly parents-teacher meetings.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	43	33	10	8	6	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	8.6	4	n.s.
<i>Teachers</i>	52	32	5	6	5	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	11.5	4	< 0.0
<i>Students</i>	40	38	4	8	10	<i>Parents/Students</i>	8.6	4	n.s.

All groups are positive in their views. Perhaps the teachers are most sure that they provide feed back of the students in the monthly parents' teacher meeting properly. It shows that teachers are aware of the feed back factor effects student performance. While students and parents are least sure as compare to the teachers.

Table 7:

Item 13	Foreign Scholarship is a better source of motivation for the students.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	32	43	16	6	3	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	34.0	4	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	40	32	10	5	13	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	3.0	4	n.s.
<i>Students</i>	41	36	7	5	11	<i>Parents/Students</i>	32.2	3	< 0.001

All groups hold quite strong positive views. Both parents and students are similar in their views while teacher's views are slight less positive. It is clear that the foreign scholarship is a better source of motivation for the students

Table: 8

Item 15	O and A level education system prepare students for professional career.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	40	37	10	6	8	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	32.9	4	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	60	19	7	8	7				

Parents and teachers have same positive point of view regarding professional career of the students. They believe that O and A level education system prepare students for their professional career.

Table: 9

Item 18	The O and A level examination is conducted fairly and transparently.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	36	40	5	8	11	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	30.8	3	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	44	25	15	4	13	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	26.5	3	< 0.001
<i>Students</i>	43	40	10	3	4	<i>Parents/Students</i>	35.0	3	< 0.001

Although, all groups have highly positive views but comparatively parents have the most positive views. All groups are verifying that the O and A level examinations are conducted fairly and transparently.

Table 10

Item 19	Syllabus of O and A level is revised according to global trends.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	47	33	3	10	7	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	1.7	3	n.s.
<i>Teachers</i>	51	31	6	8	5				

Both parents and teachers of O and A level have strongly positive views regarding revision of syllabus. It shows that O and A level syllabus are revised according to global trends in Pakistan.

Table 11:

Item 23	O and A level's institutions environment is suitable for learning .								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Parents</i>	42	42	8	4	5	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	22.9	3	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	58	25	5	5	7	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	21.9	3	< 0.001
<i>Students</i>	45	42	5	4	4	<i>Parents/Students</i>	2.3	5	n.s.

The views of all the respondents are positive. They are confident about the institution's education environment. Which shows that O and A level's institutions environment is suitable for learning.

Table 12:

Item 26	Teacher student's ratio is appropriate.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	df	P
<i>Students</i>	53	31	8	5	4	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	11.1	3	< 0.05
<i>Teachers</i>	55	23	7	7	8				

Teachers and students hold similar view. Which implies that in O and A level institution's, both teacher and student's ratio is appropriate. This helps the students to get education more efficiently.

Table 13:

Item 28	Prizes and awards are necessary to motivate students.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	Df	P
<i>Parents</i>	50	32	7	8	3	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	10.0	2	< 0.01
<i>Teachers</i>	60	23	4	5	8	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	12.7	3	< 0.01
<i>Students</i>	54	35	2	3	6	<i>Parents/Students</i>	2.1	2	n.s.

Students are much more in positive in their views than parents and teachers. In general, prizes and awards enhance the student's performance. The same scenario can be seen that in O and A level institutions prizes and award motivate the students.

Table: 14

Item 33	The teachers provide additional material apart from books.								
	SA	A	N	D	SD	Comparisons	χ^2	Df	P
<i>Parents</i>	47	40	4	4	5	<i>Parents/Teachers</i>	47.2	4	< 0.001
<i>Teachers</i>	21	56	10	6	7	<i>Teachers/Students</i>	67.5	3	< 0.001
<i>Students</i>	54	35	5	4	3	<i>Parents/Students</i>	4.9	3	n.s.

All respondents having similar point of view. Students have strong point of view than teachers and parents. Student's position is more critical in this scenario because they need additional material apart from books and their response shows that teachers cooperate and provide them additional material apart from books.

Conclusions

On the basis of analysis of data and findings of the study, the following conclusion were drawn.

All the respondents of study expressed their view that there was high academic value of O and A level education system in Pakistan. They also perceived O and A level education system as worth while kind of education and parents used to consider this education system as a status symbol for their family. In the parents and teacher opinion the O and A level education programme was preferred in Pakistan due to course contents, easy access to higher education, international acceptance and better jobs opportunities because in O and A level institutions more emphasis was given to career counseling of students. Majority of respondents in the study revealed that O and A level institutions environment was suitable for teaching and learning. They were satisfied with the facilities provided by the institutions.

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Most of parents and teachers in Pakistan agreed that O and A level education system was knowledge based and it inculcated more confidence in students and attitude of students towards education was positive. It was also found that O and A level education system promote creativity in the students. It is because Pakistani Local education system is not up to the international standard. It was found that in O and A level education system foreign scholarships, cash prizes and awards were given to the students at regional, national and international level which motivated students more towards education. It was also analyzed that merit was strictly followed in all matter. In teacher's opinion number of students of O and A level education is increasing day by day, which reveals that O and A level education system is getting more popularity in Pakistan. In the interview teachers and parents expressed the reasons for growing social acceptance of O and A level in Pakistan are better learning, fair examination system flexible scheme of studies, advanced and better curriculum, easy admission in foreign universities, provision of quality education, better learning environment, knowledge based education system, status symbol for family, flexible scheme of studies, up-to-date, comprehensive and informative courses, international acceptance and recognition, better professional careers and dynamic future for students.

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