

The "Youth Bulge" and Labor Market Integration

Syeda Sakina Mosvi

sakinamosvi111@gmail.com

PhD Scholar, Department of Anthropology and Public Health, Faculty of Social Sciences, PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Dr. Abid Ghafoor Chaudhry

abidgc@uaar.edu.pk

Chairman, Department of Anthropology and Public Health, Faculty of Social Sciences, PMAS Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Syeda Sakina Mosvi sakinamosvi111@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In this study entitled "The youth Bulge and Labour market integration" an attempt has been made to explore the exponential increase in young population and limited opportunities in labour market in Pakistan. Due the short time period of this study, data was primarily collected through secondary sources while in order to justify the result real world examples and in-depth analysis 7 semi structured interviews have been conducted. The findings of this study suggests that Pakistan has a sizable youth bulge, with a sizable section of its population falls under 30 years age bracket. For labor integration, this demographic shift offers both benefits and difficulties. The youth population has the potential to become a productive workforce that propels economic progress if they are managed well. However, effective labor market integration is hampered by a lack of work opportunities, a mismatch in skills, and insufficient vocational training. Underemployment or unemployment affects a large number of young people. Pakistan needs policies that support entrepreneurship, school reform, technical skill development, and the creation of jobs in the private sector in order to address this. The demographic advantage can be converted into long-term economic and social growth through the successful labor integration of young people.

Keywords: Brain Drain, Demographic dividend, Economic growth, Informal sector, Skill Mismatch, Youth Bulge.

INTRODUCTION

Countries with exponential increase in their population are facing the issue of Youth bulge. "Youth bulge" a term coined by German Sociologist Gunner Heinsohn (2008) is a major demographic phenomenon in which a sizable share of the population is made up of young people with inadequate economic opportunities. This is currently occurring in Pakistan. This demographic composition offers both benefits and difficulties, for Pakistan's development (Sathar, 2012). Pakistan has an estimated population of 60% who is under the age 30years . Such a sizable adolescent population has the potential to be a formidable force for social change, economic expansion, and creativity (Ahsan, 2026). However, how well young people are incorporated into the workforce will determine how much of this potential is realized. The youth bulge may change from being a demographic benefit to a demographic burden in

the absence of sufficient job opportunities and skill development. Peter Vogel in his Book “Generation Jobless” argues nothing is more detrimental to political stability or a waste of economic growth potential than a significant number of young people, especially young males, who are unemployed or underemployed and have lofty goals that they don't think they can achieve (Vogel, 2015)

The dilemma then at worst leads to jobless and aimless generation and best to what Bloom, Canning and Sevilla (2003) calls “Demographic dividend”. To put it simply Demographic dividend means the economic growth that can happen when a nation has a large working-age population relative to dependents. Development economists contend that young people may greatly increase productivity and economic growth when they are educated, talented, and employed (Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla, 2003). Countries in Asia such as Indonesia in 1980s (Raya & Suryadarma, 2013), Japan in 1950s and China in 1990s (Dobson & Boodoo, 2013) benefited greatly from this demographic advantage as it accelerated the process of industrialization in these countries. However, Pakistan's labour market's capacity to accommodate the country's expanding youth population has been hampered by structural flaws in economic planning, education, and job creation. Youth underemployment and unemployment have consequently emerged as urgent social problems (Sathar, 2012). "Skill mismatch" is one of Pakistan's biggest problems with young employment. Skill Mismatch is phenomenon in which workers' credentials and abilities don't match what employers are looking for in the job market. Inadequate coordination between academic institutions and business, a lack of vocational and technical training, and flaws in the educational system are frequently associated with this issue (Hanif, 2025).

This mismatch then provides an incentive to youth to seek livelihoods opportunities outside the formal sector of economy. In Pakistan's informal sector is dominates labour market because significant amount of economic activity occurs outside the official regulatory frameworks in Pakistan (Salik, 2025). Pakistan Labour Force Survey and the Pakistan Economic Survey estimated that informal sector of Pakistan occupies PKR of 67,668 Billion in the fiscal years 2023-2024 which represent 59% of the total gross domestic products of the country (Salman & Shah, 2025).

According to Peruvian Economist Hernan De Soto (2000), the informal economy plays a vital role in providing employment opportunities for millions of workers who cannot access formal sector occupations. The informal sector frequently acts as a gateway to the workforce for Pakistan's sizable youth population. It brings a number of difficulties, such as low pay, job insecurity, and few prospects for career growth, even while it provides flexible employment alternatives and comparatively low hurdles to entrance. Many young

workers are stuck in low-productivity jobs that don't make the most of their abilities or make a substantial contribution to long-term economic growth (Salman & Shah, 2025)

This makes it crucial to comprehend how Pakistan's youth bulge and labour market integration are related. The purpose of this study is to investigate the systemic issues and economic opportunities related to Pakistan's youthful population. It specifically aims to assess the role of the informal sector in absorbing the nation's sizable youth population and to pinpoint the reasons for skill mismatch in the current labour market.

Statement of the problem

Every year, a significant amount of Pakistan's population enters the working age group, contributing to the country's growing youth bulge. Nevertheless, this expanding workforce has not been adequately absorbed by the labor market. Significant obstacles to juvenile labor integration include high unemployment, underemployment, a lack of job prospects, and a mismatch between education and market-required skills.

Many young people do not have access to job counseling, occupational training, or high-quality education. Their potential to contribute to economic growth is therefore yet underused. The demographic advantage could become a socioeconomic burden for Pakistan in the absence of strong policies and institutional support to incorporate youth into productive jobs.

Amid these circumstances this study aims to investigate the economic opportunities and structural issues related to Pakistan's sizable young population. It focuses on analyzing how a sizable percentage of young people are employed in the unorganized sector and pinpoints the causes of the mismatch between the skills that are available and the demands of the labor market. By examining these facets, the study emphasizes the significance of successful policy initiatives that enhance education, bolster skill development, and increase job prospects. It also covers the opportunities and barriers that affect young people's employment and their ability to successfully integrate into Pakistan's labor market.

Objectives:

- 1: Identify the causes of the "skill mismatch" in the current labor force.
- 2: Evaluate the role of the informal sector in absorbing majority of population under age 30.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature I have reviewed has been divided into three genres; (1) youth bulge and unemployment; (2) skills mismatch ; (3) brain drain the migration patterns of skilled and highly qualified youth going abroad.

The term "youth bulge" describes the phenomenon of an increasing number of young people. Renowned economist Justin Lin (2012) explains the trend in his World Bank blog as "A youth bulge begins to form when infant mortality has been reduced but mothers still have a high fertility rate." Consequently, a significant share of the population is made up of children and young people. Lin suggests that the dependency ratio should decrease, and production should increase when young people enter working age amid this trend. However, this demographic advantage is prevented in Pakistan due to significant youth unemployment. The youth bulge is becoming a possible demographic "time bomb" as a result of growing youth dissatisfaction rather than economic growth (Hafeez & Fasih, 2018). According to the Youth Bulge theory, when states marginalize young people through inadequate health care, education, and possibilities for empowerment, it can lead to economic stagnation, social dissatisfaction, militancy, and political strife.

Mehmood et (2011) argue that unemployment among educated people is a result of both rapid population increase and scarce resources. In Pakistan, compared to wealthy nations, employment rates are lower because a sizable percentage of educated men and women are either unemployed or underemployed (Mahmood, Akhtar, Amin, & Idrees, 2011) Economic pundits with expertise in mass employment recommend taking immediate corrective steps to stop the rise in youth unemployment. Furthermore, they suggest that students be made aware of the level of schooling required before pursuing their chosen field of research (Qayyum, 2007). The growing number of young people in Pakistan, who make up about 63% of the country's population, due to poor economic policies and unstable political systems poses difficulties (Ahsan, 2026).

Skill mismatch

Skills mismatch is another criteria in which overwhelming majority of youth fall under Despite having increase in enrolment in higher education, many graduates lack market oriented skills and practical knowledge. There are still gaps between academic training and the demands of the labour market. Pakistan's Higher Education Commission is trying to polish their skills through improve curricula and for this purpose, HEC encourages research and innovation, but the results are still far from fruitful. As a result, even though they have official credentials, many recent graduates have trouble finding acceptable jobs (Nazir & Hina, 2023).

The educational mismatches and skill curve can be observed, since many students lack competences like communication, strategic thinking, research, and analytical skills. According to Uzair-ul-Hassan and Noreen (2013), Male and female graduates encounter comparable degrees of mismatch in the job market. Farooq (2015) suggests that there are three types of job mismatches: field-of-study mismatch, skill mismatch, and qualification-job mismatch. As a result, a large number of graduates hold positions unrelated to their degree. Highly qualified workers may see a decrease in pay as a result of this circumstance. In order to encourage female employment, Farooq (2015) highlights the necessity of entrepreneurial reforms in labor markets and education as these are trend in emerging economies at global level.

To compete internationally, Pakistan has to build knowledge-based and technology-based enterprises. However, a "low-level skills trap" brought on by insufficient education and labour skills impedes such advancement. According to Amjad, Haque, & Colclough (2005) fair labour conditions and increased investment in human capital are crucial. Thus, youth development need to be a top national focus. In order to empower youth and advance sustainable economic and social development in Pakistan, effective youth policies, federal cooperation, and active youth engagement in decision-making are crucial (Soomro & Shukui, 2015)

Brain drain

The British Royal Society used the phrase "brain drain" in the 1960s to refer to the exodus of highly qualified individuals, including scientists, technologists, and academics (Balmer, Godwin, & Gregory, 2009). It describes the transfer of human capital across nations. Since 1970, Organization of Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹ countries have received almost 59 million migrants from poorer countries, a process that has accelerated globally due to globalization (Meo & Sultan, 2023). In a similar vein, between the 1970s and the 2000s, some 12.7 million Pakistanis migrated to more than 50 countries including academics, doctors, engineers, and other talented workers who now reside in the US, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East (Ahmed, 2023).

The brain drain from Pakistan has increased significantly in recent years. 92,000 highly skilled professionals were among the approximately 765,000 people that fled the nation in 2022 in search better economic opportunities (Hijazi, Mumtaz, & Shan, 2024).

Additionally, 859,846 Pakistanis migrated in 2023, with almost 100,000 of them being professionals and skilled workers, according to the Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment (BEOE, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study mostly uses data from secondary sources. That is why it is both exploratory and explanatory. My goals are to answer the research questions and evaluate the hypothesis qualitatively. For this I reviewed reliable sources, such as scholarly publications, government reports, policy papers, and statistics databases, which provided the secondary data. The foundation for identifying important patterns, trends, and connections important to the research objectives was established through these sources. A few semi-structured interviews with respondents were carried out in addition to secondary sources to offer primary insights, contextual depth, and validation of findings. These interviews shed light on complex political, social, and economic aspects that secondary data might not adequately convey. By integrating these techniques, the study triangulates evidence from several sources, enhancing the validity and dependability of the results and providing a thorough grasp of the causes and effects of the phenomenon being studied.

FINDINGS

The demographic arrangement of Pakistan mentioned previously brought both opportunities and difficulties. Positively, if a young labour force is successfully incorporated into the labour market, it can stimulate productivity, creativity, and economic growth. On flip side however, the youth bulge can result in underemployment, unemployment, and social instability if job possibilities and skill development don't keep up with population expansion. Approximately two million young Pakistanis join the workforce each year, putting further strain on the economy to create enough jobs (Mian, 2025)

Pakistan has a big informal economy, limited formal jobs, skill mismatches, and other structural problems despite its population advantage. The nation is unable to fully profit from its youthful population because of these obstacles. The primary causes of skill mismatch in the labour market are examined in the following sections, along with the informal sector's role in attracting young people.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was established in 1961. A Paris-based international organization with 38 member countries that works to stimulate economic progress, trade, and sustainable development.

Causes of Skill Mismatch in Pakistan's Labor Market

I don't know whether Artificial intelligence will take someone's job or not, but it has already taken my job. These were the words of respondent who was doing content writing in order to make his ends meet. However, since the advent and availability of chatbots like ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity, he was replaced by AI. He argued that he was good at one thing and that was writing but AI is better in writing and costless that is why people especially students are preferring AI. He enlist himself as a person with mismatch skills.

Secondary data suggests that the skill gap between the educational system and the demands of the job market is one of the main barriers to youth employment in Pakistan. When employees' credentials and abilities don't match what companies need, it becomes a dilemma. The poor quality of training and education is a major contributing factor to this problem. Pakistan's young literacy rate is just approximately 57%, significantly lower than the global average of 91%, and only about 43% of the country's population has formal education (Zahid, 2023). Young people's employability and participation in contemporary economic sectors are restricted by these low educational outcomes. Lack of technical and vocational training is another significant factor as less than 5% of Pakistani workers have received formal training (Hafeez & Fasih, 2018). Because they lack real-world experience, many educated youth continue to be unemployed, and industries struggle to locate trained labour. Due to this disconnect between academic knowledge and practical abilities, employers frequently report having trouble finding qualified applicants and vice versa (Khattak, 2023)

Additionally, academic knowledge is prioritized over practical application in the educational system. Institutes of higher education in produces lot of graduates every year, but many of their programs don't meet the demands of sectors like services, technology and manufacturing. Because of this gap, graduates may have degrees but lack the skills needed in the industry. The mismatch is also exacerbated by geographical disparities. Especially the youth in rural areas frequently lack access to professional networks, digital tools, and training facilities etc. Compared to a greater percentage in metropolitan regions, only 12% of young people in rural areas have access to formal skill-building programs (Mengal, 2025). This discrepancy prevents young people in rural areas from gaining the skills required to engage in contemporary economic sectors. Therefore, poor educational quality, inadequate vocational training, and unequal access to learning opportunities are the root causes of Pakistan's skill mismatch issue.

Structural Challenges in Labor Market Integration

Structural challenges is among the pertinent issues in Pakistan's economic sphere. The successful integration of young people into Pakistan's labour market is hampered by a number of structural reasons in addition to skill mismatch. The poor rate of employment creation in comparison to population increase is one of the biggest obstacles. Even though millions of young people join the workforce every year, the economy has not grown quickly enough to create enough job possibilities. A respondent narrated “ *I have a graduation in Political science and the only opportunity; I have at hand is to appear in civil services exam. As there are no jobs for students of social sciences. Either you have to become a doctor or a lawyer otherwise you are unemployed.* His view resonates a strong dissatisfaction with current jobs market and economic system of the country.

Youth unemployment is still a serious issue. Reports indicate that young individuals aged 15–24 experience the highest unemployment rates, reflecting the difficulty of entering the labour market for the first time (Mian, 2024). Even young people with education have trouble obtaining jobs that fit their qualifications, which can result in underemployment or protracted job searches.

Low labour productivity is another structural problem. Due to a lack of industrial development and inadequate investment in high-value industries like manufacturing and technology, productivity growth has stagnated during the previous few decades. As a result, the economy is still largely dependent on low-productivity industries like informal services and agriculture (Shaikh , 2018).

Another significant factor in labour market integration is gender inequality. A female respondent argued that her family due to safety and security issues does not allow her to do private job. Due to cultural conventions, restricted mobility, and safety concerns, female labour force participation is still incredibly low. The visible contribution of young people to the formal economy is further diminished by the fact that rural women frequently work as unpaid family labourers, especially in agriculture and as housewives. Lastly, political unpredictability, energy scarcity, and economic volatility deter investment and restrict the expansion of sectors that can provide jobs. Pakistan's labour market will continue to struggle to accommodate the country's expanding youth population in the absence of structural reforms and economic growth.

The Role of the Informal Sector in absorbing Youth

In Pakistan's labour market, the informal sector is crucial, especially when it comes to giving young workers job options. Economic operations that are not subject to government regulation and typically lack formal contracts, social protection, or job security are included in the informal sector. An interlocuter narrated *“I am working at call centre in G6 sector of Islamabad. I neither possess any identity as I work using pseudonym and nor any job security because call centres frequently shifts their operations.*

The vast majority of people in Pakistan work in informal jobs. Less than one-third of workers are thought to be employed in the official sector, with the remainder working in informal jobs such daily wage labour, small retail shops, agriculture, and household chores (Asif, 2023).

The unorganized industry has certain benefits despite these drawbacks. It offers flexibility and chances for entrepreneurship, especially in small-scale enterprises like home-based work, online freelancing, and street vending. Young entrepreneurs sometimes use unofficial firms as stepping stones to official ones.

As a result, even though the informal sector contributes significantly to the teenage labour market, it does not always offer long-term or profitable work.

Harnessing the Youth Bulge for Economic Growth

If the right policies and reforms are put in place, Pakistan's youth bulge might turn into a demographic dividend. When a sizable working-age population boosts economic growth through higher productivity and innovation, this is known as a demographic dividend. Pakistan must give education reform and skill

development top priority in order to accomplish this. Reducing skill mismatch can be achieved by increasing the number of vocational training programs, raising educational standards, and fortifying ties between businesses and academic institutions. Youth employability can also be improved through practical training, internships, and apprenticeship programs (Asif, 2023).

Promoting small enterprises and entrepreneurship is another crucial tactic. Giving young people access to capital, internet resources, and business training can inspire them to launch their own businesses and provide jobs for others.

Furthermore, sustained economic growth depends on growing the formal sector. High quality jobs can be produced by policies that support industrialization, technical advancement, and foreign investment. In order to properly employ its expanding youth population, Pakistan may need to create 25–30 million jobs over the course of the next ten years, according to international evaluations (Shahid, 2026).

Lastly, inclusion should be the main emphasis of targeted programs, guaranteeing equal access to school, work, and entrepreneurial possibilities for women, rural youth, and underprivileged populations.

CONCLUSION

The youth bulge in Pakistan has tremendous potential for economic growth, but it also presents substantial obstacles. If appropriately incorporated into the job market, the nation's sizable youthful population can spur growth and innovation. However, this potential is hampered by enduring problems including structural inequality, skill mismatch and poor job development.

Due in large part to inadequate educational systems, inadequate vocational training, and unequal access to opportunities, the mismatch between education and labour market demands continues to be a significant obstacle. Even though it frequently offers lowquality jobs with little security, the informal sector is vital in absorbing the expanding labour force.

In addition to encouraging entrepreneurship and formal employment options, Pakistan must make investments in school reform, vocational training, and industrial expansion in order to turn the young bulge into a demographic dividend. Instead of being a cause of economic stress, the nation's youthful population can be a potent force for economic advancement with the correct investments and policies.

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