ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 5, Issue 3(b), 2026 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

A Phenomenological Comparative Inquiry into Public Schools of Karachi and Lahore and Why Quality of Education Remains Elusive

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Received: 15-01-2026 **Revised:** 02-02-2026 **Accepted:** 17-02-2026 **Published:** 04-03-2026

ABSTRACT

Quality education is a fundamental right of every citizen in Pakistan; nevertheless, achieving high educational standards in public schools is a challenging task due to numerous contributing factors affecting the condition of government-owned institutions. The aim of the study is to compare the primary and secondary public schools in Karachi and Lahore and provide policy recommendations to improve educational quality. This is qualitative research. Phenomenology served as the research design. Triangulation was employed to enhance the findings, and rigor was assured by many methodologies. Thematic analysis was employed to derive themes. We conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with principal and head teachers, as well as Key Informant Interviews (KII) with the chief executive of the education office and the District Education Officers in Karachi and Lahore. The study's conclusions indicate that despite significant efforts by provincial and federal governments, several challenges persist, including a shortage of competent teachers, an unconducive environment, an outmoded curriculum, and insufficient resources. These elements result in suboptimal learning outcomes. The education system in Pakistan frequently inadequately prepares students with the essential information, skills, competencies, and behaviors, hence impeding their capacity to contribute effectively to national development. This study evaluates both education systems for learning and system enhancement. A comparative investigation indicated that Lahore schools exhibit a robust commitment to offering critical amenities and quality education to children in contrast to Karachi. The research is beneficial for policymakers, educational administrators, and pertinent governmental organizations.

Keywords: *Educational Disparities, Education System, Educational Standards, Quality Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Importance of education is crucial for a country's development in many areas, including social, cultural, and moral development. Education is the platform for manipulating the personnel required for national progress. A developed and educated society has ample manpower, and each individual fills his or her proper place to transform the way people live, but it also boosts individual knowledge and supports national progress (Shuaibi,2014). Thus, the prevailing belief is that without education, a nation has no feasible alternatives to create growth and enlightenment. An educated and developed society possesses a skilled workforce, where each person occupies their rightful role to improve living conditions. A competitive environment is essential for any country's achievements. Petrakis & Stamatakis, (2002) Suggest that the link between development growth and education varies as a result of different levels of economic development. Moreover, educating a nation to achieve its political, economic, social, moral, and cultural goals not only advances the nation but also enhances individual knowledge and promotes national progress. Education is the foundation of all types of developments in the world. It is an established fact that the world only those nations have made progress and development which have a sound education system.

Pakistan's education system is divided into three levels: elementary schooling from grades 1 to 8, secondary education from grades 9 & 10, and higher education beginning from grade 11 & 12. Elementary education is further divided into primary grades 1–5, and middle grades 6–8. For this reason, there are primary and secondary schools. Secondary education grades 9 to 10 served at secondary.

In Punjab, there are 52,000 schools from primary to secondary levels, 338,000 teachers and 10.8 million students are in Punjab. While in Sindh[1], There are 40,978 schools 36,225 primary level (grade I-V) educational institution, 1,581 Middle level including (VI-VIII), government sector while 1,654 secondary level institutes (grade IX-X) higher secondary level institutes (grade XI-XII) are 491[2]. Total working teachers are around are 168,628[3] in Sindh. Despite the large structure in Sindh, the mostly educational indicators for Sindh are not better than Punjab. In order to promote economic growth, social justice, and democracy on a provincial and national scale, the government of Sindh is committed to give all children and youth in the province equal opportunities to acquire high quality education.

Besides, the article-25A of the constitution of Islamic republic of Pakistan articulates free and compulsory education for all males and females, children of the age of 5 to 16 years. After 18 Amendment the responsibilities of provinces regarding effective implementation of 25 (A) have been increased (PIPS & ITA, 2019)[4]. The ratification of Article 25-A, which declares free and compulsory education a fundamental right on paper, is insufficient. According to recent report UNICEF (2022) and estimations, more than 23 million Pakistanis over the age of 10 + are unable to read or write. Even among children who attend school, the fundamental abilities of reading, writing, and numeracy are not acquired during their early years of education.

[1] https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/profiles/ASC%202023-24%
[2] Annual School Census (RSU), Profiling for Government School (2023-24).
[3] https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/profiles/ASC%202023-24.
[4] A joint publication by Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services.

Education and Human Capital

In today's world, human capital development is crucial for attaining a sustainable economic growth and development. To create a knowledge-based economy, in the light of technological advancements and globalization, there is the inevitable need to increase innovative capacity and transmission of knowledge. Additionally, education is playing an increasingly crucial role in a nation's human capital development. Mamuli, (2020) explores the relationship between higher education (HE) and human capital development, they study the issues confronting Higher Education and human capital development in Nigeria, the diversification of HE curriculum to satisfy the needs of the labor market and produce a larger budgetary space for the nation's economic development. When investments in education in developing countries do not result in better growth, the issue may be the quality of schooling the education infrastructure, the beginning endowment in human capital, and the system's ability to distribute educational services fairly. Access to quality education is a critical input and determinant of human capital development, especially in countries aiming to achieve upper-middle-income status. Education can provide a national workforce with the necessary skills, knowledge, and creativity to compete in the knowledge-based global economy. One Stanford researcher stated that without boosting school quality, emerging countries will find it impossible to enhance their long-term economic performance.

Education is a component of the HDI that is computed by setting a maximum of 100 percent and a minimum of 0 percent for educational attainment. It provides two-thirds of the weight to the adult literacy rate (15 years and above) and one-third to the combined enrollment rate for the 5 to 24-year age group. Jamal & Khan (2007) highlighted changes in human development status of districts of Pakistan. According to Romer and Lucas (1990) and Rebello (1992), economic expansion has necessitated the use of human capital in the form of training experiences and educational realization. In a similar vein, several time series studies portray human capital as a crucial component of economic expansion (Qadri,.F.S., & Waheed, 2014). However, some scholars publicly dispute the standard findings, claiming that there is only a tenuous relationship between growth and human capital (Bills, M., & Klenow,P.J., 2000). Qadri &Waheed (2011) addressed in study human capital has a positive relationship with growth and is strongly correlated with health and educational attainment. These factors are critical in defining economic development and ensure long-term economic progress. The market's volatility and spillover impact made economic events that affect the performance of organization.

On the other hand, organization that work for educational development and even related government departments were more focused on the increase of enrollments to achieve the academic targets, Nevertheless, with the passage of time, it is realized by the authorities that, the increase o enrollments are not enough to achieve the educational targets and priorities were shifted from enrollments to the school attendance. UN organization such as UNICEF, UNDP and even in SDGs the school participation, child attendance and completion rate are considered as important indicators to judge the performance of the education sector. In the recent era, it has been recognized that the work on quality of education is much needed along with the enhancement of school attendance and completion rates.

Table 1 Best to Lowest Performance Districts (Sindh & Punjab) HDI Ranking 2022

Best to Lowest Performance Districts (Sindh & Punjab) HDI Ranking 2022			
Rank	**Districts**	**HDI**	**IEdu**
1	Karachi East	0.722	0.454
2	Karachi Center	0.685	0.45
3	Rawalpindi	0.656	0.429
4	Lahore	0.651	0.398
5	Korangi	0.636	0.438
6	Sialkot	0.627	0.408
7	Karachi South	0.625	0.394
Source: UNDP Report 2023			

The table 1 presents a ranking of different districts of Punjab & Sindh according to their Education Index (IEdu) and Human Development Index (HDI)[5]. Karachi East is the best district, in Sindh with an IEdu of 0.454 and an HDI of 0.722. Lower HDI and IEdu values are shown in the remaining districts, which include Karachi Center, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Korangi, Sialkot, and Karachi South. These values represent differing degrees of human development and educational achievement.

In order to promote economic growth, social justice, and democracy on a provincial and national scale, the government of Sindh is committed to giving all children and youth in the province equal opportunities to acquire high-quality education.[6]. The findings of MICS surveys show that while the Sindh government has numerous levels in its education and literacy department, as well as an adequate number of schools and teachers, the province's educational metrics are not up to pace. Nonetheless, in the current situation, Punjab's educational indices outperform those of Sindh, despite Punjab having fewer educational institutions overall. In this regard a comparative research base study for Sindh and Punjab is conduct to identify the operational and policies gaps which can help to the practioners and implementers of Sindh Government to utilize the existing educational system of Sindh and produce a good human capital.

In conclusion, education is not merely a personal pursuit but a strategic investment for a nation's future. By prioritizing education, governments can unlock their full potential, build resilient societies, and create a better world for generations to come.

Research Objectives

Our study comparative analysis of Lahore and Karachi's educational systems focused on student enrollment, infrastructure, teacher development, and quality education by using different data sources. The goal is to provide the government with data-driven insights to inform the creation of new policies that address the shortcomings in Sindh's education system. We reviewed previous studies about educational system in Sindh. Asim (2013) finds that Sindh's net enrollment rates (NERs) at the primary, Secondary, and

[5] Human Development Report 2023/2024 technical notes [Internet]. United Nations Development Programme; Available from: https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2023-24_HDR/hdr2023-
[6] http://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/pages.jsp?page=aboutus

intermediate levels stagnated. With 48,932 schools in the province. (Nasir Hussain Shah, S. , 2017) Examine the internal school issues that contributed to Punjab's public-school downfall. (Kausar, 2023) identified problems in Punjab Education Foundation.

In this study comprehensive comparison of the educational systems of two capital cities, would involve a deep dive into their respective strengths, weaknesses, policies, and operational practices. This analysis could identify key areas where one province excels and where the other could benefit from learning and implementing best practices. By comparing the two systems, insights into the factors that contribute to successful educational outcomes, such as effective teacher training, adequate infrastructure, and supportive policies. Identifying gaps in both systems would provide valuable information for policymakers to address and improve.

Furthermore, this study would be to inform the development of new policies and strategies to enhance the quality of education in both Sindh and Punjab. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both system, policymakers and can make informed decisions about how to allocate resources, improve teaching and learning, and ensure that all students have access to a quality education in both provinces. Hence this part of study is confined to elaborate best practices, and weakness of systems which are impacting on the educational outcomes by using the research modes of descriptive analysis, policy reviews and most importantly focus group discussion with relevant department in Sindh and Punjab.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Colonial Legacy of Education in Pakistan: A Historical Perspective

Understanding education in Pakistan requires a historical context of British colonization in the Indian subcontinent. East India Company making its straight entry and inclusion of new policies in the education sector of the subcontinent led to a swift expansion of schools and colleges evidence by (Mukerji, S. N., 1957). The British colonists introduced modern English education to the subcontinent, as they did in other colonies. (Khattak, S. G, 2014), (Rahman, T., 1996), (Tikly, 1999), political leaders often target the aristocratic and professional class to achieve their goals. Education about citizenship has been a goal of education since Pakistan's inception, although its conceptualization and implementation have evolved with each new government. (Dean.B, 2013). (Kaushik & Diemer, 2018) explores, from a sustainable development perspective, the vision and priority areas that have been focused on in all the major educational policy documents of Pakistan from 1947 to 2017. (Muzaffar et al., 2020) provides a historical overview that traces the reflection of political consciousness in Pakistan's national educational policies. The educational policy for 2009-2010 was developed in 1998 and focuses on implementing resources indicated in 2009. The government's lack of competent surveying, research, and planning has resulted in an unplanned aim set. (Malik et al., 2022). Pakistan’s education system remains stagnant in colonialism despite getting

independence and has hinder with neocolonialism through education. (Yasmin.F, Zaman.A & Karim. K, 2023).

Pakistan Educational System: An Analysis of Educational Policies

In Pakistan, the public policies on education reflect the National ideology. It consists the political option, tradition, values, culture, and socio-economic needs, emerging trends and concepts and even its implications in future. This regard, a number of development plans had also been implemented. (Ali et al., 2023) study policies in Pakistan, it includes as; the National Plan of Educational Development – 1951/57, First Five Year Plan – 1975/80, Sixth Five Year Plan – 1980/85, National Literacy Plan – 1984/86, Seventh Five Year Plan – 1988/93 and Eighth Five Year Plan – 1993/98. (Asfahani et al., 2024) (Asfahani et al, 2023) Study quality primary education is a critical component of a nation's development, including for social equity and economic progress. Their objective to compare educational policies and practices in primary education in multiple countries. Findings reveal significant variations in primary education and policies across the countries.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) continues to grapple with post-communist uncertainty in educational policy-making. The international assistance, knowledge, and discourses, combined with communist legacies, stalled democratic advancements, and national discourses, have distinct consequences on education in each of these countries. (Fimyar, 2008) Attempted to conceptualize educational policy-making (with its disparities between 'democratized' discourses and 'Sovietized' practices) as a form of emerging governs mentality-in-the-making on the level of the state. In a Book (Rizvi. & Lingard, 2010) authors discussed various critical issues in education policy. They also explore that the key global drivers of policy change in education and suggest that these do not operate in the same way in all nation states.

International Education System Analysis with Pakistan Education System

In terms of comparative analysis of International educational systems with Pakistan educational system, several studies have been done. We did review previous studies (Khan & Kusakabe, 2023) Compares and contrasts the educational systems of Pakistan and Japan, looking at the oversight of education and training, educational design, curriculum development, assessment and evaluation, supervision and administration, and teacher preparation and education. The research brought forth similarities and differences between Pakistani and Japanese educational systems. Japan is way ahead of Pakistan in different areas thanks to the role teachers' play in their educational systems. Furthermore, the largest number of children worldwide that are not in school is in Pakistan, which has 158 million people (58 percent).

There are 22.8 million kids in Pakistan between the ages of 5 and 16 who are not in school, or 12.1% of the entire population ((UNICEF, 2023). Meanwhile, the attention of the world's students has been drawn to Japan's superior educational system. The educational systems of Malaysia and Pakistan with a particular emphasis on pedagogy and evaluation methods. (Irshad & Jabeen, 2024) compares the primary school educational system in both countries. (Arnove, 1980) Analyzed world education system in the field of comparative education toward more sophisticated examinations of education in relationship to economic, political, and social forces. Australia and South Africa regarding the structure of OBE (outcome-based education), assessment and reporting, and the extra workload associated with the implementation of OBE. (Williamson, 2000) Finds that Australia is a country found to be well resourced, politically and economically stable, with at least 10 years' experience in (OBE).

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research study and phenomenology was used as the research design (John W. Creswell and Cheryl N.Poth, 2017). Phenomenological research seeks the lived experience of the participants (Gurwitsch, 1966; Manen, 2017). To gather data semi-structured interviewees were conducted (Miller, 2022). The non-probability sampling approach includes four primary techniques: snowball, purposive, quota, and convenience sampling (Rahman, 2023). The purposive sampling was used in this research (Aldaihani & Data, 2021; Campbell et al., 2020) Data saturation was achieved after completion of 30 interviews so researcher stopped taking further interviews (V. Braun, 2014; Fugard & Potts, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 2000). The participants were selected based on their notable contributions, accomplishments, and ability to provide significant insights. Data for the study was collected through extensive fieldwork carried out in the Lahore and Karachi, between November and December 2025. To ensure that we were comparing the same level of schooling across Lahore and Karachi's government schools, many of the listed public schools were excluded due to the difficulties to find school location in limited time. Our main focus was on public sector schools that ran by the government, they were the more important players in the provision of free quality education access to all. Data was also collected from key Informant interviews (KIIs) and focus Group Discussions (FGDs). For the KIIs and FGDs, different visits and interviews were conducted with the headmistress (HMs) of government schools which are actively working in education sector of Lahore and Karachi. Thematic analysis for used for data analysis(V. Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Figure 1 Research method

Sample Coverage and characteristics of Respondents

This study employed a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling (Palinkas.A et al, 2015) is the non-probability sampling method where the researcher deliberately selects participants based on the specific characteristics to the research objectives. To select 30 schools 15 from Karachi and 15 from Lahore. To ensure representation, the sample included equal numbers of boys' and girls' schools, with 8 girls' school

and 7 boys' school in each city. The data for this study was collected from Headmistress of the selected school.

Table 2 Sample of schools

Districts	No. of Schools	Type of school	Area of school
Karachi South	7	3 Boys/4 Girls	Lyari/Saddar
Karachi East	8	4 Boys/4 Girls	Jamshed town/Gulshan
Lahore	15	8 Boys/ 7 Girls	Shalimar Town, Shahdara, Gulberg, Barki, Green Town

Source: Individual questionnaire

We developed 3 questionnaires, KII (Key Informative Interviews) questionnaire, Focused group discussion (FGD) questionnaire, and KII for (DEO) District Education Officer Karachi, and (CEO) Chief Education Officer Lahore. Questionnaire were comprising on schools' information, Enrollment characteristics, School Infrastructure, Facilities in schools, and teacher training questions. Each section comprises on relevant multiple-choice questions. Each question had multiple choice answers related to the mentioned sections. DEO questionnaire was developed according to school information and their practice for schools' development and teachers training development.

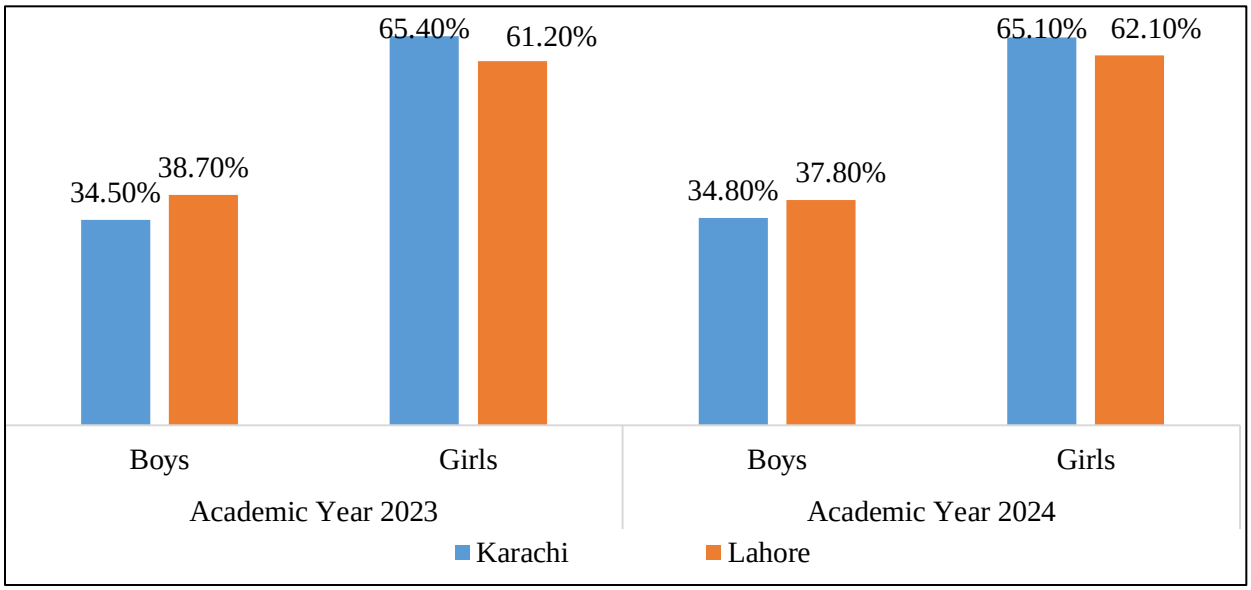
RESULTS

COMPARISON OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN KARACHI AND LAHORE

We visit schools of Karachi and Lahore in different areas as mentioned in table 2. We compare important education indicators collected data from Karachi and Lahore enrollment rate, number of teachers, basic facilities in school. In this section we compare infrastructure of school in Karachi and Lahore.

A gender imbalance in favor of girls in school enrollment (Figure 2**).** In Karachi, the percentage of boys enrolled in schools increased from 34.50% in Academic Year 2023 to 34.80% in Academic Year 2024. Conversely, the percentage of girls decreased from 65.40% to 65.10%. In Lahore, the percentage of boys enrolled in schools increased from 38.70% in Academic Year 2023 to 37.80% in Academic Year 2024. The percentage of girls decreased from 61.20% to 62.10%.

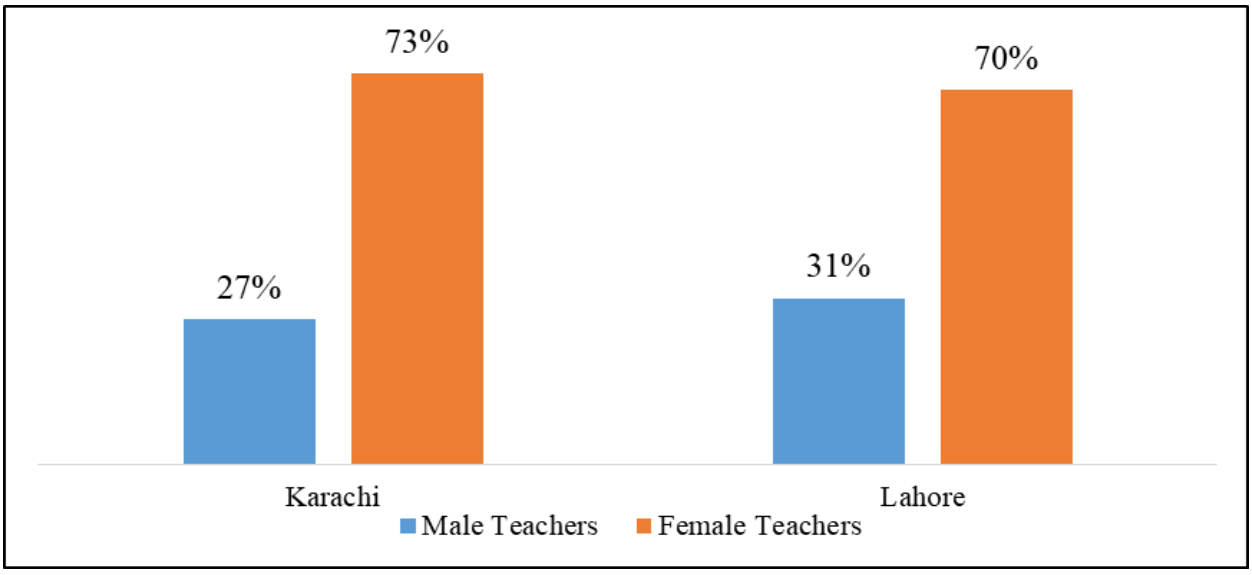
Figure 2: Enrollment Rate % in Karachi & Lahore School (Boys & Girls)



Source: Data Collect by School Visits

Figure 3 data reveal a significant gender disparity in the teaching workforce in both Karachi and Lahore. Female teachers constitute a substantial majority in both cities, with 73% in Karachi and 70% in Lahore. This indicates that male teachers are underrepresented in the educational system of these major Pakistani cities. Research suggests that students may benefit from having teachers of both genders. A diverse teaching workforce can create a more inclusive and enriching learning environment for all students.

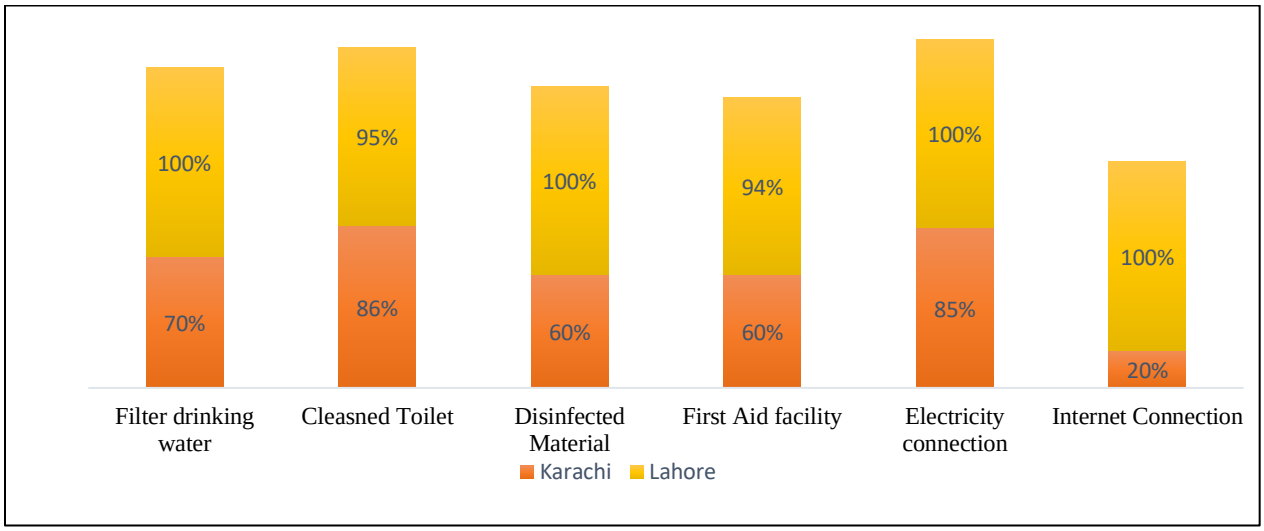
Figure 3 No. of Teachers Male & Female (Karachi & Lahore)



Source: Data Collected by School Visits

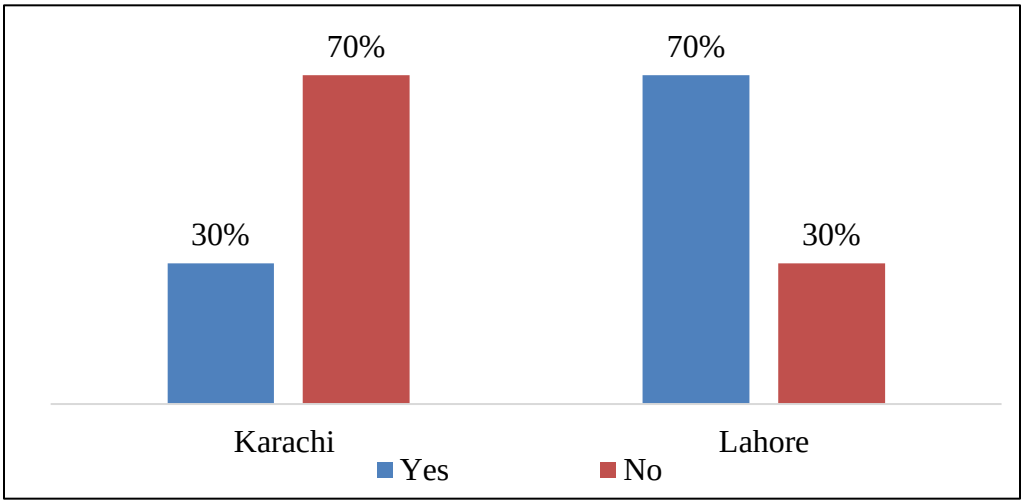
Figure 4 provides a comparison of school facilities between Karachi and Lahore. Overall, Lahore appears to have a higher availability of most facilities compared to Karachi. Specifically, both cities have 100% access to water and usable toilets. However, Lahore has a higher percentage of schools with filtered drinking water 100% compare 70% in Karachi, electricity connection 100% compare 85% in Karachi, and internet connection 100% compare 20% in Karachi. In terms of sanitation, Lahore again shows a slight edge with 100% of schools having disinfected materials compared to 60% in Karachi. However, both cities perform well in toilet cleanliness, with 86% of schools in Karachi and 93% in Lahore having cleaned toilets. Finally, first aid facility availability is lower in both cities, with 60% of schools in Karachi and 94% in Lahore having access.

Figure 4: Basic facilities in Schools (Karachi & Lahore)



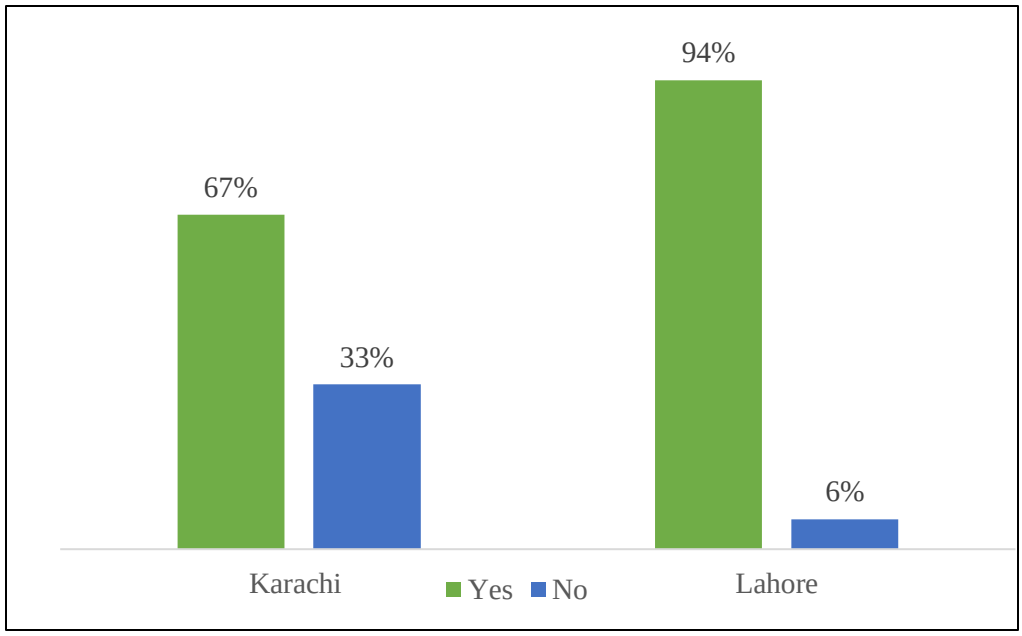
The data presented in figure 5 indicates that a significant proportion of schools in Karachi lack functional libraries. In Karachi, only 30% of schools reported having a working library, while a concerning 70% indicated that their libraries were not operational. This suggests a widespread issue of inadequate library resources and accessibility in these major urban areas of country.

Figure 5: No. of Working libraries (Karachi & Lahore)



The data in Figure 6 reveals a stark difference in the availability of computer labs in schools across Karachi and Lahore. In Lahore, a significantly higher percentage of schools (94%) have access to a computer lab, compared to Karachi where only 67% of schools have one. This suggests that a considerable number of schools in Karachi lack this crucial technological resource for student learning. This disparity in access to technology has significant implications for educational equity. In today's increasingly digital world, access to computers and technology is essential for developing essential skills like digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

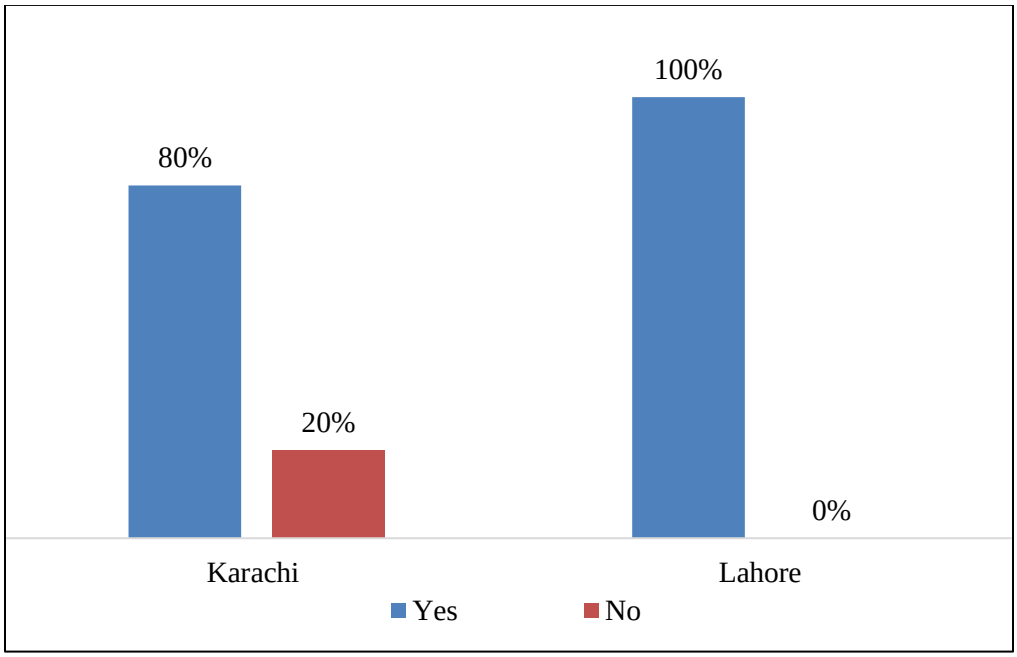
Figure 6: No. of Computer Labs (Karachi & Lahore)



Infrastructure of Karachi & Lahore School

The figure 7 shows that a higher percentage of schools in Lahore have boundary walls compared to Karachi. All surveyed school in Lahore have a 100% boundary wall, while 80% schools in Karachi. This suggests that Lahore schools may place a greater emphasis on physical security and boundary walls may be more commonly implemented as a safety measure.

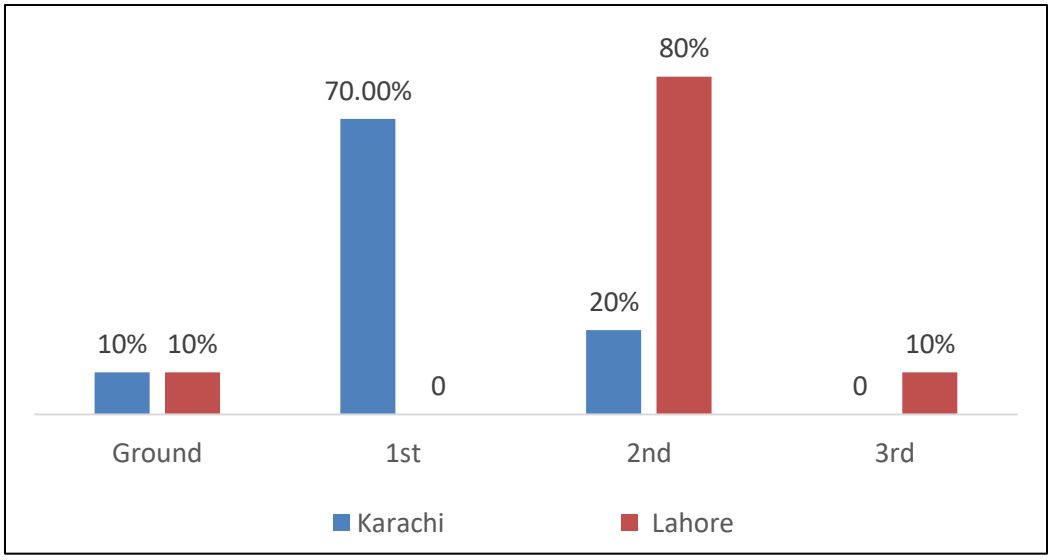
Figure 7: Boundary wall/fence in school (Karachi & Lahore)



Source: Data Collected by School Visits

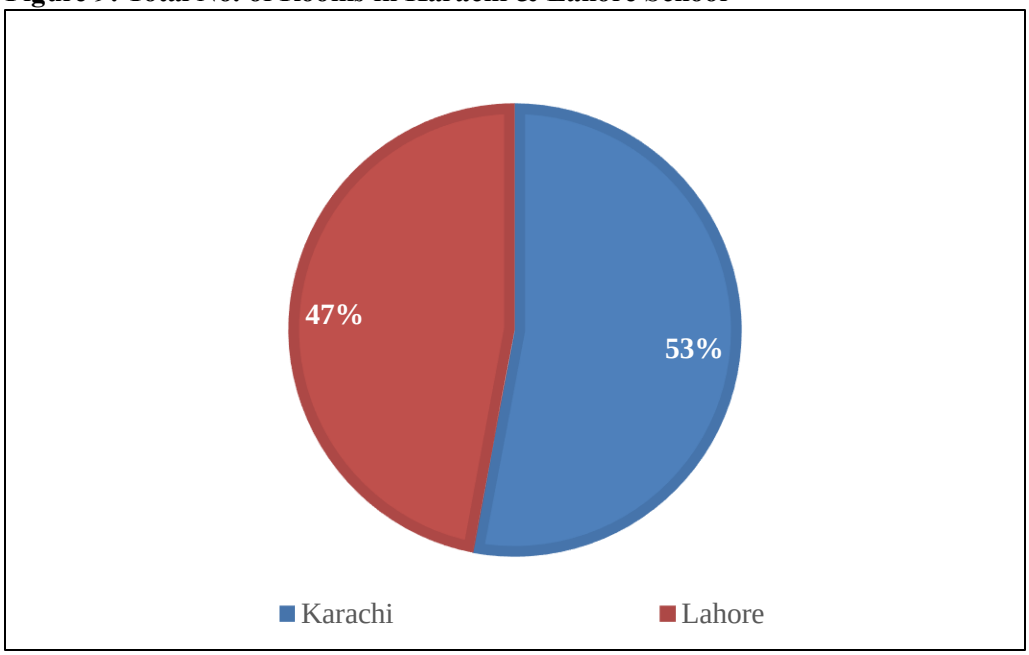
Figure 8 provides data on the distribution of school buildings based on the number of floors in Karachi and Lahore. While both cities have one school with only a ground floor, Lahore has a significantly higher number of schools with first floors 80% compared to Karachi. Conversely, Lahore has a greater proportion of schools with second floors than Karachi, and 10% school with a third floor, whereas Karachi has none. This suggests that schools in Lahore generally have more floors than those in Karachi, possibly due to factors like land availability, population density, and educational requirements in each city.

Figure 8: No. of Floors in school (Karachi & Lahore)



We visited schools in Karachi and Lahore, total number of functional rooms in school out 30 school data, figure 15 shows the total number of rooms in schools in Karachi and Lahore. Karachi has a higher number of rooms with a total of 414 rooms, whereas Lahore has 368 rooms. This suggests that schools in Karachi have more rooms available compared to Lahore.

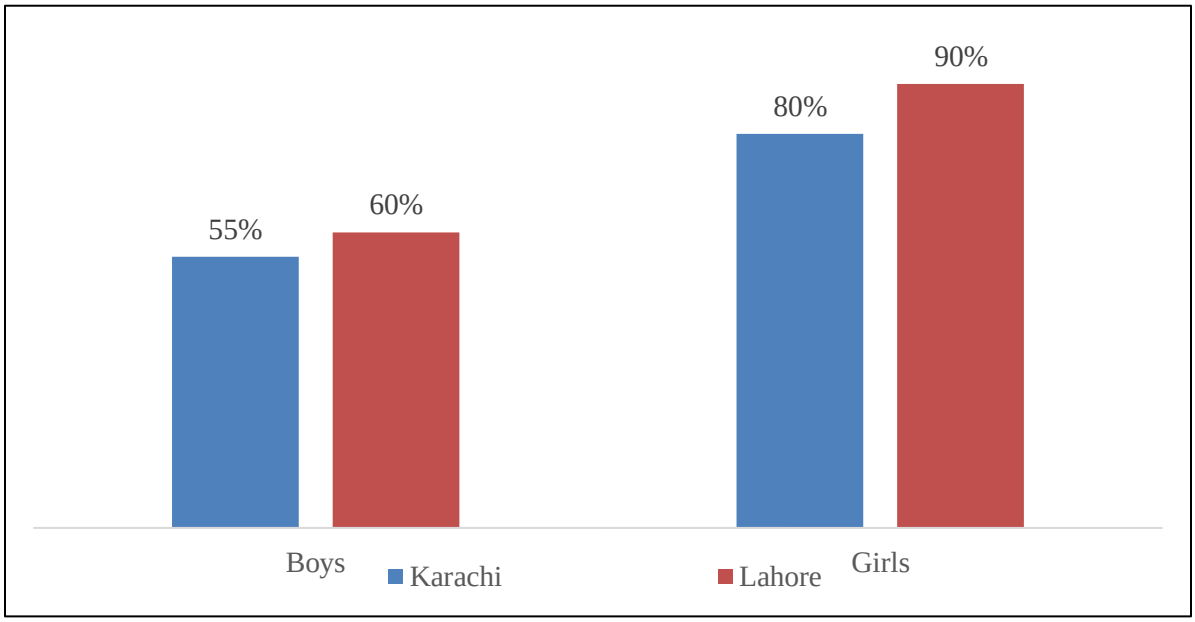
Figure 9: Total No. of Rooms in Karachi & Lahore School



Source: Data Collected by School Visits

Safe and hygienic sanitation, like toilets, is essential for public health. They help us manage waste properly, protecting our environment and reducing the spread of diseases. Unfortunately, a large number of people globally lack access to these facilities, leading to unsafe waste disposal practices (WASH, 2024). The collected data provides the number of separate toilets for boys and girls in schools in Karachi and Lahore. In Karachi, there are 55% toilets for boys and 80% for girls. In contrast, Lahore has a significantly higher number of toilets, with 60% for boys and 90% for girls. Adequate sanitation facilities are crucial for maintaining good hygiene and preventing the spread of diseases. The higher number of toilets in Lahore may indicate better sanitary conditions in schools comparatively Karachi.

Figure 10: No. of Separate Toilet for Girls & Boys (Karachi & Lahore)

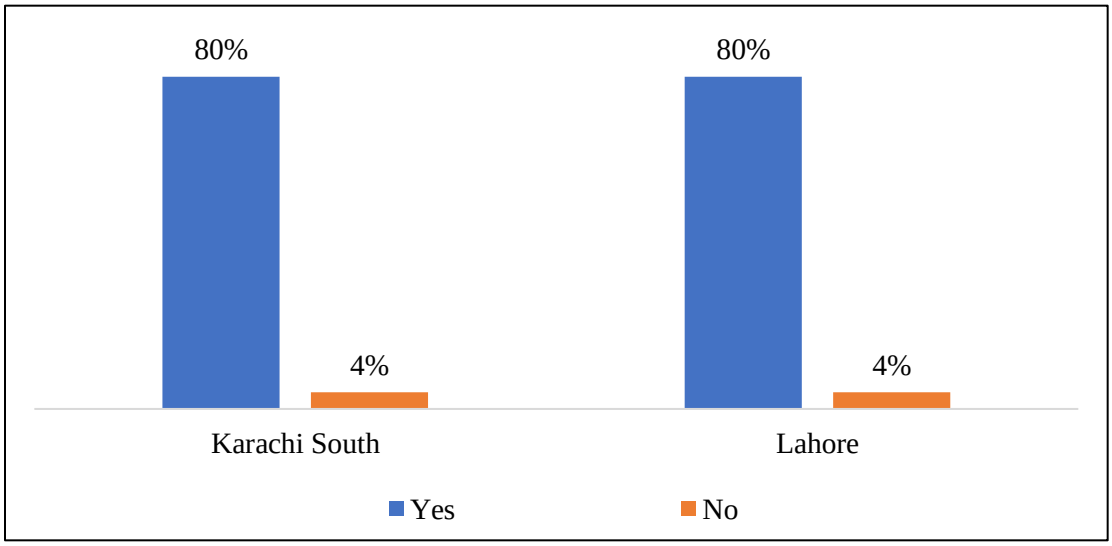


Source: Data Collected by School Visits

Facilities in School (Karachi & Lahore)

The figure 11 represents data on the presence of ECE (Early Childhood Education) equipment in classrooms in Karachi and Lahore. In Karachi, 80% surveyed schools reported having ECE equipment in their classrooms, while 20% did not. In Lahore, a higher proportion of schools 80% indicated the presence of ECE equipment, compared to 20% surveyed schools that lacked it. This suggests that a greater percentage of schools in Lahore are equipped with materials for early childhood education compared to Karachi.

Figure 11 ECE Equipment in Class Room (Karachi & Lahore)



The figure 12 shows the availability of fans in classrooms in Karachi and Lahore. In Karachi, 27% surveyed schools have 1 fan, 27% surveyed schools have 2 fans, and 46% schools have more than 2 fans in their classrooms. In Lahore, a higher proportion of schools 86% have more than 2 fans, while only 13% surveyed schools have 2 fans. This indicates that a greater number of schools in Lahore are equipped with multiple fans compared to Karachi.

Figure 12: Available Fans in Class Room

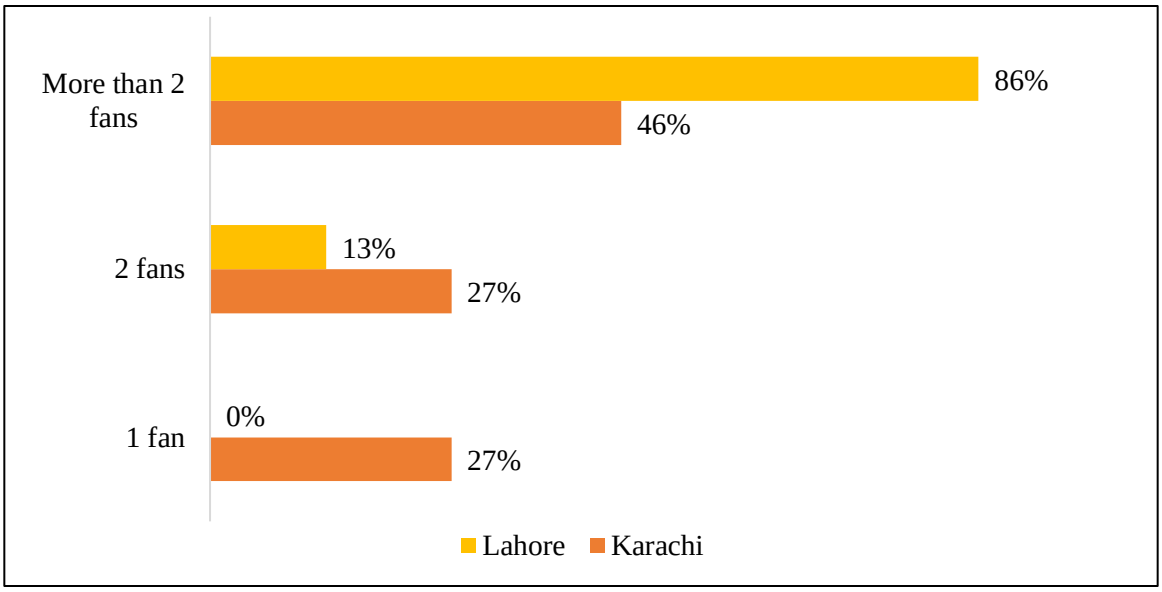


Figure 13 presents data on the availability of transport facilities for schools in Karachi and Lahore. In both cities, only 7% surveyed school reported having a transport facility. This suggests that a very small percentage of public schools in both Karachi and Lahore provide transportation services to their students. Government-run or subsidized school bus services, particularly in underdeveloped areas with limited public transport infrastructure.

Figure 13 Transport Facility Available in Karachi & Lahore Schools

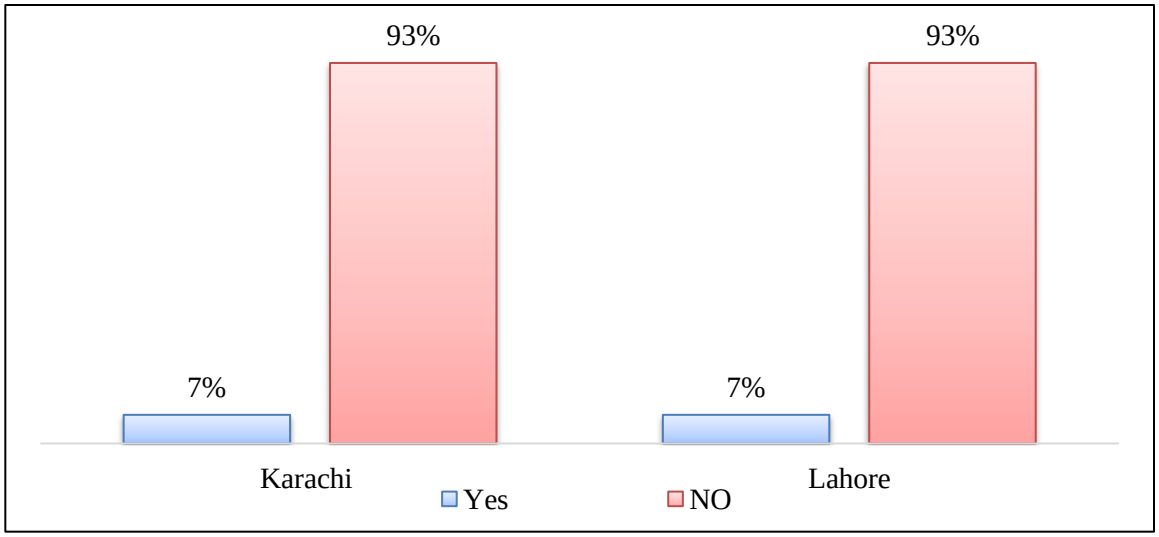
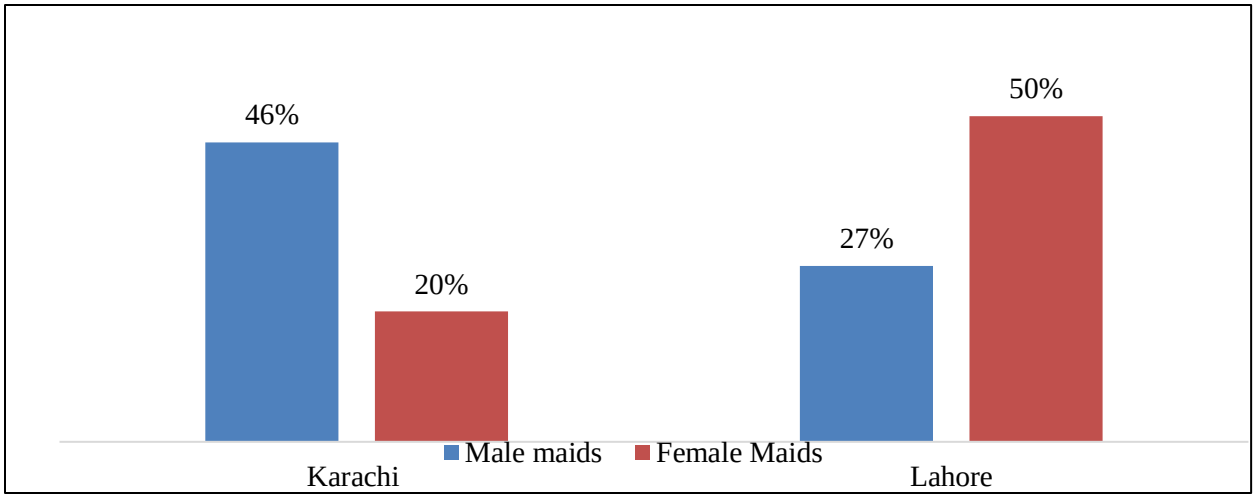


Figure 14 provides information on the number of male and female maids employed in schools in Karachi and Lahore. In Karachi, there are 46% male maids and 20% female maids, while in Lahore, there are 27% male maids and 50% female maids. This suggests that a higher proportion of male maids are employed in schools in both cities. The HMs of Karachi and Lahore have said that we have hired male and female maids ourselves because the government has banned recruit of non-teaching staff.

Figure 14 No. of Maids in Karachi & Lahore Schools



Focus Group Discussions with Principals and Teachers

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with headmistresses and teachers from public schools in Karachi and Lahore to explore perceptions of educational quality, curriculum implementation, teacher development, student engagement, and future priorities. The findings are organized thematically, highlighting both convergent and divergent perspectives across the two cities.

Quality of Education

Participants in both cities identified structural and socioeconomic constraints as primary determinants of educational quality. In Karachi, the majority of respondents reported dissatisfaction with the quality of education, particularly in underdeveloped urban areas. Insufficient access to basic facilities—including clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and non-teaching staff—was cited as a major impediment to effective teaching and learning. Student absenteeism was frequently attributed to poverty-related factors such as transportation costs and household financial instability.

In Lahore, perceptions were comparatively mixed. Approximately half of the participants expressed satisfaction with overall educational quality, emphasizing teachers' academic qualifications and commitment. However, respondents highlighted low parental literacy, limited parental engagement, and high student absenteeism as persistent challenges, particularly affecting student retention and learning outcomes. In both cities, newly recruited teachers were perceived as motivated and adaptable, whereas resistance to pedagogical change among senior teachers was commonly reported.

Curriculum and Assessment

Participants from both Karachi and Lahore acknowledged that the revised curriculum represents an improvement in content quality and alignment with international benchmarks. Karachi respondents noted that changes in the medium of instruction had increased interest among families previously favoring private schools.

Despite these improvements, implementation challenges were consistently reported. Teachers—particularly senior staff—experienced difficulties adapting to curriculum changes due to limited training and the absence of structured teacher guides. Respondents emphasized the need for activity-based, project-based, and formative assessment approaches. Concerns regarding assessment credibility were especially prominent in Lahore, where participants reported frequent examination paper leaks via social media, undermining the validity of standardized testing.

Mechanisms for feedback on curriculum implementation were limited in both contexts. While Karachi schools utilized Parent–Teacher Meetings (PTMs) through formal and informal channels, Lahore participants reported minimal parental feedback due to widespread illiteracy and lack of access to digital communication platforms. Teachers' feedback was largely informal and seldom incorporated into curriculum design.

Teacher Development and Support

There was strong consensus that teacher capacity building is essential and should be institutionalized as a continuous policy priority. Participants across both cities reported that existing professional development initiatives often fail to address practical classroom realities, including large class sizes, time constraints, and diverse learner needs.

Teachers in both Karachi and Lahore described feeling overburdened by non-teaching responsibilities, such as administrative work, census activities, and election duties, which significantly disrupted instructional continuity. Participants recommended the allocation of separate personnel for non-academic tasks to safeguard teaching time. Teacher evaluation practices included classroom observations, student performance reviews, and copy checking, with Lahore respondents emphasizing unannounced classroom observations as a particularly effective evaluation method.

Student Engagement and Well-Being

Participants consistently emphasized that interactive teaching strategies and positive teacher–student relationships are central to student engagement. Teachers in both cities reported providing additional instructional support to slower learners through extra classroom time or focused attention during library periods.

Regarding student well-being, teachers frequently assumed informal counseling roles, addressing students' emotional and social challenges. While Karachi respondents strongly advocated for the appointment of professional counselors or psychologists at the district level, Lahore participants highlighted teachers' emotional labor and commitment despite limited institutional support. Extracurricular activities were viewed positively in both cities, contributing to students' social development and school attachment.

Future Directions

Participants from both cities identified professional development, infrastructure improvement**,** and technology integration as critical priorities for enhancing educational quality. Karachi respondents emphasized urgent needs related to basic facilities, timely provision of textbooks and stipends, digital infrastructure, and non-teaching staff. Lahore respondents stressed the importance of project-based learning, digital literacy, and skill development to prepare students for future employment opportunities.

Overall, the findings indicate that educational quality in public schools is shaped more by systemic and contextual factors than by curriculum design alone. While teachers demonstrate commitment and recent recruitment has introduced positive momentum, sustained improvements require coordinated policy attention to infrastructure, teacher support, assessment integrity, and the reduction of non-teaching burdens.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

District-level surveys and in-depth studies conducted in two major public-school divisions Karachi and Lahore provide important insights into educational priorities, institutional capacity, and perceptions of the provincial government's role in educational governance and reform. While some findings are context-specific, many offer broader lessons for education leaders and policymakers. Addressing the challenges faced by these public institutions is essential for achieving sustainable improvements in education systems.

At the outset of the study, key educational indicators for Sindh and Punjab were compared, including the number of schools, student enrollment, teacher availability, school infrastructure (e.g., buildings, boundary walls, classrooms, and play areas), availability of facilities (e.g., electricity, water, sanitation, internet, laboratories, libraries, furniture, and student–teacher ratios), and teacher development initiatives (e.g., pedagogy, curriculum management, assessment methods, and classroom management).

The analysis revealed notable differences between the two cities. Lahore schools demonstrated stronger compliance in providing essential facilities, with universal access to water and functional toilets, and higher availability of filtered drinking water, disinfected materials, and first-aid facilities. While electricity connections existed in most Karachi schools, frequent load shedding disrupted school operations, whereas Lahore schools reported universal internet connectivity. Enrollment trends showed a slight increase in both cities between academic years 2023 and 2024, with a more pronounced rise in girls' enrollment in Karachi, while Lahore experienced a marginal decline in boys' enrollment.

Across both cities, transportation difficulties emerged as a major contributor to student dropout and low enrollment, particularly among students from low-income households. Limited affordability of daily commuting was a common barrier, highlighting the need for subsidized or government-supported school transport services, especially in underdeveloped areas.

The study further identified poverty, parental employment constraints, resistance to even nominal school fees, and population mobility as key factors influencing enrollment and retention. In both cities, many parents prioritize immediate economic needs over consistent school attendance. Frequent migration, particularly among rental households, also contributes to fluctuating enrollment figures. These findings underscore the need for targeted poverty alleviation measures, including conditional cash transfer programs linked to regular school attendance, expanded scholarships for low-income students, and community outreach initiatives to raise parental awareness about the long-term benefits of education.

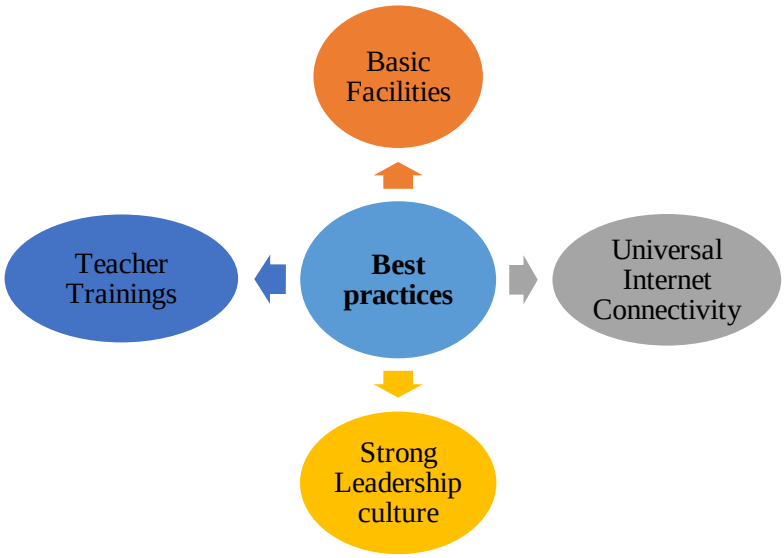
Both Karachi and Lahore schools showed a strong commitment to teacher professional development, particularly in pedagogy, classroom management, and subject knowledge. However, priorities differed: Karachi emphasized school leadership training, while Lahore prioritized subject-specific and interactive instructional courses. The findings suggest a shared need to move beyond traditional lecture-based training toward interactive, practice-oriented professional development, including peer learning, simulations, and technology-supported training.

Finally, parent engagement mechanisms were evident in both cities, with regular Parent–Teacher Meetings (PTMs) and systematic follow-up on student performance. These practices reflect a broader institutional commitment to monitoring student progress and fostering collaboration between schools and families.

Best Practices

Lahore is consistent provision of basic facilities such as filtered drinking water, disinfected materials, first aid facilities and high infrastructure in schools demonstrates a proactive approach to student health safety and quality education. The universal internet connectivity in Lahore schools also provides students with valuable access to educational resources and opportunities for online learning.

Karachi emphasis on teacher training suggests a proactive approach to school improvement and fostering a strong leadership culture. The high number of interactive courses indicates a willingness to adopt innovative teaching methods. As far as enrollment is concerned in Lahore enrollment has decreased, but Lahore is still boasting a higher enrollment rate compared to Karachi. This is due to factors such as a well-established educational system, better access to basic resources, and a strong emphasis on education within the community.

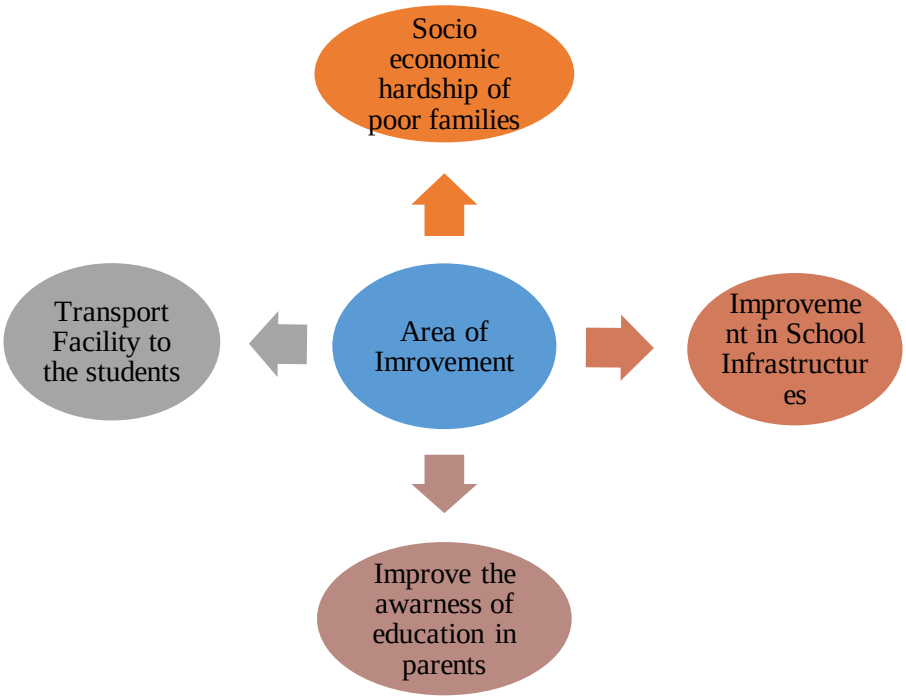


Areas of Improvement

The decrease in enrollment in Karachi could be attributed to various factors, such as economic hardships, lack of awareness about educational opportunities. Addressing these issues would require a multi-pronged approach, including improving school infrastructure, providing financial assistance to families, and creating a safe and inclusive learning environment**,** provide transport facilities to reduce the drop outs rate**,** improving access to filtered drinking water and first aid facilities is crucial for ensuring the health and safety

of students. Increasing the availability of internet connectivity in Karachi schools would also enhance educational opportunities for students.

While in Lahore subject-specific knowledge is a priority, further emphasis on trainings and its role in creating a positive school climate would be beneficial. Additionally, exploring ways to increase the frequency of PTMs in schools that currently hold them annually could strengthen parent engagement. To improve the enrollment rate and reduce the dropout rate there is need to provide free transport facilities to the public schools by the government.



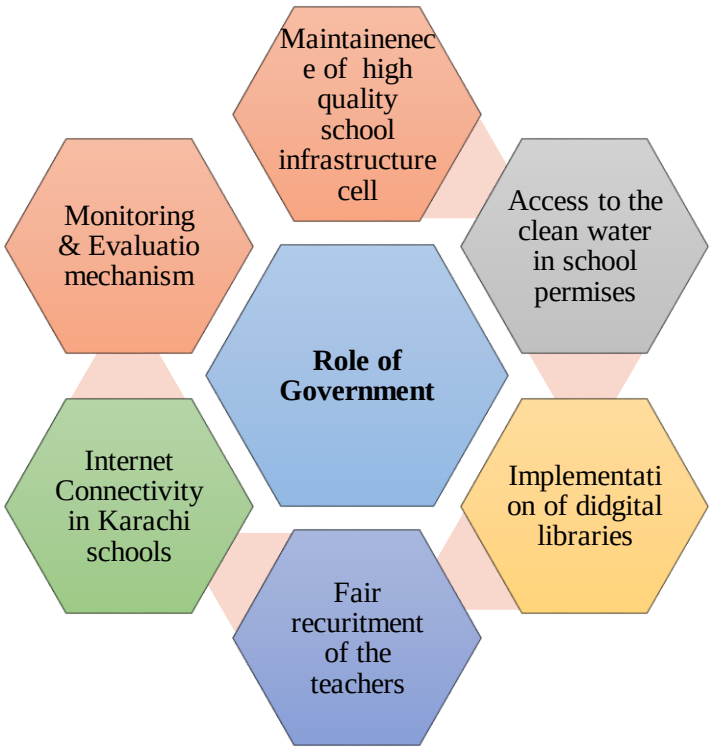
Overall, both Karachi and Lahore demonstrate positive practices in education. By addressing the identified areas for improvement and leveraging the strengths observed in each city, schools in both regions can continue to enhance the quality of education and provide a better learning experience for all student's growth and development.

Role of the Government

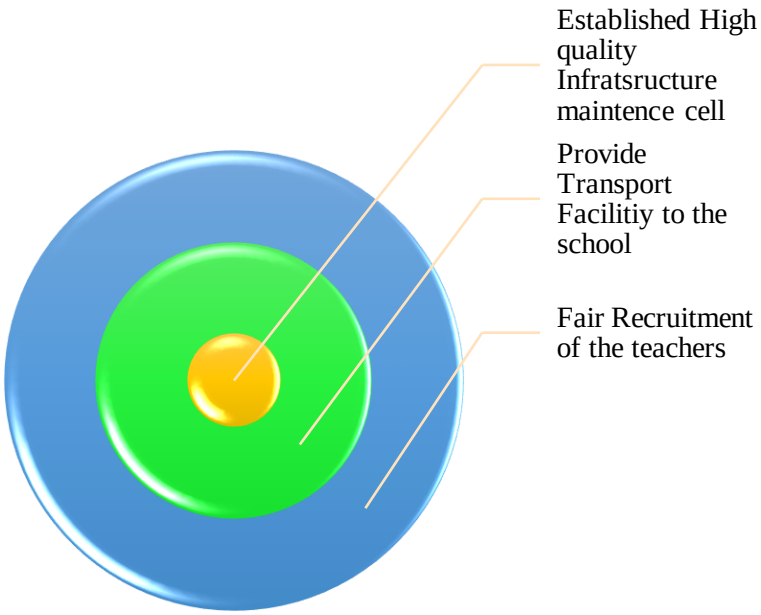
The government plays a crucial role in implementing policy implications. Government should prioritize the development and maintenance of high-quality school infrastructure cell across Karachi specially underdeveloped areas, such as (Liyari & Jamshed quarter). This includes ensuring access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and well-equipped classrooms. CEO and DEO of respective districts of Sindh and Punjab should conduct regular inspections, support, provision of first aid kits and trained personnel, and ensur the availability of disinfected materials and a clean environment. Government should work on expanding internet access to all schools in Karachi. To enhance and to maximize internet connectivity government should implement comprehensive digital literacy programs for teachers and students. This includes training on online safety, digital citizenship, and effective use of educational resources available online. For resource allocation government need to established robust monitoring and evaluation

mechanisms to track progress and ensure that public schools are adhering to the set standards across the Sindh.

This study supports the school management and provides feedback to the relevant stakeholders, regarding multiple issues, including on how to revise and keep the curriculum up-to date and relevant challenges while instruct in classroom, how to improve the modern-day requirements of standard and international benchmark, and how to strengthen teachers' research and development opportunities within industry. Engaging the members in such a detailed manner will create a sense of shared purpose that can assist in educational reforms, and improving the quality education in the province.



Immediate Implement Targets:



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