

**Uses and Challenges Faced by Female Teachers in Primary Schools of Rural Areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study entitled as "Issues and Challenges Faced by Female Teachers In Primary Schools Of Rural Areas In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" aimed to investigate the issues and challenges faced by primary school teachers in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The current study follows mixed-methods and adopts purposive sampling technique to select the population sample of the study. open-ended questionnaires have been used as a tool for data collection and were distributed to total of 200 female primary school teachers of rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The qualitative description of the data interpreted the participants' responses in data analysis which yielded into major findings. The findings shows that female teachers are facing several barriers such as gender discrimination, professional development, inadequate resources, societal pressure, work-life balance issues, poor infrastructure; lack of classrooms, furniture, sanitation, and lack of security. Commuting problems, lack of familial support and lack of compensation from government complicates the context further. All these issues contributes to the hinderance of female education in Pakistan.*

**Key Terms:** PSTs, Female Education, Barriers, Gender discrimination.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background to the Study**

In Pakistan, female teachers contribute a substantial portion of the teaching faculty, across the country especially in rural areas (Tahira et al., 2020). Irrespective of their crucial role and significance, female teachers face various issues and challenges which has direct influence over their professional and personal lives. These issues and challenges spread from inadequate resources to the lack of professional development opportunities, and societal attitudes towards women in leadership roles (UNESCO, 2023). According to UNESCO, 2023 the feminization of teaching profession has been in practice globally which has given an edge to women in primary education. However, despite their majority they are suffering from bad working condition and lack of professional growth opportunities (Kagoda, 2012). In the context of rural areas female teachers often face additional barriers such as limited access to professional development and support networks, which can influence their career progression and job satisfaction (Glover et al., 2016).

Girls' primary education is a critical and crucial endeavor of global efforts to achieve gender equality and improve educational outcomes for all children. According to UNICEF, focusing on girls' education can result to transforms communities, countries, and the entire world. Girls who receive education are less likely

to marry young and hence are more likely to lead healthy, productive lives. They can become financially stable, participate in their personal decisions, and build better futures for themselves and their families. Girls' education is needed to strengthen economies and reduces inequality, contributing to more financially stable, resilient societies (UNICEF, 2023).

Despite various measures and policies, challenges remain in ensuring that all girls have access to quality primary education. Like in case of Pakistan, the primary school completion rate for girls has reached 90%, with gender parity achieved in most countries. However, girls still face unique hurdles in the pursuit of education for instance, safety concerns in classrooms, societal attitudes, and lack of resources. (UNICEF, 2023; PIE, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and well-thought-out approach that includes policy changes, community engagement, and targeted interventions to support girls' education.

Female teachers play a crucial role in the educational infrastructure of Pakistan especially rural areas Pakistan. Their importance can be judged through several key aspects: female teachers are role models and mentors as they are inspirational figures to young girls in the society. They also portray the female leadership and professional abilities, hence motivating girls to follow their academic and career goals (UNESCO, 2023). This kind of representation and encouragement is particularly urgent in the rural areas where the use of the traditional gender roles can limit the ambitions of girls.

Scholarly studies have proved that female educators do have a positive impact on the academic achievements and the overall well-being of students. In primary school, women teachers often create an atmosphere of support and conductivity in the learning process that will help students feel more comfortable and engaged (UNESCO, 2023). Therefore, this will lead to better academic performance and retention especially among girls.

The female teachers can be strategically used to curb the gender-specific challenges that girls encounter in the school system. They have provided a caring and sensitive attitude to matters like menstrual health, safety and gender discrimination. As a result of dealing with such issues, female teachers lead to the development of a more inclusive and equal learning setting amongst students.

In Pakistan, rural schools and teachers of female gender can be the focal point of community interaction and promotion of the female education. They work with parents and local organizations as well as community leaders to reinforce the importance of education to girls and to remove obstacles that hinder girls going to school. This kind of community engagement is critical towards the development of a facilitating environment that would support the education of girls.

It is direly needed to conduct a study and identify the main issues, analyze how society views them, determine the presence and sufficient number of resources, as well as how to improve the working conditions and career growth opportunities. The mixed methodology used by the present research presupposes the employment of open-ended questionnaires as the tool of data collection, followed by the qualitative description and the description of the results. The need to conduct such a study can be supported by the fact that there are gender inequalities within the teaching profession, especially in rural regions. The issues they face are usually distinct and unnoticed by the existing governmental policies and programs; so do female teachers in such areas (Kagoda, 2012). As it focuses on identifying and suggesting possible remedies to the identified dilemmas, this research will help develop prospective solutions to improve the working conditions, professional effectiveness, and general state of female teachers, which will consequently result in the positive changes in the students' learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2023).

### **Purpose Statement**

The current study "Issues and Challenges Faced by Female Teachers in Primary Schools" is aimed to explore the issues and challenges faced by female primary school teachers. The study is primarily intended to identify key challenges faced by the female primary school teachers. Further, the study aims to investigate the impact of societal attitudes on the professional aspect of female primary school teachers. Moreover, the study attempts to assess the available adequate resources and suggest adequate policies to address the concerned issues. The use mixed methods, adopts open-ended questionnaires to collect data, followed by the qualitative description and analysis of the data.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the key challenges faced by female primary school teachers in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To study the impact of societal attitudes on the professional lives of female teachers.
3. To investigate the availability and adequacy of resources for female teachers.
4. To suggest strategies to address the issues and challenges faced by the female primary school teachers.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the main challenges faced by female primary school teachers in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. How do societal attitudes impact the professional lives of female teachers in this region?
3. What are the available resources to female teachers, and how do they affect their job efficiency?
4. What strategies can be implemented to address the issues and challenges faced by the female primary school teachers in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The profession of teaching especially at the primary level, has seen a significant feminization over the years. In Pakistan, female teachers play a crucial role by contributing a substantial portion of the teaching workforce (Tahira et al., 2020). Despite their significant role, the concerned female staff face various challenges that affect their professional and personal lives. These challenges ranges from inadequate resources, lack of professional development opportunities, and societal attitudes towards females of the society (UNESCO, 2023). However, this does not necessarily imprint into better working conditions or professional growth opportunities for female teaching staff (Kagoda, 2012). In rural areas, female teachers got exposure to additional barriers such as limited access to professional development and supportive networks, which results in the hindrance in their career progression and job satisfaction (Glover et al., 2016).

The role of female teachers in primary education cannot be neglected. They are important in influencing the educational life of young girls as role models and mentors. These are female educators who are usually

skilled in solving gender-specific issues that female learners might face within the teaching platform, including menstruation, security issues, and gender inequality. By considering these issues, female educators will have an opportunity to make the learning experience more inclusive and equitable to everyone (UNESCO, 2023).

Despite the advances that have been made towards increasing the count of female teachers, there are still a lot of challenges and issues which need to be addressed. Female teachers in part of the developing countries have challenges in advancing their careers and profession. These barriers are attitudes in society, the inaccessibility of resources, and the lack of access to professional progress. To cope with these issues, a comprehensive strategy is needed, including the policy modification, community involvement, and direct intervention of the concerned authorities to support the female teachers (Haugen et al., 2014).

### **Girls' Education in Pakistan**

In the context of Pakistan, girls' education is a subject to many problems that interfere with the quality of education. The socio-cultural barriers have a very great role to play and the traditional gender roles and societal norms usually prioritize the education of boys over girls. These problems are also worsened by early marriages and gender discrimination, which makes it hard to attend school and even complete a school (Baron, 2023).

Economic issues are also prevalent. Poor families are usually unable to both meet the direct and indirect expenses of schooling including uniforms, books, and transport. This economic cost results in giving precedence to the short-term income rather than long-term education investments in girls (UNICEF Pakistan, n.d.). The inadequate infrastructure in most rural schools such as insufficient sanitation systems and unsafe learning conditions are other factors that deter families sending their daughters to school (Theirworld, 2018).

In addition to that, psychological hurdles complicate the girls' education profusely, affecting their social interactions, academics and overall personality. Girls face stress and anxiety challenges primarily related to their academic pressure, societal expectations and futures insecurities which lead to their decline in academic performance, burnouts and procrastination resulting further stress and a horrible cycle of anxiety (Assembly, 2023).

In the same way, Girls often confront a hostile environment due to the threats of harassment and violence coupled by lack of reliable transport services and long distances to school (World Bank, 2024). Additionally, gaps in policy implementation and resource allocution continue to exist despite commitments from the government and international organizations. There is often lack of sufficient funding and political will alongside with inadequate teacher training programs which regrettably weakens efforts to improve females' education. (Theirworld, 2018).

Similarly, depression is an another commonly existing problem amongst adolescent girls, rendered by factors such as peer pressure, social media and body image concerns. It can lead to the issues of lack of motivation, remaining absent, not getting focused in the class, vehemently hampering the attainment of proper education (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2019). Low self-worth, often caused by rigid norms of gender stereotypes and societal expectations, further impacts girls' confidence and their desire to participate in class, which can have detrimental effects on their academic engagements and achievements (AAUW, 2023).

Just like that, social isolation is equally a major issue among many girls that frequently made them victims of bullying, exclusion, or the inability to make friends. It is this isolation that harbors the sensations of loneliness that affects mental health and college involvement negatively. Besides, teenage girls experience often inadequate emotional control, which can result in impulsive actions and discord with peers and employees, which adds additional complexity to the learning experiences of adolescents (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2019).

Another study conducted by Khan, Haidar, and Amin (2021) is a mixed-methods study that concentrated on the obstacles encountered by women educational leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. In this research study, the focus groups and structured interviews with female leader were conducted, which provided both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The research aimed to determine certain challenges being encountered by these leaders such as prejudice by the society and family. The findings showed that some cultural practices and gender prejudices greatly hinder professional development of female leaders in the education sector, thus the necessity of enacting laws that could foster gender equality in leadership practices.

Other than that, another study by Cimene, Reilly, and Elci (2024) presented that employed purposive sampling to select female educational leaders in the United States and Philippines. They conducted a study aimed at examining systemic challenges that deny women a chance to become leaders in the institutions of learning. As a result of the mixed method approach, they were able to gather sufficient qualitative data in the form of structured interviews and focused group discussion as they gathered quantitative data in the form of surveys. The findings revealed that in both nations women faces the same problems which include gender differences, absence of adequate guidance and mentorship opportunities and social pressures which prioritizes household roles over work. The researchers urged to encourage training programs and legislations to strengthen the roles of women in leadership.

Likewise, the podcast series created by the Harvard Graduate School of Education facilitated a perspective analysis of the individual issues that women encountered in the sphere of education by Weiner (2021). The podcast explored gender biases, pay inequality and inaccessibility of females in leadership roles within the education sector. Weiner emphasized the importance of detecting and resolving these problems to create an inclusive and supportive climate among the female educators. To empower women in education, the discussion also highlighted the importance of having mentorship programs and institutional reforms.

The worldwide examination concerning the gender equality in the teaching field was conducted through UNESCO (2023). The study highlighted the discrimination the female teacher experiences particularly in under developed nations. The issues raised in the study included inadequate professional growth, gender violence, and absence of representation in decision makers. By undertaking qualitative research in terms of interviews and surveys in various areas, UNESCO gave a clear insight into the systemic barriers that female teachers were experiencing. The results underscored well trained, supported, and respected female teachers as being very critical in achieving gender equality in education.

### **Female teacher and social barriers**

The female teachers in Pakistan are faced with social barriers that hinder their career allocation and growth. Among these barriers is the dominance of conventional gender roles associated with them and cultural practices in which men receive more education and are employed more than women. This cultural concept has the peculiar impact of causing a lack of family support among females who have teaching careers because their main roles are viewed as domestic chores and home tasks (Jafree, 2023).

Similarly, female teachers often encounter issues such as harassment and violence in many rural areas, which can detract them from going to their job locations i.e. schools (Pakistani Alliance for Girls Education, 2023). Moreover, female teachers are often exposed to gender-based discrimination at work places. This can be in several forms such as unequal pay, limited opportunities for professional progression and a lack of representation in decision making positions (Pakistani Today, 2022).

### **Geographical Challenges**

Geographical barriers significantly impact girls' education in Pakistan, especially in rural areas. Barón (2023) is of the opinion that a lack of infrastructure, such as schools being far away from children's homes, makes it difficult for girls to go to schools consistently. Theirworld (2018) pinpoints the absence of essential infrastructure which can be particularly challenging for adolescent girls, who may not attend school during menstruation due to inadequate sanitation facilities.

Since, there lack of proper knowledge about understanding these issues faced by female teachers, they hardly use to address them in an effective manner. Policy makers and the general public do not have the proper knowledge about certain specific issues that female teachers encounter in the professional journeys. The lack of awareness may lead to the insufficient support and resources being allocated for addressing these issues. As an example, Baron (2023) dwells upon the challenges of gender-based discrimination, unequal pay, and lack of opportunities to develop professionally experienced by female teachers. Being unfamiliar with these issues, one can hardly take proper actions and implement the policy that will guarantee the required assistance and make the working conditions of female teachers more comfortable. Human Rights watch (2018) stated that the advocacy campaigns, education and media coverage can be vital in creating awareness on these issues.

### **Cultural Challenges**

In Pakistan, cultural barriers contribute a lot to the obstruction of the education of girls. Generally, gender roles and societal norms value boys education more than the girls and this tends to result in lack of family support among the girls seeking education. The idea of early marriages and the fact that the main task of girls is household duties also restrain their educational activities (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Similar to that, gender inequality is another cultural obstruction that can be presented in different ways e.g. involuntary access to learning resources and opportunities. Unhealthy societal customs and the risks of being victimized on their way to schools also affect the education of girls (Baron, 2023).

### **The lack of Acceptance**

Female primary school teachers (PSTs) in Pakistan are highly affected by the lack of acceptance and the general misperceptions. Such misperceptions are usually displayed through gender biasness in which the female teachers are considered less competent or authoritative than the male counterparts. This gendered discrimination may have an impact on the professional growth and job satisfaction.

As an instance, Tariq Mahmood and Ghazala Kausar (2019) examined the perception of gender bias among female teachers with Pakistani English textbooks. Their research proved that gender stereotypes strengthened with the biased content of educational material might influence the behavior of teachers and students also negatively to female educators. This non-acceptance can create a hostile working environment and it might make the female teachers unable to develop professionally.

Besides, the Gender Report by UNESCO (2020) proves that the negative impact of gender norms and stereotypes on the learning experience of teachers and learners are possible. Teachers should be willing to listen to the students and assist them to discover themselves without continuity of negative stereotypes. In the case of female teachers who are not accepted and exposed to stereotypes, that may negatively affect their ability to effectively teach and their students.

These issues should be emphasized with special attention to raise awareness, gender-sensitive policies, and provide female teachers with supportive networks. Through breaking stereotypes and creating a more accommodating atmosphere, one can develop a fairer and more supportive educational system to all the teachers.

### **Mixed-Methods Strategy in Relation to Current Study**

Mixed-methods can be used to analyze the issues and challenges that female teachers experience in order to have a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Such a method utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data, which will enable a researcher to collect in-depth information and come up with patterns and trends.

Mixed methods approach is particularly useful in the context of female teachers as it enables one to explore the extent to which they experience it as well as the depth. Quantitative data give some statistical background and assist in finding the trends, whereas qualitative ones offer detailed accounts that highlight the personal and emotional nature of the challenges the female teachers encounter. Combinations of these methods will allow the researchers to create a more comprehensive view of the challenges and problems faced by female teachers and create more effective interventions and support services.

The study is intended to address the complex problems and challenges of female primary school teachers. It is a rural area in Pakistan that introduces special socio-cultural, economic, and geographical challenges which mean a lot in the professional life of female teachers. Although a significant percentage of teaching staff is comprised of them, these teachers usually struggle with gender-related discrimination, social perception, lack of resources, and the absence of professional development chances.

These issues are further increased by the cultural background of Pakistan which has been firmly instilled with traditional gender roles. Male teachers often find themselves facing biases which weaken their professionalism and authority which causes them not to be accepted and create stereotypes. Other issues that have a critical impact on inhibiting their professional development and job satisfaction are safety issues, including the potential of being harassed and lack of safe transportation.

Besides, the barriers in pakistan geographically, such as long distances to the schools and poor infrastructure is another obstacle. These not only influence attendance at the school, but also provide an unsafe and challenging working environment to female teachers. The fact that these issues have little awareness and acceptance among the rest of the community and policy-makers tends to make the situation worse in terms of the lack of support and resources.

### **Research Gap**

Although the situation of female primary school teachers in rural Pakistan is a major problem, the literature covering the specific issues is quite scarce. Several socio-cultural, economic, and geographical obstacles overlap in rural areas, and this is the area that has not been properly explored.

Besides, gender-based discrimination and opportunities to advance in the profession are relatively well-researched, whereas the lives of rural female teachers with references to their safety and infrastructural issues are a rather understudied topic. Available literature tends to be quantitative and this may not adequately be able to reflect the subtle and intricate aspects of these issues. This gap requires a mixed methods approach to be able to offer a depth and breadth of knowledge.

Also, empirical evidence on rural settings is deficient in focused interventions and policy suggestions. The majority of the policy measures are conceived on an urban-focused basis that might not be effective in relation to meeting the special needs of female teachers in urban schools. The study will address these gaps by offering a holistic and context-based study on the problems of female teachers in primary schools in this area.

This study aims at highlighting the systemic barriers that female primary school teachers experience as well as present measures that can be taken to enhance their working environment, professional growth opportunities. Finally, the study will also help in coming up with more effective policies and initiatives that can establish a more favourable and inclusive educational setting among female instructors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The mixed-method approach has been used in the study to obtain in-depth understanding of personal experiences and perceptions of female PSTs and at the same time, helping to identify the general themes and trends within the prepared data. Open-ended questionnaires combined with qualitative data description and analysis are used to carry-out the study. Open ended questionnaires were used as the main instrument of data collection. The study used purposive sampling to sample out the participants. In particular, the study focused on female primary school teachers. The sample was consisting of 200 female primary school teachers (PSTs). In the analysis, the answers to the open-ended questionnaires were coded and categorized in a systematic way to outline popular themes and patterns. This qualitative research contributed to the fact that the problem and issues faced by the participants were examined in depth, hence provide useful information on how to solve the problems.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The following section is supposed to analyze and interpret the findings based on the data obtained on the chosen 200 female primary school teachers. This discussion shall give a detailed insight into the complex problems and issues that female teachers face. The data were gathered using open-ended questionnaires and thus provided both a quantitative and qualitative data by a mixed method approach.

The answers begin with demographic data of the respondents, referring to the level of education and the number of years of teaching experience. Subsequently, the data were discussed in terms of the main themes revealed during the questionnaire responses, which included, but were not limited to, gender discrimination, societal attitudes towards the issues of challenges faced by female teachers, instructional resources and practices, education infrastructure, safety-related concerns and issues, financial and transportation drawbacks and concerns, and several personal and professional concerns.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Summary of the Responses</b>
What is your highest level of education?	Most stated that they have a bachelor's degree; significant number with master's; a few with intermediate education.

What are the main challenges you face as a female primary school teacher in Pakistan?	Responses suggested some challenges such as; Gender discrimination, lack of professional development, inadequate resources, societal pressure.
How do societal attitudes affect your role as a teacher?	Societal attitudes highlighted in the responses includes Undermines authority and competence; impacts confidence and effectiveness.
Can you describe any instances where you felt discriminated against based on your gender?	Discrimination observes in the forms of being Overlooked for promotions, excluded from decision-making, verbal harassment.
Are there adequate teaching resources available at your school? Please elaborate.	In the context of resources, the issues include Grossly inadequate; purchase materials with own funds.
How does the infrastructure of your school impact your teaching experience?	Poor infrastructure hinders teaching; lack of classrooms, furniture, sanitation, security contributes to the infrastructural issues faced by the female teachers.
Do you feel safe traveling to and from school? Please explain any safety concerns you have.	Significant safety concerns; long distances, harassment are of the safety concerns the respondents had.
What financial challenges do you face in your daily commute to school?	Commuting is a conspicuous financial hurdle; unreliable public transportation.
What transportation challenges do you face in your daily commute to school?	Issues related to the transportation covers Lack of reliable transport, long distances, poor road conditions.
Are there any other issues or challenges you would like to highlight that have not been covered in the previous questions?	Various issues other than the above mentioned include Lack of support, balancing responsibilities, inadequate healthcare.

**Table 1: Tabulated representation of the Data and its Responses**

The results obtained with the sample of 200 female primary school teachers in Pakistan are a graphic representation of the numerous problems they face at work and in personal life. The high rate of gender discrimination is of special concern. Besides being evident in work places where women teachers are not given promotions, and are not involved in decision making, this discrimination is also evident in their daily lives and positions in the society. This kind of bias permeates their authority and their competence and leaves an atmosphere where their performance and performance is not appreciated and their potential is suppressed.

Such professional barriers are further aggravated by societal attitudes. In a culture that preserved the traditional gender roles, female educators usually face the problem of disapproval and further spreading stereotypes that challenge their competencies. This is influencing their work as well as their private lives since this social pressure extends into their work as well as into their personal lives, leading to a constant need to get verified and be respected.

These barriers are complicated by lack of adequate resources and inappropriate infrastructure. In most schools, there is a shortage of teaching materials and teachers have to buy their supplies themselves or use old ones. This weakness is further supported by poor infrastructure such as insufficient classrooms, lack or poor sanitation facilities in addition to poor maintenance, which largely interferes with the process of

teaching and learning. These conditions not only reduce the level of education, they also de-motivate and de-moralize the teachers.

Safety concerns are frequent issues and hence cannot be ignored. Pakistani female teachers often show concerns about their security when travelling to and out of school. Their distances and routes they have to cover, and which in most cases involve empty and unsafe places, result in harassment and threats, and every trip is potentially a risk. Such safety factors are also worsened by the fact that there is no good source of transport that can be trusted and many teachers are left to use very costly and unreliable means.

Other level of difficulty facing these teachers are financial issues and transportation issues. Commuting is an expensive activity financially, as shown by the frequent breakdown of the public transport system and the state of the roads. All these make their work lives difficult to manage as they not only burden their finances but also increase delays and absenteeism, which in turn affects their professional obligations.

The community and family cannot support the female teachers, which only increases the burden that female teachers already have. The need to balance between professional tasks and home chores is a never-ending problem because the society tends to impose the burden of the household tasks on the female gender. This two-level weight holds them back in achieving professional growth and development.

In addition to that, these issues are largely unknown and unaccepted not only by the rest of the society, but also by the policy-makers. The consequence of this ignorance and absence of support leads to the fact that there is a lack of resources and interventions to cope with the systemic barriers that female teachers experience. The lack of policies and specific programs that address their needs only becomes a sign of intensification of their plights and they have to deal with the challenges on their own.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
What is your highest level of education?	55% Bachelor's, 35% Master's, 10% Intermediate
What are the main challenges you face as a female primary school teacher in Pakistan?	78% Gender discrimination, 72% Professional development, 70% Inadequate resources, 66% Societal pressure
How do societal attitudes affect your role as a teacher?	68% Undermines authority, 62% Impacts confidence
Can you describe any instances where you felt discriminated against based on your gender?	52% Promotions, 47% Decision making, 38% Harassment.
Are there adequate teaching resources available at your school? Please elaborate.	73% Inadequate, 58% Purchase materials.
How does the infrastructure of your school impact your teaching experience?	81% Poor infrastructure, 69% Classrooms and furniture, 63% Sanitation, 48% Security.
Do you feel safe traveling to and from school? Please explain any safety concerns you have.	64% Safety concerns, 57% Long distances, 39% Harassment
What financial challenges do you face in your daily commute to school?	72% Financial burden, 54% Unreliable transportation
What transportation challenges do you face in your daily commute to school?	61% Lack of transport, 56% Long distances, 43% Poor roads
Are there any other issues or challenges you would like to highlight that have not been covered in the previous questions?	51% Lack of support, 63% Balancing responsibilities, 42% Inadequate healthcare.

***Table 2: Percentage-wise representation of the Data***

The percentage-based analysis of the answers that were received after interviewing 200 female teachers working in primary schools in Pakistan shows that there are some critical insights to the multifaceted problems that are afflicting their professional and personal lives.

The level of education among the respondents is rather impressive as a large number of them (55 percent) have bachelor degrees, and an even larger number (35 percent) have mastered their degrees, which, on the one hand, is a good indication of the level of education of female teachers, and, on the other hand, the fact that professional development is still required to improve their competence and effectiveness in the classroom.

Solving the key issues, a significant percentage of respondents (78) named gender discrimination as a key challenge. This is an all-encompassing problem that is enhanced by the pressures of the society as 66 percent of those interviewed observed that societal expectations have a negative influence on their professions. These issues are aggravated by the fact that there are no opportunities to advance in their professional development (72%), and teaching resources are insufficient (70%), which indicates that it is possible to change the existing system and provide the female educators with the necessary support.

The mindset of the society is of great importance in determining the professional experiences of these teachers. As 68% claim that their authority is being undermined and 62 percent of them are of the opinion that their confidence and effectiveness is being influenced by the perception of the society then it is clear that efforts to change these strongly held attitudes are important in empowering the female teachers and improving their working situations.

The cases of gender discrimination that the respondents reported are alarming with half of them being victimized by promotions, 47 percent locked out of decision making and 38 percent being verbal harassed. Such experiences underline the need to have institutional policies and practices that would facilitate gender equality and proactively fight discriminatory practices in the educational institutions.

Another major concern is the sufficiency of teaching materials as 73% of the teachers indicate that they lack adequate teaching materials. The buying of these materials using their own money is practiced by many of these educators (58%), which not only burdens their pockets, but also indicates a systemic failure in the way resources are distributed, which has to be corrected.

The infrastructure of the school is also one of the major problems, according to 81% of the respondents. Inadequate security facilities, lack of proper classrooms, furniture, and sanitation facilities also mean that there is deterioration of the teaching and learning process. It is important to develop the physical infrastructure of the schools by improving the conducive learning environment to facilitate the teachers and students.

The question of safety is a serious matter and 64% of teachers revealed that they are afraid in both cases; when they travel to and away school. These safety concerns are further worsened by the distance (57%), and harassment (39%). The need to resolve these issues by ensuring that there are safe and reliable means of transportation is crucial in order to give a secure environment to the female teachers.

Both the financial and transportation issues are major problems, with 72 percent stating that commuting costs are major financial load, and 54 percent citing bad transportation. These challenges are facilitated by the absence of good transportation (61%), long distances to school (56%), and state of the roads (43%),

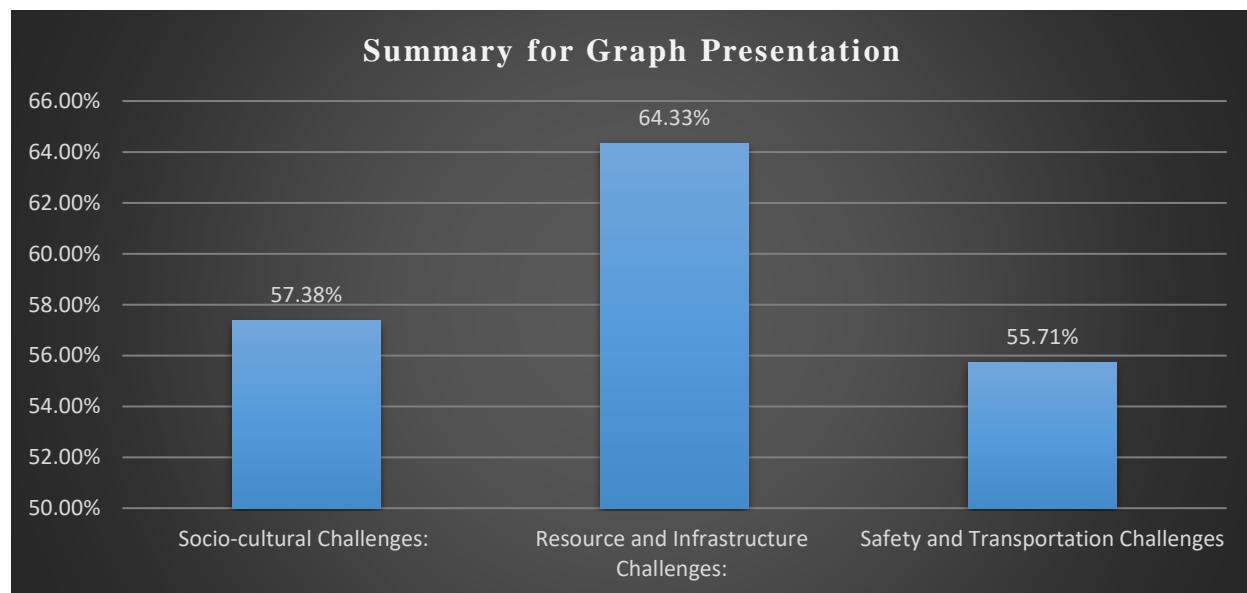
which not only affects the finances of the teachers but also their performance in terms of achieving the professional responsibilities.

Lastly, other issues are the absence of community and family support (51%), difficulty in juggling between work and family (63%), and lack of healthcare facilities (42%). The problems mentioned highlight the necessity of holistic support systems that meet the holistic needs of the female teachers both in the professional and personal domains.

To sum up, the information shows that female primary school educators in Pakistan are faced with a complicated network of issues that have to be overcome daily. There is a need to deal with these problems in a complex and comprehensive manner, which entails alteration of policy, community participation, enhancement of infrastructure and specific support mechanisms. Addressing these obstacles, one can establish a more balanced and favorable learning setting that will allow women teachers to succeed in their careers and personal lives.

### **Graphical Representation of the Data**

For the graphical representation of the data, the challenges were classified by the researcher into three major categories based on their nature and its structure.



*Figure 1: Graphical Representation of the Data*

### **DISCUSSION**

The critical discussion on the responses received from 200 Pakistani primary school female teachers provides a detailed insight into a uniform set of challenges that they face. The results can be critically analyzed in the context of existing literary studies to shed light on the systemic barriers and define the possible points of interventions.

Most of the respondents, (55%) holding bachelor degree, 35% having masters, and a small proportion 10%, having taken intermediate-level education, make up the respondents. This distribution shows that the percentage of female teachers possessing a high level of education is quite significant, which aligns with the statement made by Qureshi et al. (2022) stating that high level of education is the prerequisite of increasing the effectiveness of teachers. Nevertheless, the necessity of the lifelong professional growth is also obvious. According to Ingersoll and Merrill (2011), formal qualifications are important; however, continuous professional development through training and development programs is essential to enhance teaching effectiveness and suitability to new educational demands. This reinforces the need to put in place effective professional development systems that address the needs of rural female teachers.

### **Main Challenges Faced**

The greatest challenge stated is gender discrimination, which is reported by 78% of respondents, which is consistent with the results of Mahmood and 39 Kausar (2019) that gender bias is prevalent in Pakistani education institutions. This kind of discrimination usually leads to the failure of female teachers being promoted and not being involved in decision making processes, thus hinders their career growth and reduces their motivation and job satisfaction. These problems are further worsened by the deficiency in professional development opportunities as was observed by 72 per cent of respondents. This oblivion is of great concern considering the fact that continuous learning is critical in ensuring that high standards of teaching are met (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2011). Further, 70 per cent of the respondents cited poor teaching materials as one of the major barriers. Similar findings were made by Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2015), who emphasized the chronic lack of educational resources in Pakistani schools that obliges teachers to spend their own funds or use the old resources, thus lowering the quality of education.

### **Societal Attitudes**

Female teachers are seen as weak and incompetent by 68% per cent of the society. This is in line with Lynd (2011) who pointed out that women are often placed in lower positions in the society, which makes them lack confidence and effectiveness in their profession. These attitudes do not only damage the self-esteem of teachers themselves, but also influence their relationship with students and other teachers. It is imperative to transform these well-established perceptions to empower the female teachers and improve their professional settings. These attitudes can be altered by raising awareness in terms of community participation and policy advocacy that can lead to a more accommodating environment of female teachers.

### **Gender Discrimination**

The gender discrimination is also a major concern with half of them indicating that they have been disregarded in promotions, 47 percent have been blocked out of decision-making processes and 38 percent have been verbally harassed. The same patterns were reported by Salik and Zhiyong (2014), with the focus on the systemic nature of these issues. Discriminatory practices do not only encroach professional development but also create a hostile working environment. There is thus the need to institute institutional reforms that foster gender equality and inclusiveness. These challenges can be reduced by implementing policies that provide equal chances of a promotion and creating systems to combat and curb harassment.

### **Teaching Resources**

The lack of proper teaching resources, as claimed by 73 percent of the participants, is a critical problem with regard to quality of education. According to Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2007), in Pakistani schools, there was chronic under-investment in schools, which also meant that teachers had to purchase materials

with their own funds or utilized old materials, which has constrained the finances and affected the teaching performance. It is essential to invest in proper teaching materials and provide them in time in order to help educators to provide quality teaching. Government, NGOs and community stakeholders need to work towards filling these gaps of resources in rural schools.

### **School Infrastructure**

Poor infrastructure is one problem that is experienced by 81% per cent of the respondents and the deficiencies include classrooms, furniture and sanitation facilities. According to Aslam (2013), teaching and learning in the rural schools are seriously impaired by poor infrastructure. Lack of adequate classroom facilities, furniture and lack of sanitation also provide an undesirable and sometimes hazardous atmosphere to both teachers and students. These gaps are essential to be handled in order to create a favorable learning environment. This is not just about the erection and maintenance of facilities but also the capability to ensure that the facilities suit the particular requirements of the female teachers and students including the provision of separate sanitation facilities to protect privacy and hygiene.

### **Safety Concerns**

Safety issues are one of the key concerns of 64 per cent of the respondents who do not feel safe to travel to and out of school. Ashraf (2013) also reported similar issues experienced by female teachers in Pakistan, when it comes to long distances and remote roads which increase the risk of being harassed and becoming a target of violence. Reliable and safe transportation should be ensured. Some of the measures may involve the provision of school buses, creation of safe walking paths, and the introduction of community-based safety programs to carry out safety measures on the teachers in their commutes. These interventions would enhance safety, lessen absenteeism and stress and allow teachers to concentrate on professional duties.

### **Transportation and Financial problems**

The cost of commuting is a burden to 72% of teachers, and half of that percentage attributes this to the unreliability of the public transport. Similar financial and transportation issues were found by Malik (2019), who stated that the lack of transport opportunities and the condition of roads make the problem worse when it comes to rural educators. The transportation issues must be addressed to reduce the financial and logistical costs. The possible solutions might be to subsidize transportation expenses, enhance the road infrastructure, and provide quality transport services to people. Such steps would decrease the financial load and guarantee the teachers the ability to travel safely and efficiently.

### **Other Issues**

Other issues include lack of community and family support (51%), and problems with balancing work and home life (63%), and lack of healthcare facilities (42%). These issues reinforce the complexity of challenges that female teachers encounter as it is recorded by Rizvi (2010). It is crucial to create a system of support that will cover the personal and professional needs of the female teachers to increase their well-being and performance levels. These systems might provide flexibility in work schedules, child care and health care facilities, and a positive community atmosphere that appreciates and encourages the efforts of female teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the research provide an elaborate and subtle perspective of the issues that are faced by female primary school teachers in Pakistan. These difficulties, that are in line with those already reported in the previous academic work, highlight the urgency of specific measures and changes in the policy. The complex approach to overcome these systemic barriers consists of the creation of awareness, gender-sensitive policies, the development of infrastructure, safety, and financial and emotional support. Through these challenges, it is now possible to create a more supportive and even equal learning environment where female teachers can succeed in their career and personal lives.

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