

Enhancing Educational Equity and Diversity in Pakistani Schools: The Environmental Factor

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to enhance the equity, diversity, and environmental issues in the Pakistani educational system, with a renewed policy integration implemented via innovative approaches in the curriculum, and to provide equal opportunities to students. The objective of the study is to identify the equity, social and economic disparities with analyzing the current challenges that hinders the growth of similar educational opportunities. The data analysis employs a qualitative approach with population comprises of teachers and administrators of 8 different schools, using thematic analysis to scrutinize the data through purposive sampling technique, which is collected from various sources. The study found that education equity in Pakistan is obstructed by numerous system-level problems, such as socioeconomics gaps, gender inequality, culture, and poor infrastructure. Such issues are experienced the most in the rural and marginal regions. The study concluded that certain measures like parent-teacher meetings and administration in person or on digital platforms are necessary to motivate all stakeholders to establish a congenial atmosphere for their enthusiastic participation. In addition, the element of efficient teacher training and development programs, and to add value to inclusiveness of culture and social elements in the curriculum of Pakistani education system to promote educational equity and diversity in Pakistani schools. The study recommended that implementation of sensitive policies like gender, minorities, discrimination and racism among students and teachers would help the overall environment to get better results in diversity and equity among students.

Keywords: Equity, Diversity, Teachers Training, Curriculum and Education, inclusivity

INTRODUCTION

In a country like Pakistan, equity and diversity in the pursuance of education is a fundamental issue that generations in this country have been facing. The potential that this nation holds is immeasurable but concerns regarding equity and diversity have been holding this potential back (UNESCO, 2020). Pakistan is a developing country with slow economy, no political stability, social and economic disintegration. Unfortunately, Pakistan's education system has been badly neglected, despite numerous educational policies, the country is confronting a plethora of challenges. The reasons for all these problems are lack of general awareness and illiteracy promoted by an ineffective education system as Pakistani schools continue to grapple with the problems of quality, equity and diversity.

Environmental factors also play a major part in the landscape of education in Pakistan. These factors include lack of technology, lack of resources, differences across different regions of Pakistan which hinder in the ability of an educational institution in providing quality education to their students. Addressing these

problems regarding the disparity of equity and diversity faced in the pursuance of education calls for a comprehensive strategy and efforts from every stakeholder, government official, educational institutions and the educators (Kozol, 2019).

A significant number of available literatures have undermined the effect that social and cultural backgrounds have on the disparities in education. The World Bank (2021) has shed light on the impressions that the socio-economic aspects have on the pursuance of education. Students belonging to the socially low-income environments and lower literacy of their parents face many difficulties while pursuing education. These factors lead them to face disproportions and inequalities to carry out their education. In addition to these socio-economic constraints, there are also cultural factors affecting the education of students. Research suggests that due to cultural constraints and restrictions, educational landscape is different for different regions of Pakistan (Pakistan Education Foundation, 2020).

1. Understanding Educational Environment Factors: Key Factors

These dynamics are significant because understanding what forces influence student learning, engagement, and success and knowing how to best understand how to facilitate a healthy educational environment through these dynamics is critical for creating a healthy educational environment. These are interactions of teachers with teachers, students with students, administrators with students, teachers with parents, and vice versa all of whose relationships are critical in predicting the effectiveness of any learning environment.

2. Teacher–Student Relationships:

The relationship between students and teachers is essential for academic success and personal growth (Zhang, et al., 2024). By building trusting, encouraging relationships and an inclusive classroom culture, teachers help raise students' confidence and motivation. Good teacher-student relationships have several benefits, including greater engagement, higher performance, and a more positive attitude toward learning (Martin, A. J., & Collie, R. J., 2019).

3. Peer Interactions Among Students:

Students' interaction with their peers play a part in students' academic progress and social development. Collaborative learning, teamwork and friendship promotes emotional well-being and cognitive development of course, a culture of support among peers is key to reducing bullying and encouraging inclusion, as well as promoting engagement in and out of the classroom.

4. Teacher-Administrator Relationships:

A harmonious relationship between teachers and school administrators is essential for a smooth, and efficient teaching work flow (Lijun, W., & Te, H. C., 2024). School administrators provide vision, resources, and policy for teachers so they may help as many students as possible with instructional practice. However, as a result of this partnership, the curriculum planning, professional development opportunities, and school culture all improve.

5. Relationships with Administrators:

Students' relationships with school administrators inform discipline policies, access to support services, and the cultural atmosphere of the school environment. Having approachable and responsive administrators makes students feel like they belong and are safe (Faulkner, S. L., et al., 2021). Fair and transparent disciplinary procedures rule-out abuse and contribute to a learning environment.

6. Teacher and Parent Bonds:

Their relationship forms the foundation of the communication and collaboration that are essential for student success. When educators and parents communicate consistently, students experience support on both sides, at the school and home environments (Schneider, C., & Arnot, M., 2018). Students whose parents are engaged in the education more likely to do better in school, demonstrate better behavior, and stay motivated.

A report formed by the international organization UNESCO (2021) has provided with the facts and figures pointing towards the environmental hindrances faced by students in the pursuance of education and by the institutions in providing quality education to its students. These factors include poor conditions of infrastructure and sanitation, lack of drinking water and overcrowded classrooms. Training teachers is the most important element for the reform of educational landscape to overcome the lack of equal opportunities, socio-economic and cultural constraints. Research conducted by the Pakistan Teacher Education Project (Pakistan Teacher Education Project, 2022) has stressed upon the effect of efficacious of impactful teacher training on the quality of education delivered.

7. Religious context:

The positive behavior of Muslim children with non-Muslim children in the same school plays an important role in the development of religious tolerance and equality. It creates a sense of empathy, sympathy, and avoids aggression among the students. This leads students to avoid jealousy, hatred, and stereotyping behaviors in the future. Most of all, it helps in the enhancement of both curriculum and co-curricular activities. So, they seem more cooperative due to the influence of positive behavior in an educational institution (Berger et al., 2016).

Moreover, in European schools, both Muslim and non-Muslim children learn in the same classrooms. Boys experience an interactive environment, competitive activities, and focus on making friendships. Meanwhile, girls tend to focus more on inclusive and supportive activities than boys. They get almost the nearest marks in their results. It was also investigated that those who are minorities in Muslim countries, especially in Pakistan, get high scores as compared to Muslim children on account of their in-depth interest in theology. However, teachers can play a major role in promoting intercultural empathy and a sense of equality and compassion among all children (Smith & Andersen, 2022).

Connected to this, teachers and students' proper conduct with non-Muslim children promotes cultural understanding and eradicates misconceptions about their religions. This misconception is often shared by such parents who have little knowledge about comparative religions. This type of treatment promotes a peaceful environment in both educational institutions and social life.

More interestingly, there are so many minorities getting education in various schools, colleges, and universities in Pakistan. There is a special training for teachers with minorities to keep respect for every religion. This shows that positive behaviors have an impact on the life of every single person and boost harmony among various communities. It also justifies the excellence of both private and government institutions and their equal treatment with each type of student from various communities (Qazi, 2021).

Statement of the problem

Most Pakistani institutions still find it difficult to provide varied and fair learning environments owing to several financial and social economics hurdles faced by majority of students. Generally speaking, pupils from deprived groups, whether based on gender, ethnicity, language, or religious, are discriminated against,

marginalized, or underrepresented in classroom activities and peer interactions. Barriers to learning include biased teacher behavior, peer prejudice, and the absence of proper pre-service and in-service teachers training. Few studies have examined how these nonphysical environmental elements help to create educational equality and diversity in Pakistan's schools. This study seeks to investigate how diversity driven curriculum, educational policies and equity initiatives impacts students' access to equal learning opportunities.

Objectives

This research primarily focuses on the following objectives:

- i. To explore the equity and socio-economic disparities faced by students in pursuance of education in Pakistan.
- ii. To analyze the current environmental factors that hinder the growth of equal education in the Pakistani educational system.
- iii. To measure the effectiveness of teacher training programs on the current status of Pakistani educational system.
- iv. To evaluate the inclusiveness of cultural elements in curriculums of Pakistani educational system.

METHODOLOGY

The method of study selected for selected issue was qualitative multiple case study in nature for better understanding of complex research topic and deep understanding of perceptions and lived experiences of teachers and school administrators. Population of study was teachers and administrators from 8 schools in Pakistan. Schools included both public and private sectors. Participants came from different subjects and fields. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Selection ensured diversity in socio-economic status, teaching specializations (mainly english, mathematics, and science), institutional and regional context.

Research Questions for data collection were

- i. What are the equity and socio-economic disparities faced by students in pursuance of education in Pakistan?
- ii. What environmental factors hinder the growth of equal education in the Pakistani educational system?
- iii. How effective are the teacher training programs on the current status of Pakistani educational system?
- iv. What is the inclusiveness of cultural elements in curriculums of Pakistani educational system?

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from teachers and administrators. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Steps followed in the analysis were transcription i.e. converting some recorded audio interviews into written text, familiarization i.e. reading the transcripts thoroughly to understand the content, coding i.e. identifying key points and assigning relevant codes, theme development i.e. grouping related codes into broader themes, theme adjustment i.e. refining and finalizing

the themes and explanation & Interpretation i.e explaining what the themes mean and interpreting the overall findings.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The analysis resulted in nine main themes related to educational equity and diversity in Pakistani schools. The results indicate that socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of infrastructure, technological differences, sociocultural factors, policy problems, and the lack of teacher training have profound effects on students' quality education access. Concurrently, inclusive practices in teaching and community involvement were revealed as key conditions to fostering educational equity.

In Theme 1, students explore how equity and diversity are seen in education.

Equity was consistently regarded as the provision of differentiated support based on students' needs rather than the same support for all students. Diversity was seen as "recognition and celebration of cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-economic difference in the educational environment". Teachers highlighted the need for differentiated methods of instruction, financial support, multilingual classroom practices, and inclusive classrooms for achieving educational equity.

One participant stated: Equity is about ensuring an opportunity for students to succeed, and to succeed, and for any student they may need. It appears that stakeholders view equity and diversity as key tenets of good curriculum development, classroom management and educational policy.

Theme 2: Systemic and Systemic and Environmental Barriers to Educational Equity. Analysis showed that there were significant differences between urban and rural schools in terms of infrastructure and educational resources. Participants highlighted the environment, lack of classroom facilities, sanitation, power supply, and lack of digital facilities as key factors affecting educational inclusion.

One respondent remarked: How can kids learn to code without Internet? The results suggest that inequalities in the environment lead to inequalities in learning opportunities and contribute to the socioeconomic inequalities faced by many, especially rural students.

The development of technological inequality and the digital divide. Digital divide became a major educational problem regarding educational quality and inclusion. The majority of respondents indicated that there is a lack of computers, projectors, internet, computers and modern teaching technologies in the rural schools.

Teachers highlighted that inadequate technologies are the limiting factors in innovative teaching methods, impact on students' digital literacy, and educational disparities between rural and urban settings.

A participant explained: The availability of technology has been very limited, which has had a major impact on interactive and dynamic learning as well as access to the global library. The findings show that technology access is gaining more significance within the context of educational equity in the modern Pakistan.

Themes 3 is about sociocultural barriers and gender inequalities. One of the most apparent sociocultural barriers to education participation was gender discrimination. Girls' education opportunities were affected by early marriage, cultural barriers, security and traditional gender roles, among other factors, participants noted.

One interviewee noted: Parents don't want girls to travel to school. The results show that the sociocultural norms are still in play in the educational access, which is still the case in rural and conservative communities, thus perpetuating gender inequalities.

Theme 4: Class and Caste Based Exclusion. The study has found that class and caste prejudices influence student involvement in extra-curricular activities, as well as in general school activities. Financial constraints, social stigma, and fewer opportunities to participate in sports, arts, and cultural activities are common problems affecting low-income students. Exclusions were found to perpetuate social inequalities and to impact negatively on students' confidence levels, social integration and leadership development. The results indicate that educational equity is more than access to academic attainment; it is equal access to the non-academic aspects of school life also.

Theme 5: Policy and Gap in implementation.

While there are some governmental initiatives in place, participants had concerns about unenforceable mechanisms and poor monitoring. Publicly available free textbooks, scholarships and other assistance programs were felt to be inadequate or not widely available. One of the primary issues identified was the issue of teacher training. A significant number of the respondents pointed to the need for educators' professional development on the topic of inclusive education, disability support and culturally responsive teaching.

One participant observed: Teacher training helped me to recognize subtle discrimination and to be proactive in creating content that promotes a fair learning environment. The results show that, often, policy goals do not translate into good education because of resource constraints and implementation difficulties.

Theme 6: Effective inclusive teaching practices.

A number of best practices that support educational equity were identified in each of the cases. These included:

1. Multilingual education approaches;
2. Flexible assessment methods;
3. Peer mentoring systems;
4. Individualized instruction;
5. Interfaith educational activities.

Teachers indicated that use of local languages along with Urdu and English involvement was more helpful in engaging students and improving comprehension. Likewise, a range of assessment strategies was used for the students who have different learning needs. The results indicate that context-sensitive pedagogical approaches have a strong impact on inclusive contexts.

Theme 7: Community and parental engagement

The importance of community participation for educational inclusion became an important factor. Parental involvement, grassroots organizations and interfaith community initiatives were stressed. Mothers' Committees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been cited as the successful community-based model interventions that promote girls education and cut down on early marriage.

One teacher explained: Parents who are involved in the learning process are more likely to cause their students to behave well, achieve good grades and be more confident. The results suggest that enhancing educational equity requires a partnership between schools, families and communities.

Theme 8: Emerging Needs & Future Directions

The participants identified several emerging priorities to address for improving educational equity in Pakistan, these were:

1. Offline Digital tools: Crisis preparedness;
2. Gender-sensitive school infrastructure;
3. Female Teachers' recruitment in the rural region;
4. Data-driven educational planning;
5. Continuous professional development programs.

Participants stressed the need for cooperation between the governments, schools, communities, and development partners to achieve sustainable educational reform.

One participant recommended:

Institutions should be more adequately funded, be provided with better technology access, have stronger parental engagement programs, and have better monitoring and oversight of implementation of their equity policies.

It is shortly mentioned that the study concluded that in Pakistan, environmental, technological, sociocultural and institutional factors are inter-dependent and impact educational equity and diversity. The socioeconomic inequalities, poor infrastructure, gender disparities and policy implementation remain as impediments to access to education.

However, there is potential for educational equity and diversity through innovative teaching practices, multilingual education, community engagement and inclusive teacher training programs. The outcomes indicate that integrated interventions that engage both policy makers and educators, parents and communities will be necessary to achieve equitable education.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this study imply that the phenomenon of educational inequality in Pakistan is a consequence of numerous interdependent factors, and socio-economic inequalities are one of them. It is the driver that is the most important. The study also shows that students in low-income households and especially in rural areas are suffering grossly due to a lack of obstacles to education. This comes as a result of the financial strains that families undergo, and, on most occasions, children are required to work rather than go to school. The use of child labor to make ends meet is a never-ending cycle of poverty and illiteracy where the child has no chance to attend school and gain quality education. This is made worse by the fact that there are no funds for school fees, uniforms, and books, which also reduces the access of the students to further their education.

The issue of gender inequality is another significant topic in Pakistan's education system. Although there have been some developments in some urban places, cultural norms remain biased towards boys' education versus that of girls in rural areas. This sex imbalance is also added as there is a lack of female teachers' gender-sensitive provisions, like separate toilets for girls, and the issue of the safety of female students. Such obstacles discourage families from sending their daughters to school, and thus there is a low rate of enrollment a girls in school and a high rate of taking girls out of school. The absence of adequate amenities in certain places the safety of girls in schools has proved to be a major setback to their safety whereby parents are not comfortable sending their girls to schools that are dangerous to them and are not safe and private.

Another factor that contributes to the failure of the fact that the education system does not give equal opportunities to all students due to its cultural and linguistic diversity in Pakistan. The paper identifies the non-inclusion of students of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in the learning process because of standardization of the national curriculum that does not consider the different cultural and linguistic identities of students. The problem is especially noticeable in communities in rural settings whose local languages and culture are not uniform with the national curriculum that the learners are subjected to. The unavailability of culturally-relevant instructional resources and the inability of teachers to integrate local cultural contexts into the teaching process make the marginalized students even more marginalized.

The poor nature of schools' infrastructure in most of the rural and remote regions is another major problem. The paper has revealed that overcrowded classes, sanitation were poor sanitation, inadequacies, and unfavorable learning conditions were common in most schools in these areas. This not only influences the working experience but also leads to high dropouts since students are not comfortable or even safe in such an environment. Girls are overrepresented in being afflicted by a deficiency of the relevant facilities, which increases the rate of female student dropout. Basic amenities, like clean water to toilets, are not available, and as well as safe precincts for students are not available. This makes it hard, and these schools can barely operate properly and offer a conducive learning environment. Inequality in education between urban and rural areas is further indicated by the digital divide that became most apparent in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Urban students could use online education services, but students in rural areas also lost out because they did not have internet connection, digital devices, or access to online services. The requisite knowledge to access online learning. This gap also undermines the capacity of students to pursue their education in a situation of turmoil. Not only does it widen the educational disparity between the rural and urban regions, but it also reproduces the disparity. Digital divide should be solved by investing more funds in infrastructure, especially in rural regions, so as to provide modern learning tools to all students equally.

To overcome these issues and enhance educational equity, it should take a holistic approach. The government should put efforts into minimizing socio-economic educational obstacles through the act of supporting families within disadvantaged communities. This may be instigated by scholarships and stipends, and more vocational educational courses, which decrease the use of child labor. Gender inequality needs to be addressed by resolving it using specific policies that would involve prioritizing girls' education. Build-up infrastructure, make sure that schools offer a safe and accommodating environment to girls, and it is female-friendly. The curriculum needs to be updated into a curriculum that is culturally and linguistically diverse to all the students in Pakistan and thus able to comprehend the subject matter in a comprehensible manner.

The ultimate master key to bridging the educational gap is investment in infrastructure like the upgrading of school facilities and making availability of digital tools available to learn, bridging the rural-urban divide. Employer teaching programs should also be redesigned to pay attention to inclusive education, digital

literacy, and a culturally responsive approach. Educators are supposed to be trained to handle any kind of student and interact with the cultural and language requirements of their students. These key areas can help Pakistan to come closer to an effective education system where all students would have a chance to be successful.

CONCLUSION

The paper has come up with a conclusion that education equity in Pakistan is hindered by numerous system-level problems, such as social and economic gaps, gender inequality, culture, and poor infrastructure. Such issues are experienced the most in the rural and marginal regions. In the parts where there are serious problems in accessibility to quality education for children. The shortage of financial capacities, gender sensitive policies, and these inequalities are worsened by the presence of inadequate school facilities, and this results in high rates of dropout and low performance amongst the disadvantaged students.

Another important finding that should not be overlooked concerns the digital divide that substantiates educational inequality and is more significant in rural places. Urban students are better placed to receive information on the online learning programs, whereas rural students are disadvantaged by the absence of the internet and computer gadgets. In order to solve these problems, the core of reforms required in Pakistan is reducing socio-economic barriers and promoting gender equality and enhancing construction of schools. Additionally, teacher preparation programs need to change to include digital literacy and inclusive education, and culturally sensitive teaching methods. By overcoming these challenges in a comprehensive way, Pakistan will have the opportunity to ensure a more equitable and inclusive education system for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations should be extended:

1. Institute special financial aid packages for the low-income families in rural schools to ensure fewer dropout cases and higher educational retention rates. Give stipends or scholarships to the students with disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can enjoy the benefits of attending school.
2. Enact gender sensitive policies which aim at motivating and convincing girls to study after primary school. The institutions ought to have gender-sensitive infrastructure like sanitation facilities as well as safe learning environments for females.
3. Invest in physical school infrastructure, mainly in the rural areas. Classrooms ought to be decongested and schools furnished with contemporary study facilities so as to enhance proper teaching.
4. Enlarge the digital infrastructure in the countryside and give people inexpensive access to the internet, and provide students with digital learning tools. Teachers ought to be trained on digital literacy so that they do not fail to utilize online educational materials.
5. Rethink the national curriculum in the context of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Pakistani students. Use of local languages and cultural views in teaching material to make it more inclusive.
6. Redesign teacher training in a way that would emphasize inclusivity, digital literacy, and culturally responsive teaching practices. Provide the teachers with uninterrupted PD to enhance their competencies.

7. Enhance the relationship between schools, parents, and communities, specifically the rural contexts. Encourage more Parent involvement by use of community outreach programs and communication over the internet.
8. Introduce reform in the management of education, where it should be decentralized, and ensure that the sharing of resources is more equitable among regions. Much more autonomy with respect to meeting unique educational needs should be given to the local government.

Future researchers should explore several different perspectives of learning including but not limited to psychological area where students feel safe and sound with equal rights to learning, loud and clear parental and community awareness additionally technology and environment sustainability will also play a contributing role in educational equity diversity.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Demographic:

Name (Optional): _____

Physical Age (Years): _____

Designation & Subject: _____

Experience (Years): _____

Major interview questions. It is important to mention that your responses will only be used for research purposes and will not be shared with anyone except of the study supervisor.

- 1) Describe your strategy as a teacher to make an improvement towards your student's education and learning?
- 2) Identify the significant environmental factors that need to be overcome in order to provide quality education?
- 3) As a part of an educational institution identify the major problems contributing to issues regarding equity?
- 4) Mention major constraints or barriers you have to confront in your student's educational journey?
- 5) In your views, what are the steps needed to be taken for the improvement of quality of education and diversity currently provided?
- 6) In what ways can teachers and administration make collaborative effort to foster academic accomplishments among students.
- 7) What is your opinion, as an educator to improve environmental facilities provided to students?

- 8) Do you think as an educator, your own education and cultural background have affected your ability to teach your student's education?

(Thank you for your time)