

Reasons of Low Enrolment at Punjab Education Foundation Assisted Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the underlying causes of low enrollment at the elementary and high school levels in Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) assisted schools. Despite efforts to improve educational access through public-private partnerships in Punjab, a significant number of children either drop out after primary education or never enroll at higher levels. Using a quantitative research design, the study incorporates data from 98 PEF school heads and stakeholders via structured questionnaires and telephonic interviews. The contributing factors to this critical issue include; lack of transport facilities, poor school infrastructure, madrassah preference, and ineffective educational policies. Gender disparities, early marriages, and migration to other private schools also emerged as significant contributing factors, especially in rural areas. The study concludes that while some infrastructure-related factors matter, socio-economic barriers are the primary deterrents to sustained student enrollment. It offers actionable recommendations such as transportation support, school upgrades, and community awareness programs to address these enrollment challenges.

Keywords: low- enrollment reasons, Punjab Foundation Assisted schools, Out-of-School children

INTRODUCTION

Education is the vital component for the success and development of any nation which is taken for granted and ignored in Pakistan. Pakistan has one of the worst literacy rates in the world which is one of the very core reasons for the slow growth and destructive economy. Unfortunately, Pakistan is ranked at 113th positions in the total 120 countries in literacy rate. (Akhtar, 2023). Pakistan is frequently used as an example of a nation leading in Public-private partnerships (PPPs) trend in South Asia, where the government has been aggressively allocating public funds to low-fee private schools (LFPS) for educational purposes, particularly in Punjab province. More emphasis has recently been paid to the discussion around the role and influence of the private sector in delivering education in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA). Punjab gained international attention in 2015 when The Economist published an article titled "Learning Unleashed," announcing the province as the "new standard bearer for market-based education reform." Around that time, the Punjab government announced a policy that prioritized school expansion through a PPP through the semiautonomous Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and prohibited the construction of new public, government-run schools. Punjab Education Foundation persists with the policy to bring maximum number of children in its schools within available resources. Approximately 16 percent of children aged 6 to 15 have never attended school, and there are currently over 5.5 million out-of-school children in Punjab (World Bank, 2016). This study is indented to explore the reasons of low enrollment at middle and high

level (6th-10th) PEF schools and will suggest possible solutions to cope with this problem. The Punjab Education Foundation assisted schools are categorized under three types; FAS (foundation assisted schools), EVS (education voucher scheme) and NSP (new school program). All these three types of schools are under study according to their percentage.

Statement of the Problem

According to the federal ministry of education and professional training report 2023-24, the number of out of school children is 26.2 million. The Human Development Index of Pakistan (2015) reports that, Pakistan is the 2nd highest in the world in out of school children and every 12th out of school children is in Pakistan. 33.2% students drop out after completing primary level of education. Only 1/3 of the primary students enter into the next level of education. This study addresses the causes behind the lower enrollment and early dropout of the students at elementary and secondary stage of PEF schools.

Research Questions

1. What are the reasons of low enrollment according to school heads and stakeholders at middle and high-level PEF schools?
2. How reasons of low enrollment are different at school type PEF schools, (FAS, EVS, NSP)?
3. How reasons of low enrollment are different at school level (middle, high)?
4. How reasons of low enrollment are different in rural and urban PEF schools?
5. What are the prevailing reasons of low enrollment at the schools having low enrollment?
6. What are the reasons of students' retention at the schools having high enrollment?

Significance of the Study

This study is intended to explore the underlying causes of the low enrollment in the PEF schools in Punjab and will identify possible factors that contribute to low enrollment. It will help stakeholders, policymakers, school heads and the government to understand the risk factors of low enrollment and will suggest possible and valuable ways to overcome this issue. It may also improve equity and accessibility for out of school children and help them to overcome most of the problematic factors that hinder their way to school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan's high dropout rates continue to be a serious issue, impeding social and economic advancement and compromising educational advancement. According to the literature, socioeconomic constraints, the quality of education and the school environment, gender disparities, and cultural norms are the main causes of student dropout.

Social and Economic Constraints

In Pakistan, socioeconomic factors are commonly mentioned as the main reasons why students drop out of school. According to Rahman and Khan (2019), poverty leads many kids to drop out of school early in order to work to support their families. High dropout rates result from low-income families' inability to

pay for education due to costs like supplies, uniforms, and transportation (Mughal & Aldridge, 2017). According to UNICEF Pakistan (2020), these budgetary limitations are particularly severe in rural regions due to the lack of adequate educational infrastructure and funding.

Quality of Education and School Environment

Another major factor contributing to dropout rates is poor educational quality, which includes out-of-date curricula, underqualified teachers, and inadequate infrastructure. According to Ahmed (2021), rote-based teaching strategies and a dearth of interactive or hands-on learning opportunities frequently cause pupils to become disengaged. Additionally, Aslam and Kingdon (2020) talk about how inadequate facilities, crammed classrooms, and scarce resources create a demotivating learning environment that raises the risk of dropout. Khan (2018) also cites the high rate of student dropouts as a result of the widespread use of corporal punishment, which is particularly common in rural institutions.

Gender Disparities and Cultural Norms

Dropout rates are made worse by gender inequality, which is impacted by cultural and societal standards, especially for girls. According to the World Bank (2020), cultural attitudes that place a higher value on early marriage and household duties than education deter females from going to school in many places. Girls' attendance and dropout rates are also impacted by parental worries about safety, especially in places without facilities that are gender-segregated. According to Jamal (2019), boys are frequently pressured to make financial contributions, which pushes them out of school and into the workforce and contributes to the dropout rates.

Enrollment as Compared to Neighboring Countries

According to the World Bank, tertiary education enrolment was reported at 9 % in 2018 in Pakistan as compared to 26% in India and 48% in China (World Bank, 2018).

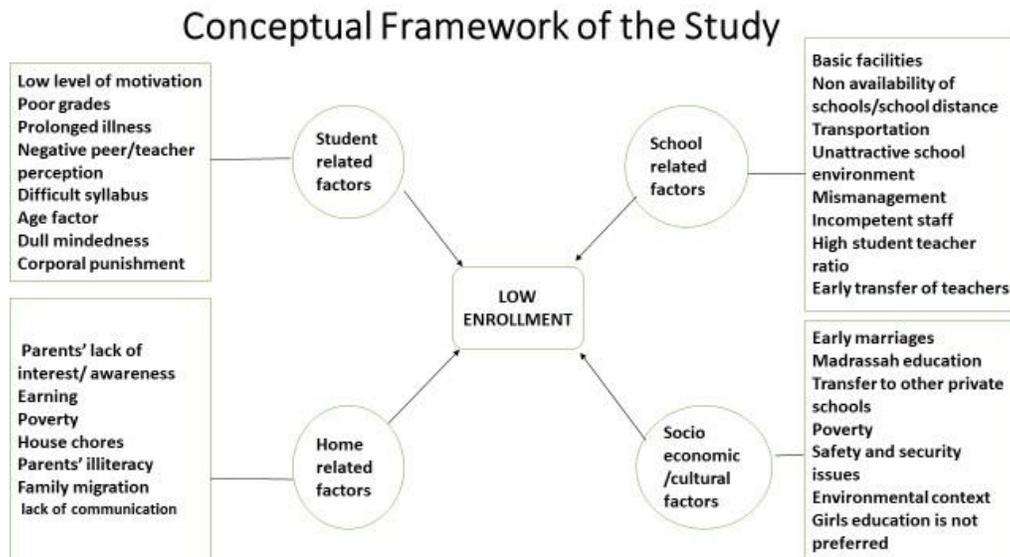
By 2020, Pakistan's government aims to achieve a 15% gross enrolment in Pakistan higher education, which means Pakistan failed to achieve its higher education sector goals even in 2020.

Due to Pakistan's low total enrolment ratio, our country is unable to compete with other developing countries in the higher education sector indicates insufficient socio-economic development progress.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Lack of motivation, unattractive school environment, low budget of education, pupil-school-teacher ratio are the reasons of low enrollment according to Pak-gulf economist survey,2022. Charles Pearson, 2019 found the low enrollment because of Poor grades, need for employment, school alternatives(not satisfying with public school).Lack of basic facilities, multi grade teaching, lack of parents' interest, inadequate supervision, poor family condition(Rahman and Tareen, 2017). Shortage of teachers, school distance, poverty, house chores, cultural factors, pointed out by Njeru, Otube and Ondigi, 2016. Transportation, orphan hood, and finance were the low enrollment reasons pointed out in the study ofMatsol, M.J., et al. 2018.

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Population and Sampling

PEF assisted Secondary and Elementary schools located all around the Punjab are the population of the study. The number of PEF schools according to the type is as: FAS, 68% secondary and 29% elementary. EVS, 21% secondary and 60% elementary. NSP, 11% secondary and 53% elementary. FAS secondary; 68% in South, 23% in Center, and 9% in North region. The sample for the study has been drawn after proportionate sampling. The sampling distribution is as follow:

- FAS elementary; 73% in South, 15% in Center, and 12% in North region.
- NSP secondary; 66% south, 20% center and 11% in north region.
- NSP elementary; 78% south, 15% center and 5.8% in north region.
- EVS secondary; 38% south, 55% center and 6% in north region.
- EVS elementary; 66% south, 27% center and 7% in north region.

After proportionate stratification, random schools have been selected out of the strata, according to their type; FAS, EVS, NSP. Out of 100%, 53% FAS, twenty% NSP and twenty-six % EVS schools were the participants of the study.

School Level	middle	high	Total
%	40.8	59.2	100.0

The sample schools were selected according to the proportion of the middle and high school, and there were about 41 % middle schools and 59% high schools, which participated in the study.

School Region	south	central	north	Total
%	53.1	32.7	14.3	100.0

There were total 53% schools from south, 33% were from central and 14% from north region, which participated in the study, region wise distribution of the schools was already existed according to the PEF structure, the researcher just selected the schools proportionately.

School Area	rural	urban	Total
%	65.3	34.7	100.0

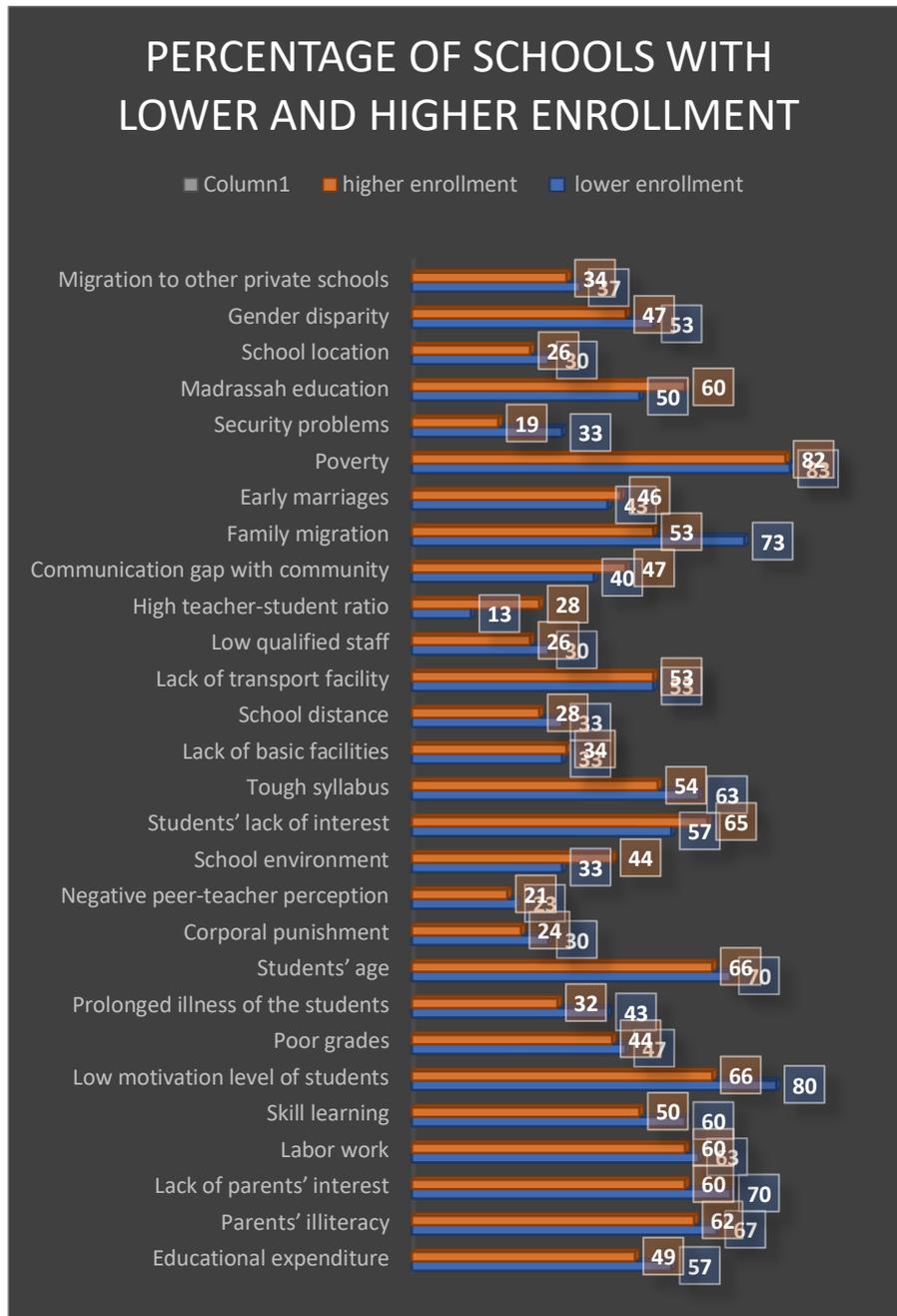
Out of 100% the participation rate of rural and urban schools was 65.3% and 34.7% respectively.

Instrumentation and Data collection

A questionnaire, consisting of 3 sections had been developed for data collection. Total 66 variables added in the questionnaire including 38 variables of demographics related to PEF schools only. The data collection instrument (questionnaire) administered after ensuring validity and reliability through expert checking and pilot testing. Google form is used to collect data because it was difficult to collect data physically from all across the district. Google form is administered after taking the consent and permission of the PEF officials. A WhatsApp chat group had been created including all the selected participants (320) Only 98 respondents filled out the survey form.

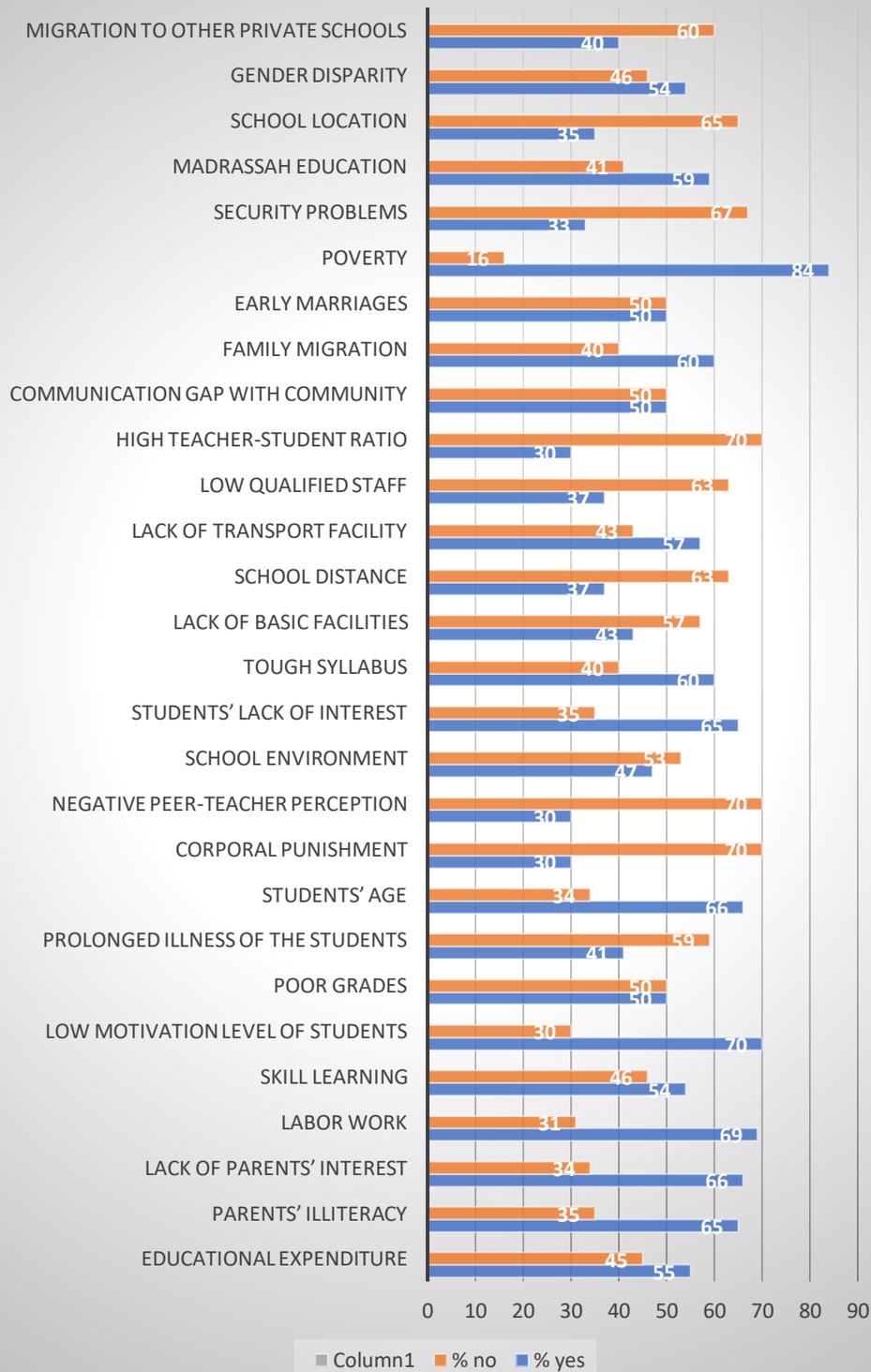
DATA ANALYSIS

The data had been analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics had been applied like frequencies to check the percentages of the respondents against a nominal scale (yes/no) and cross-tabulation to check the % of respondents based on their school level, school type, school area, and schools with higher and lower enrollment separately. Percentages had also been calculated of middle and high schools' compliance trends of different indicators set by PEF authorities to be followed by the partner schools. While merging the data, collected from PEF schools and the stakeholders, a graph has also been plotted to show the overall %.



The data of the above graph is based on the % of the respondents of the schools with lower enrollment (up to 500) and the schools with high enrollment (more than 500), it shows that most of the factors effecting nearly equally, with less than 10% difference at both level of enrollment.

Overall Percentage of the Respondents



The above graph gives us an overall picture of the factors effecting the low enrollment at PEF partners schools, the respondents were the schools' principals, vice principals and the stake holders. Poor grades of the students, communication gap with community and early marriages were the factors reported 50% with yes and 50% with no. Poverty, students' low level of motivation, parents' illiteracy, labor work, madrassah education, lack of transport facility were the factors that highly effected the school enrollment, while negative peer teacher perception, corporal punishment, high student teacher ratio, prolonged illness of the students were the factors with high % of no.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data has been done according to urban and rural divide and the most of the reasons of low enrolment at rural schools were poverty, labor work, lack of transport facility and school distance from the home, while at urban schools, students' low level of motivation was slightly highly reported than rural schools. In rural areas most of the people can't afford the expenditure of the high schooling and they are not well educated too to understand the importance of education so they prefer to send their children on labor work or to learn some skills to earn their living after primary. The second reason of low enrollment at middle and high level in rural areas is that the high schools are located far away from most of the villages and it costs a lot to the poor parents to send the children far away because they can't afford transportation expenditure. The second question is about the reasons of low enrollment at different types of PEF schools and the analysis showed that poverty is the main reason in almost every type of schools. family migration and labor work were the dominating reasons at NSP schools, students' age, their low level of motivation were the reasons at EVS schools while lack of transport facilities and labor work were mostly reported by FAS schools. If the data is analyzed according to middle and high-level schools, we find that educational expenditure, students' age, poor grades of the students and early marriages are mostly reported. If some students are more in age than their class fellows, they tend to leave school early and some of them got married at earl stage of life, lack of transport, madrassah education, poverty, labor work and communication gap with community about the educational importance and students' low level of motivation are the reasons equally find out at both level of schools. The sample was selected on the basis of higher and lower enrollment to check whether the schools having more than 500 enrollment and the schools having the enrollment lower than 500 facing the similar reasons of students drop out after primary to elementary and elementary to high, the data shows that both type of the schools were facing almost similar reasons of low enrollment, because most of the students don not get high education because their parents can't afford their educational expenditure and transportation because most of the high schools are not nearby.

The analysis of the data from the stakeholders and the school principals showed that poverty was the highest reason of the low enrollment and also the students' low level of motivation, lack of transport facilities, labor work, madrassah education and parents lack of interest in their children's' education were the main reasons of low enrollment.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that socio- economic factors were most prevailing reasons of low enrolment after that the factors related to students and house-hold effected the enrolment at PEF middle and high-level schools. the study showed that the factors that least effected the enrollment were school related, like; student teacher ratio, negative peer teacher perception, safety and security measures at schools and low qualified staff. Family migration and migration of the students to other schools were also the reasons reported significantly in the study, the parents who are hand to mouth, migrated towards cities and put their children on work, this leads the students drop out of the schools. the second is that the parents who

can afford better education prefer to send their children to some other good private schools. The study concluded that the socio-economic is the main hindrance to get the students high level education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study result, here are some recommendations that can be considered for increasing enrollment at middle and high-level schools:

- Why there are more enrollment at primary level and less at middle and even lesser at high level, because there are more primary schools which are nearer to the locals, few middle schools and very few high schools, so there must be high schools which can be accessible to every student.
- Some parents want their children to study after primary or elementary, but the high schools are not too near to go by foot and they can't afford transportation expenses, so it is recommended that schools must provide free transportation facility especially for middle and high school students and PEF must provide travel expenses to schools as per student.
- PEF partners must design effective communication strategies and take some measures to spread the awareness about the importance of education among community members.
- Parents and stakeholders must be involved in decision making, so they can feel confidence and negotiate about the domestic issues; that can cause dropout of the students, the PEF partners must consider their concerns and make possible solutions to the problems.
- Students lack of interest in studies and low level of motivation decreasing with increasing use of social and digital media, there must be some motivational activities for students that can increase their morale and interest in studies.
- To cope up with the labor work and skill learning, there must be some practical and skill learning activities in second shift of schools rather than rote memorization up to middle or high level, it may helpful in better retention of students.

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