

Educational Access Inequalities in Rural Balochistan: A Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The situation in Rural Balochistan demonstrates certain inequalities in the access to primary and elementary school education where girls encounter intertwined socio-cultural, economic, geographic, and safety limitations. The paper looks at the gendered impediments to enrolment, attendance, and retention of Grades (1-8) in rural Balochistan, via the lens of parents. The qualitative case-study design was applied. Thirty-five (35) purposively chosen parents (mothers and fathers) were interviewed using semi-structured and face to face interviews. The interviews were recorded in audio in (Balochi/Urdu), transcribed and translated to English and analyzed through thematic analysis. The study is theoretically informed by Social Reproduction Theory, Feminist Theory, and the Capability Approach, which together explain how structural inequality, patriarchal norms, and restricted life opportunities shape girls' educational exclusion. Findings explored Poor school facilities and teacher absenteeism, direct and indirect school expenses and the cost of domestic labor of girls including distance, lack of transport and fear of harassment; oppressive norms which refers to the cultural practice of female seclusion, often associated with maintaining modesty and protecting family honor and tradition of Balochistan; early marriage expectations; and a scarcity of female teachers, all led to a lack of trust in schools as girls' safe places. The exclusion of girls is one of the indicators of limited real possibilities, but not absence of desire. To enhance retention in rural areas, gender responsive, and integrated interventions are required.

Keywords: Gender inequality; Rural schooling; Schooling of girls; Educational access; Balochistan; School dropouts; Parental attitudes; Socio-cultural norms; Thematic analysis; Qualitative case study

INTRODUCTION

Education is undoubtedly considered one of the most important determinants of life opportunities, social activity, and growth, especially in those situations when gender disparity restricts mobility, voice, and access to resources (UNESCO, 2024). Nevertheless, despite the improvement, there are still gender differences in education, both in their access and performance. Structural barriers to the exclusion of girls in education are usually associated with poverty, discriminatory norms, early marriage, and violence (UNESCO, 2025). Gender-responsive education systems should not only be a priority on the basis of rights but also on the basis of development as education of girls has been linked to late marriage, enhanced health, enhanced human capital performance and increased future income (World Bank, 2024).

In Pakistan, the necessity to work towards a better access to schooling, both constitutional and continuous, is emphasized by both the constitutional obligations and continuing exclusion. Article 25A of the Constitution provides a compulsory (and free) education of children aged 5 as 16 years (Government of Pakistan, 2010). Nevertheless, there are still huge figures of out-of school students with girls being the most affected especially after the initial grades (UNICEF Pakistan, 2021; Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024). Although the figures are not constant, Balochistan continues to record the greatest amounts of exclusion, where two-third of school-going children are out of school with its estimates being far bigger than those of other provinces (UNICEF Pakistan, 2021 ; Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024; Government of Pakistan, Finance Division, 2024/2025).

The Balochistan situation is further enhanced by the geographical constraints of the place, its demography, and its service delivery. Balochistan being the largest province in Pakistan, the province covers about 347,190 square kilometers, or approximately 43 -44 percent of the total territory of this nation, but is the least populated, with consequent low settlement density and high schooling infrastructure and staffing expenses (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). There are very few schools in many of the settlements, and the schools are unevenly distributed. The gaps in facilities and staffing, especially on the educational program of girls, also restrict access (Government of Balochistan, 2020/2025). Another aspect that is mentioned by UNESCO is that the education sector of Balochistan needs to employ gender-sensitive approaches because girls experience a special barrier to their participation as well as the transition (UNESCO, 2022).

This paper fulfills these gaps by considering roadblocks to access and attendance of primary and elementary education (Grades 1-8) in the Balochistan rural areas in a gendered manner. It gives attention to the parental attitudes regarding the reasons why girls drop out of school and the ways at which families consider socio-cultural requirements, economic limitations, geography, infrastructure, and security during their education decision-making process. Due to the 12-year school system in Pakistan (including primary and middle schooling (Grades 18) the primary school years are the critical years in which girls discontinue education because gender expectations harden over time (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Focusing on parental stories, the research will offer a context-specific examination of how the gendered barriers intersect, and it will offer essential evidence on policies and programs regarding enhancing the retention of girls in rural areas with limited resources, as well as in socially conservative environments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptual framework was based on three theories, including the social reproduction theory, feminist theory, and the capability approach. The social reproduction theory, which was formulated by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, was used to analyze the process of continuation of gendered systems in the society, especially patriarchal structures within the educational systems. The theory reflected the perception of girls in Balochistan as the main caregivers, and their education was usually neglected to care about the domestic chores. It was analyzed through the feminist theory based on women scholars such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, that the gendered processes of power, i.e. the honor and respectability among the rural setting, limited the freedom of girls to receive education. Such cultural practices were seen as a hindrance that curtailed the movements of girls as well as their access to education. The denial of education was examined in terms of the capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum to investigate how the denial of education constrained the ability of girls to develop into fully functioning members of the society. This theory stressed the fact that education is not only a right but also an ability that can help people to broaden their possibilities in life. In this framework, the compounded barriers to girls in rural Balochistan were examined, which provided the insight into the multifaceted form of educational exclusion.

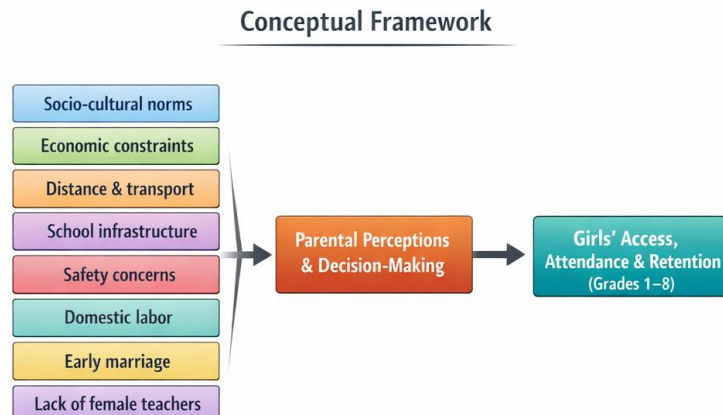


Figure. 1 Conceptual frame work

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is a vital resource to personal and social progress, but gender education gaps persist in most regions of the world, especially with regard to girls being located in low-income and rural communities (Fakhr and Messenger, 2020, p. 71; Reis, 2015, p. 4). The factors preventing the education of girls are complex and interconnected in Pakistan in terms of socio-cultural, economic, geographical, and infrastructural conditions (Nazli and Noman, 2023). The current literature review discusses different studies that have reviewed these barriers, particularly in rural Balochistan, where education access among girls is particularly limited, where girls are systematically denied schooling due to deep-rooted tribal beliefs and views of patriarchal capital (Arif et al., 2025, p. 1).

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Gender role socio-cultural norms are one of the biggest predictors of the educational achievements of Pakistani girls (Iqbal et al., 2023; Mehmood et al., 2018, p. 10). This restricts mobility and access to education of the girls in the rural areas like in Balochistan (Arif et al., 2025). These limitations are influenced by patriarchal standards which enable more attention to the domestic functions of girls instead of going to school (Arif et al., 2025). Girls are traditionally expected to work at home and take care of the family, which restricts them in terms of school attendance (Arif et al., 2025; Bhamani et al., 2023, p. 13). The work of UNICEF-associated research mentions acute mobility limitations to which girls are subjected once they reach the age of 12, when they usually enter puberty, thus making them drop out of school. This is caused by the religious value of purdah, which requires girls to honor and be decent to their family by staying at home, thereby confirming their position as caregivers but not as students (AUDU, 2024; Guglielmi et al., 2021, p. 35).

Besides, cultural attitudes toward honor and family prestige define societal attitudes toward the education of girls (Bhamani et al., 2023, p. 13). Rural communities consider it inappropriate to send girls to school long distances (especially when school is co-ed or it is staffed by a male teacher) because of honor-code penalties and concern of being defamed or harassed (Arif et al., 2025; Bhamani et al., 2023, p. 13). Social

construction of gender roles may also make families focus on educating boys more than girls especially in environments where schools are far or culturally inappropriate girls, and investing in the education of children is more rewarding to a male child (Bhamani et al., 2023, p. 13).

Economic Constraints

Economic factors are also critical in restricting access of girls to education besides socio-cultural issues. Although Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan declared free and compulsory education of children aged between 5-16 years of age (Bibi, 2015, p. 64; Hassan & Khan, 2024; Khattak, 2020, p. 281; School Education in Pakistan:, 2019, p. 16), the indirect costs of uniforms, transportation, and school supplies cost a lot to the poverty-stricken families in Pakistan (Bibi, 201 A study that was supported by the World Bank in Punjab revealed that parents spent hefty amounts of money every year, on uniform, feeding, buying books and covering their kids to schools (Afridi, 2018). This implies that Pakistan has financial constraints because the International Monetary Fund has noted that more spending is needed to reach Sustainable Development Goals in education (Hanedar et al., 2021). The search results were not able to find a direct government or UN agency description that specifically spells out the "opportunity cost" of girls in Pakistan of losing household labor.

Child marriage is also prevalent in Pakistan thereby interfering with the education of girls in addition to the economic impediments to the education of girls. According to UNICEF, early marriages are rural, and a good percentage of females marry before 20 years old (Ashiq et al., 2020). According to the 201718 Pakistan Demographic and Human Survey, 39 percent of child of bearing-age married women were married under the age of 18, and this trend is more common among the less educated women in poor and poor rural households (Javed and Mughal, 2020). At the Balochistan province alone, as of 2017, 49.1 percent of married women got married below 18 (Javed & Mughal, 2020). Girls who get married at a young age are supposed to assume marital and household duties that in most cases terminate their education (Arif et al., 2025, p. 1).

Infrastructure and Geographical Barriers.

Geographical isolation in the rural areas of Pakistan is a major contributor to the education marginalization of girls in Pakistan. Being the largest in Pakistan in terms of land area, Balochistan is a major problem as far as the educational infrastructure is concerned. According to the records of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, many schools in the country are either poorly furnished with basic facilities such as boundary walls, drinking water, latrines and electricity, or with none whatsoever, which makes the learning environment poor (Rashid, 2024). The lack of equal distribution of schools poses a major challenge, especially in rural areas, to girls who in many cases have to cover long distances (Zamir and Wang, 2023, p. 10). These are long distances of travel, which are logistically difficult and unsafe, particularly to girls, because families do not want them to travel solo because they are afraid of harassment or assault (Bhamani et al., 2023, p. 13). According to a World Bank report on rural transport services in Pakistan, rural women and school-age girls are more likely to face poor access to transport, which highlights the logistical issues (Starkey et al., 2021). The situation is even worse by the fact that female teachers are few in these regions. In a study by the World Bank, it is stated that female teachers increased the participation of girls on the villages they taught compared to those without (Morley, 2019).

Teacher Availability and Quality of Education.

Another important factor, which affects participation of girls in schooling, is the quality of education offered in schools. Although an independent government or UN report on poor educational quality and its particular effect on the motivation of girls in rural Balochistan was not located, the problem of the poor quality of

infrastructure and facilities, the qualifications of teachers, and the quality of teaching tools are presented as the critical problems in the education sector of Balochistan according to the academic analysis (Chachar, 2023; Çoşkun, 2023).

Security and Conflict

Security issues and especially in conflict stricken regions are also some of the factors that contribute to the lack of education in Balochistan among girls. Although no direct World Bank or UN agency report on the security issues that affect the education of girls in Balochistan specifically was found, scholarly articles show that in Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of children, especially girls, do not receive an education because of the threat and attacks on educational institutions and workers (Khan and Lohana, 2022; Nawab et al., 2021). Many educational institutions have been destroyed by militants, and in most cases, the situation is disproportionately more afflicted by female schools (Nawab et al., 2021). A report by the Human Rights Watch (2017) with UN sources reveals that attacks on educational centres and military use of schools are some of the barriers to girls getting an education (Akbariavaz & Tehrani, 2020).

This insecurity results in school closures, family displacement and deterioration of the education quality (Nawab et al., 2021). Girls in such an environment can be kept out of school as it is considered safer and this can result in long periods of education loss, which is challenging to overcome (Khan & Lohana, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

To provide a complex and multiple explanation of the issues that girls encounter in rural Balochistan when trying to obtain an education, the theoretical framework of the present study on the barriers to girls education in rural Balochistan has been based on a synthesis of the social reproduction theory, the feminist theory, and the capability approach.

Some of the most common barriers that have been prevalently studied in previous studies in Pakistan and other similar settings include poverty, patriarchal norms, early marriage, mobility restrictions, and poor school infrastructure (Wahid et al., 2025, p. 127). Nevertheless, a significant part of this research has considered these factors independently and has only given minimal focus to the intersection of these factors in the daily decision-making of parents, especially in rural Balochistan (Arif et al., 2025). The given research paper fills this gap as it combines various theoretical approaches to offering a more in-depth explanation of gendered educational exclusion.

The social reproduction theory is the term used to explain how the structures of society, especially gender norms were replicated by the systems of education, as put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Erben et al., 1979). Bourdieu and Passeron believe that educational systems usually reproduce and legitimize the existing social inequalities by reinforcing current cultural norms through such practices as symbolic violence (Erben et al., 1979). In Balochistan, education of girls was regarded as a secondary activity to the traditional domestic functions performed by women hence their lack of access to formal education. The theory explained the choice that the study had on cultural capital which included gendered expectations regarding mobility and domestic labor in determining how parents thought about educating girls. The education of boys was more favored in the family because of perceived economic payoffs whereas girls were expected to work in the household hence perpetrating gender disparities.

It was important to consider the feminist theory, particularly based on the works by bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks, 1995) and Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought*, 2024) to understand how gender and power have crossed shaping the educational outcomes. This

theory brought out the role played by patriarchal systems in rural Pakistan and how they did not allow girls to access education. Gendered rules in Balochistan regarding honor and family honor had a highly limiting impact on the freedom of movement and the freedom to attend school by girls, particularly in those cases where the school was remote or staffed by men. This framework enabled the research to investigate the ways in which education of girls was influenced both by economic factors and by strongly held cultural expectations.

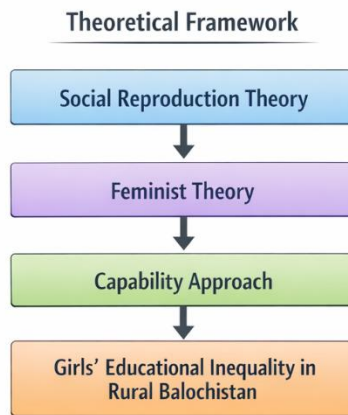


Figure.2 represents the theoretical framework

Lastly, the capability approach, which was formulated by Amartya Sen in his book, *Development as Freedom* (Sen, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum in her book, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Nussbaum, 2000), was used to evaluate the effects of the education of the girls or the absence of it on their ability to be fully functioning members of society. The strategy focused on the fact that the deprivation of education curtailed the possibilities and life decisions of girls. The capability approach gave a detailed perspective to see the bigger picture in educational exclusion in rural Balochistan by highlighting the fact that girls had been able to seek an education and that there were systemic obstacles that limited these freedoms.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting

The present study employed the qualitative case study design to focus on qualitative research of the barriers to primary and elementary education (Grades 1-8) in the rural Balochistan through a gendered approach to the differences in the interpretations and decisions of parents on the influence of limitations on child schooling. The choice of a qualitative approach was made due to the fact that it allows exploring the meanings, perceptions, and situation-specific decision-making that cannot be described using purely quantitative indicators.

The research was performed in the rural communities in Panjgur District, Balochistan where the interaction of geographic dispersion, resource limitations, and gender norms that are locally salient may influence educational access and retention.

Participants and Sampling

The sample size constituted of 35 parents (mothers and fathers) living in rural Panjgur and had direct experience with children enrolment, attendance and/or dropout at either primary or elementary level. The sample was purposively selected to include participants with the requisite information that would provide extensive information about the educational decision-making at the household level and the gender-specific constraints that constrained both boys and girls.

Data Collection

The data were gathered using face-to-face semi-structured interviews which were held in places that were convenient to the respondents. Interviews were conducted on Balochi and Urdu to minimize the language barrier and promote culturally-based expression. Interviews took around half an hour and a half. The interview guide was focused on (a) access and continuity of schooling, (b) differences between girls and boys, and (c) advices by the participants on how the issue of girls education would be addressed. Before full data collection, the guide was tested on five parents (who were not included in the sample but were in a neighboring rural setting) and was made clear and contextually relevant. Two subject experts also reviewed the instrument to enhance the coverage of the content. The interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim and translated into English to analyze the data.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The analyses of the data were performed through the thematic analysis, which necessitated the systematic, iterative data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, and write-up of the narrative.

The preparation of the manuscripts was also in line with the COREQ reporting checklist in order to facilitate the transparent reporting of the interview-based qualitative research.

Participant Protection and Ethics

The university authorities granted ethical approval. Every respondent gave an informed consent and was notified that participation would be voluntary and that he could withdraw at any point in time without repercussions. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by the removal of personal information in the transcripts and reports and the storage of materials pertaining to the research was done in a secure place and used only with research purposes.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were the main tool that was used to collect data in this research and it presented a flexible but a systematic approach to understanding the experiences and perceptions of parents towards the barriers to primary and elementary education in Panjgur, Balochistan. Semi-structured interviews were selected because it gave the participants freedom to belong out their thoughts and at the same time the researcher was able to steer the discussion into major research areas. The method is especially appropriate to qualitative research work since it can produce rich, nuanced, and context-specific information which is not available in terms of standardized questionnaires or other quantitative techniques. The flexibility of this tool also enabled the researcher to dig deeper into the emergent themes, demystify the response of the participants and discover the other unforeseen yet pertinent issue during the interviews.

The applicability of the interview tool was a very crucial factor in the consideration of the data collected to be relevant to the experiences of the interviewees. In order to increase the validity, a number of major steps were taken. To begin with, the interview questions were formulated in regards to a detailed assessment of the existing literature about the access to education, gender gap, and schooling obstacles, especially in the rural Balochistan provinces. This assisted in determining the key themes like the cultural norms, economic barriers, gender roles, and infrastructural barriers that impact the education of the boys and girls.

The interview guide was subsequently validated by two scholars in the field of qualitative education research and gender studies who evaluated the questions on the basis of their clarity, relevance and comprehensiveness. Their response was critical in improving the phrasing of the questions as well as making sure that they were culturally relevant and fit the purpose of the research. In a further effort to ensure that the instrument was able to measure the complicatedness of gender-based barriers to education, the questions were modified according to the expert review and pilot testing feedback.

The pilot study involved five parents in the neighboring rural area of similar socio-cultural and economic factors with the target population. The pilot test served to determine how the questions were decipherable, clear and could obtain detailed answers. It was decided according to the pilot to make some slight modifications in making the questions clearer and make the instrument more contextual. The review, piloting, and optimizing of this instrument led to its validity as it was able to reflect the views of the participants regarding the hindrances to education.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Participant profile

Table 1 summarizes the interview sample (N = 35 parents). The distribution is relevant to interpretation because schooling decisions in many households are negotiated (or controlled) within gendered family structures, and locality differences (rural vs. urban/central settlements) can shape exposure to schools, infrastructure, and norms.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 35)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	20
	Female	15
Locality	Rural	15
	Urban	12
	Central	8

Analytic Approach and Interpretive Framing

Manual thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data and identify patterned meanings when the parental accounts were taken into account. It was analyzed by going through the transcripts repeatedly, through the manual coding, category development, theme generation and through the process of the interpretive refinement. The ultimate themes were treated using a gender-sensitive approach based on Social Reproduction Theory, Feminist Theory and the Capability Approach. This interpretive framing enabled the study to frame education as a socially constructed opportunity that is both a formal right as in Article 25A and SDG4, and a socially constructed opportunity by safety, affordability, mobility, school quality, and gender norms in rural Balochistan.

Thematic Findings

Across interviews, parents described barriers as *interlocking*, rather than single-cause. Themes clustered into six analytically distinct but mutually reinforcing domains.

First, systemic school-side constraints eroded early learning motivation. Parents usually remembered the early enthusiasm of daughters, which was then followed by withdrawal after poor infrastructure, scarcity of learning materials and low motivation by teachers became the indicators that schooling was no longer a good avenue. These reports reflect the system concerns within provincial planning (facilities, teaching/learning, and governance) of Balochistan Education Sector Plan 202025. Some indication of the degree of early interest dealt with was the power of school conditions to put out the fires of interest instead of the absence of the desire to learn: *“Soon her excitement faded due to the lack of proper facilities and teaching... She felt unhappy and frustrated.”* (Respondent 4)

Second, economic hardship and the opportunity cost of schooling shaped dropout risk. The direct costs of schooling (books, uniforms), the indirect costs (transport), and the household trade-offs that poverty causes especially in a situation where education is in competition with the need to survive, were all emphasized by the parents. This is in conformity to the national trends of educational exclusion and previous records of financial constraints and resource allocation within poverty-stricken households. The language of parents was very open in how schooling was considered to be a luxury: *“We are so poor that we can barely afford food and clothes, so education becomes a luxury we cannot afford.”* (Respondent 32) These restrictions were also gendered: as resources became scarce, investment was more frequently rationalized in the case of boys (as future earners) which made girls all the more vulnerable to drop out.

Third, distance, mobility, and physical safety operated as gender-specific access constraints. Parents repeatedly talked about unsafe paths, fear of being harassed and low level of school security (e.g. no boundary wall, gate or guard). This barrier cluster can be especially likely in a province where the dispersion of settlements and long-distance travelling are structural features. It also aligns with the evidence provided in Pakistan on a larger scale that the risks of stopping the safety and the distance involved may force families to keep the girls at home. A brief description demonstrates the way of how fear of harassment is transformed into withdrawal choices: *“Some boys used to tease the girls on the way, and that made her feel unsafe.”* (Respondent 4)

Fourth, patriarchal social norms and “respectability” regulation shaped perceived appropriateness of girls’ schooling. Parents defined high community standards where girls were supposed to focus on household work, no exposure and getting ready to marry and gossip and pressure of extended families as the measures of enforcement. Such stories are not foreign to traditional sociological explanations of purdah as a set of gendered modes of mobility control and figurative safety, particularly following puberty. These norms were indicated in crude and socially common language by parents: *“Many people still believe that girls should*

stay at home and prepare for marriage instead of attending school.” (Respondent 1) Social sanctions were explained as an immediate limit to parental agency: “When I tried to support my daughter’s education, many relatives and neighbors criticized our decision.” (Respondent 33)

Fifth, gendered domestic labor obligations competed directly with schooling time and continuity. According to parents, the everyday duties of girls such as cooking, cleaning, childcare and other domestic chores were the daily expectation that decreased attendance and increased the probability of dropping out when the quality of the school was poor or when traveling was unsafe. Such a time poverty dynamic is also reported as one of the avenues in which households incorporate opportunity costs and withdraw girls first. A typical statement was: *“My daughter had to stay home to help with cooking, cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings.” (Respondent 2)*

Sixth, school staff disengagement and institutional gender bias reduced trust in schooling as a protective space for girls. According to parents, teacher absenteeism, low responsiveness of administration, rough pedagogy, and the lack of female staff were the reasons that turned schools into cultural misfit and rendered them practically useless. These are reiterated concerns in the education planning in the form of governance and quality issues, and they are reiterated in the national records of barriers to education in girls. There were instances of gender bias among some parents expressed outright by teachers which only served to strengthen the distrust back at home and in the community: *“They treated girls’ education as less important than boys’... Some teachers would say things like ‘girls don’t need too much education’.” (Respondent 1)*

Notably, emergent pro-education beliefs were noted in interviews as well as the demand to focus on solutions, which indicate that conservative norms are not universal. Other parents defined education of girls, as being no less important, as well as being associated with empowerment and development of the community: *“I believe girls’ education is just as important as boys’. Education can help them become confident and capable.” (Respondent 1)* The solutions suggested by parents were closely in line with the obstacles they encountered in the form of the proximity to schools, availability of transport that was safe, school security, additional female teachers, and funding—a pragmatic theory of change based on everyday limitations: *“The government should build schools closer to our village, especially for girls, so they don’t have to travel far.” (Respondent 34)*

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The paper, based on a qualitative case study design in a gendered approach to the study of obstacles to primary and elementary schooling (Grades 1-8) in rural Balochistan, investigates how parents interpret and make decisions about restrictions on schooling in children. The study was conducted as semi-structured interviews with 35 parents in Panjgur, in Balochistan, in terms of the household-level educational decision-making and gender-specific limitations of both boys and girls.

The finding revealed the chain of limitations in which the initial parental motivation and dream of schooling among the girls wear out. This frailty is explained by the worsening school quality and safety, growing expenses, and the increasing reinforcement of restrictive gender norms with age among girls. This finding extends to the larger policy environment, such as the claims by UNICEF on high national out-of-school exclusion, with Pakistan accounting 25.3 million children under the age of 16 not enrolled in school (Ali et al., 2025). Balochistan is one province that is characterized as having a high proportional exclusion especially in girls (Arif et al., 2025). These statistics demonstrate the magnitude of educational exclusion that has a critical effect on parental choices.

When these findings are interpreted through the prism of rights and capabilities, the parents do not simply say that there are not educational facilities but deeper than that there are no actual freedoms. This hinders

their accomplishment of formal rights into stable educational participation. The price, proximity to schools, safety issues, and the existing gendered norms all inhibit the actual option. This point of view is connected to the capabilities-oriented concept of educational justice developed by UNESCO, which suggests that real educational equity should refer to significant focus on the systemic inequalities that restrict the actual opportunities, instead of legal access (Angelis, 2025; Hart, 2018; Walker, 2006). It is especially relevant in rural Balochistan since it is the largest province in Pakistan by area (Ahmed et al., 2020; Anser et al., 2020; Bashir, 2019; Fair and Hamza, 2017; Zaheer, 2019), which adds to its size and renders a large travel radius and uneven coverage of the services, thus putting girls in a disadvantaged position unfairly because of their lack of mobility and fear of insecurity (Arif et al., 2025).

Besides, the findings point out to intersectional layering in which gender disadvantage is exacerbated by poverty, rurality and insecurity. This compounding effect leads to increased exclusion, which is in line with the intersectionality argument of Crenshaw that social disadvantages do not add up but interact in complex ways (Fernandez et al., 2024; Keller et al., 2023; Varsik and Goročovskij, 2023; Ziegler et al., 2023). This framework can explain why one-off intervention, e.g. awareness campaigns and not touching on the transport or security, can be ineffective in such situation as rural Panjgur. Indicatively, even parents who basically believe in educational opportunities to girls may pull out their girls when the path to the school is perceived as unsafe, when female teachers are absent and when the family needs the labor of girls.

Governance and systems Parents accounts are consistent with national measures of problems with education of girls in Pakistan, such as lack of adequate schools, unsafe movement, possible harassment, and lack of institutional responsibility. The provincial sector plan also notes that participation and access are two concepts which are tight because of governance and quality reforms. This supports the observance that the reluctance of the demand side is usually a logical reaction to the deficiency of supply and the uncertain conditions and not an incoherent inclination of the culture.

The existence of pro-education views of parents along with their insistence on particular solutions implies a large policy gap. Should affordability, safety, and distance-related restrictions be relieved, it is probable that the households will be more empowered to engage in their schooling aspirations of girls. The significance of this is also supported by development evidence since the World Bank documents multi-domain returns to education of girls, including later marriage, better health information, and higher income and labor force participation (Sperling et al., 2015; Wodon et al., 2018b, 2018a). This implies that the intervention targeted at the reduction of gendered dropout rates in rural Balochistan is not only human rights appropriate and, therefore, covered by Article 25A and SDG4, but also an important investment in wider human development (Abid et al., 2021; Arif et al., 2025). Lastly, the fact that the intervention targets the reduction of gendered dropout rates in rural Balochistan and the existence of pro-education beliefs and solution demands is an indicator of a policy-relevant opening: with affordability, safety, and The evidence of development also explains the importance of this: the World Bank is summing up multi-domain returns of girl education, the later marriage, the better health knowledge and the higher income and participation in labor market. It means that the problem of gendered dropout in the rural areas of Balochistan is an intervention that will not only be a rights-aligned intervention that satisfies Article 25A and SDG4 but also a human development investment in general.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates that the education of girls in rural Balochistan is fragile not due to the consistency of unwillingness of families to have girls go to school but the combination of various factors that accumulate and enhance with time. The mothers and fathers recounted early interests of daughters in education, which were followed by disengagement of the daughters as families faced unaffordability of direct and indirect schooling fees, long commutes, fear of harassment and lack of school security. These access risks were

compounded with patriarchal community norms of emphasizing girls domestic labor, limiting mobility (including purdah-based regulation of respectability), and early marriage or early preparing girls to marry-things that push the returns to schooling downwards to girls. Simultaneously, parents emphasized issues on supply- and governance-side, such as teachers' absenteeism, poor school-parent relationships, sex discrimination, oppressive teaching methods, and the lack of women employees, which diminished their trust in schools as safe and desirable itself. These difficulties during disruptions were increased by digital or connectivity limitations (and poor system capacity to support remote options), which solidifies dropout pathways. Altogether, the results indicate that apparent promises of constitutional and SDG equal education must be actualized, i.e. access, rather than formal enrolment: families must have safe access, satisfactory manpower, and reasonable cost of access to retain girls in Grades 1-8.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish nearby girls' schools, safe transport, and basic school security measures to reduce dropout caused by distance and fear of harassment.
2. Provide scholarships, free uniforms and supplies, and social protection support to lessen the financial burden and opportunity cost of girls' schooling.
3. Recruit and retain more female teachers, reduce teacher absenteeism, strengthen parent-school communication, and use low-tech learning alternatives where connectivity is limited.

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