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## Effectiveness of Educational Policies in Provision of Quality Education for Marginalized Communities in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

This study has been conducted under the Interpretivist paradigm using the Qualitative research approach to explore the effectiveness of Educational Policies in providing quality education for marginalized communities in Pakistan. There were five Education officers from public sector and five Education officers serving in NGO's at South Punjab sampled purposively for the study. The data were collected with the help of a semi-structured interview protocol comprising 10 questions. The collected data were analyzed with the help of Thematic analysis. Findings reveal a chronic divide between policy and practice owing to systemic bureaucratic lapses, poor monitoring, weak infrastructure, and low accountability. These problems, coupled with policy attempts from 2000 to 2017, specifically target rural and female students. Solving these problems demands greater coordinated action, strategic

community mobilization, increased public and private investment and collaboration. The persistent gap in education relative to other social markers for disadvantaged groups will become entrenched without sustained intervention.

**Keywords:** Educational Policies, Quality Education, Marginalized Communities

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the right to education is considered a fundamental human right that acts as a powerful catalyst of socio-economic change. Quality education is not equally available to everyone, especially to marginalized populations, in almost every part of the world. In Pakistan, these gaps are particularly acute, with lines of different ethnic social economic and urban-rural divisions that further exacerbate educational backwardness (Abbas, 2021).

The socially disadvantaged, remote rural dwellers, low-income urbanites, and conflict zones populations face a unique combination of social, economic, and political barriers to education. Keeping these barriers intact, births a cycle of underdevelopment constricting the development possibilities of individuals and nations through poverty and social exclusion (Shoib, et al., 2024; Zainab, et al., 2023). For a sustainable development of Pakistan these vulnerable groups need to be addressed to promote social cohesion, reduce inequalities and foster holistic development (Ali & David, 2021).

Access, quality, and inclusivity issues have plagued the education system of Pakistan, despite the nation's exorbitantly large populace. Programs such as the National Education Policy seek to alleviate struggle through its non-targeted forms of intervention for disadvantaged criteria (Shah, et al., 2025; Imran, et al., 2023). Still, their attempts have proven futile due to attempting complexity of serving marginalized communities (Haider et al., 2024).

Recent data suggest that around 22 million children of school going age are out of school in Pakistan, most of whom belong to marginalized groups (Ali, et al., 2023, Ali, et). For these communities, access is not merely a physical endeavor, but instead entails socio-cultural obstacles such as discrimination, poor infrastructure, and underdeveloped economic opportunity, which forces the child to work rather than go to school (Maqsood et al., 2021).

This research plans to address this by identifying the core challenge(s) of marginalized communities, assessing the effectiveness of existing educational policies, and exploring ways to create a comprehensive and adaptable model of inclusivity in education. The authors aim to contribute to the understanding of Pakistan's educational system by incorporating critical perspectives from marginalized groups premised on the socio economic backdrop (Sain, 2023; Zohra et al., 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Attaining education is a global issue for marginalized communities as they lack access pathways. Those residing in conflict, crisis, or poverty stricken areas appear to experience the most widespread gaps in education, for instance, in Pakistan (Baig & Jamil, 2020). The objective of this literature review is to identify various educational

barriers from current policy to these communities, along with proposed solutions in the literature (Naseer, et al., 2024; Naseer, et al., 2018). Exploration of innovative models indicates the existence of advanced educational systems designed to improve access and achieve equity, which shaped the borders of research (Amir, Sharf & Khan, 2020).

### **Socio-Economic Challenges**

As barriers to educational access all over Pakistan are consistently portrayed, socio-economic ones seem to top the list for communities in Pakistan. In cases where there is no proper governance, family units are constrained from pursuing work, the mother usually stays at home, and the father works, they become economically inactive, and endure poverty (Ali, et al., 2023, Ali, et). With no sufficient means to pay for basic needs, such as school fees, uniforms, or transport, children's drop out becomes a necessity (Habib-ur-Rahman et al. 2022).

According to the report on Education Statistics, in Pakistan, children not enrolled in schools are often from economically marginalized families and their parents face difficult choices between immediate economic gains and long-term educational investments (Farooq et al., 2020). Such families experience multiple sets of educational hurdles due to insufficient finances which act as a barrier to economic mobility and socio-educational opportunities. Educational inequities perpetuate within families from one generation to the next (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). Parents primarily allocate minimal resources towards primary literacy, while secondary and tertiary education enrollment suffers greatly due to insufficient monetary resources (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014).

#### **Gender Disparities in education**

In underprivileged regions of Pakistan, girls face some of the most profound inequalities which hinder their educational achievement. It includes practices such as child marriage, unpaid domestic work and rigid gender roles which restrict the participation and retention rates of girls in school especially in the rural or conservative regions (Akram et al., 2021).

The disparity in primary education completion in Pakistan girls is 15% lower skirting primary education, and secondary education seems out of reach for them (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014). The cultural views regarding the significance of education for women vis-a-vis men has far deeper implications which primary education remains a bone of contention for many children from families unable to understand or care (Abbas, 2021).

The apex of the mountain ranges is set apart at a substantial distance (Geographical Isolation). Geographical boundaries of a frontier region like academically backward Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan have no educational means to them. A World Bank report (2022) highlights the lack of appropriate educational facilities such as schools, classrooms, and qualified teachers for the Pakistan (Baig & Jamil, 2020). Children in these regions endure long travel distances to access reliable education face high levels of student attrition, especially girls coupled with safety issues (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022).

The barriers to enrollment and attendance include inadequate infrastructure, boundary walls, as well as sanitation facilities (Naseer, et al., 2024; Naseer, et al., 2018).

Additionally, the untrained staff in the schools and lack of sufficient teachers significantly augments the educational challenges in the region, widening the gap between urban and rural educational access (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014).

#### Cultural and Social Barriers

Social, cultural, economic, and geographical determinants can also serve as harsh forms of exclusion for already marginalized communities (Azhar, 2024; Azhar, et al., 2022). Education in some of the regions is embraced only as a customary exercise, devoid of practical relevance, and lacks any form of respect. Other more heavily tribal and feudal societies might be rather adamant to allow children, particularly girls, outside to school beyond the confines of their communities, as doing so is often construed as a threat to family honor or culture (Ali & David, 2021). Social limitations of this nature require attention from researchers, as they tend to provide design methodologies that are culturally sensitive and participant-driven community approaches engage with local traditions and philosophies and align educational strategies with community ideals (Farooq et al., 2020).

#### Policy Interventions and Gaps

The attempts made by the government of Pakistan to improve educational opportunities have not fully considered the requirements of marginalized groups. Education is not accessible to all children, even after the Right to Education Act is in place and other programs are enacted because there is lack of adequate resources, political issues, instability, and governance dysfunction (Habib-ur Rahman et al., 2022). There seems to be a great deal of criticism concerning policy frameworks, which focuses more on the primary issue of marginalized communities from a generalized perspective rather than concentrating on the specific underlying problems of people living with disadvantages. Ahmed, Ali & Haider (2014) call for more tailored policies that take into account local socio-cultural frameworks so local populations can claim ownership of the policies.

## METHODOLOGY

This study has been conducted under the Interpretivist paradigm using the Qualitative research approach to explore the effectiveness of Educational Policies in providing quality education for marginalized communities in Pakistan. There were five Education officers from public sector and five Education officers serving in NGO's at South Punjab sampled purposively for the study. The data were collected with the help of a semi-structured interview protocol comprising 10 questions. The collected data were analyzed with the help of Thematic analysis.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The collected data were analyzed with the help of Thematic analysis. The results are stated as under:

### **Policy Implementation Gaps**

Government and NGO education officials recognized that although educational policies were in place, improving school infrastructure, including attendance, teacher training, recruitment, and provision, but were still in poor shape with poor

implementation in the marginalized areas of South Punjab, mainly because of administrative bottlenecks, financial implications, and lack of coordination. Government officials justified their position by alleging that efforts were being made to tackle these issues, while NGO official accused policy making-level disconnect when it comes to implementation.

#### **Government Education Officials' Perspectives**

One of the participants said that: In an effort to improve access and the quality of education, the government launched the Punjab Education Sector Reform Program, but the real challenge comes from putting these policies into practice. The 'Inefficient execution — bureaucratic delays, long approval processes and administrative inefficiencies — prohibits poor communities from attaining the benefits of the reforms.' That's the problem.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: Data, analysis, expert consults, and research drives all of our education policies. And yet, what happens in remote communities with inadequate funds and qualified teachers poses a problem to realization. However, policies are very much limited in impact without further funding and capacity-building programs

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: Policymaking at the national level ought to occur where implementation is expected at the provincial level — one of the great gaps at the moment is inadequate co-ordination of federal and provincial education bodies. The gap between policy intended and action taken in many low-resourced schools is managed within a more cohesive framework.

Another participant stated similarly that: Politically motivated decisions regarding education continue to be made despite the existence of past policy attempts aimed at equitably distributing educational resources. The other schools typically situated within underserved communities tend to receive disproportionately less funding or politically masked delays in funding. We try our utmost to distribute the rewards evenly, but these external factors are hard to control, subverting government strivings. Furthermore, we strive to enforce the implementation of policies and those accountable to implementation of policies defined to ensure transparency within the policies themselves. However, reforming the education system requires time, particularly in poorer regions where resources are scant and the available workforce is underqualified. Despite the slow shifts in policy toward improvement, the most disadvantaged communities will have to wait many years before realizing the full scope of their benefits.

#### **NGO Education Officials' Perspectives:**

One of the participants stated that:

The primary challenge facing government education policies is the lack of involvement from those who engage with children living in the more remote parceled communities. As a result, policies that are textbook logical but impractical are created. To address these issues, community participation is paramount in deciding whether policies actually meet the needs of the underrepresented populations.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: The government never fails to come up with fantastic policies, but their effective integration is what renders them useless.

Policies often come with limited and blurry proposals for execution plans along with no adequate monitoring frameworks for follow up. Many of these policies don't achieve the desired impact in the absence of sustained monitoring and do nothing, year after year, for the underrepresented groups who are put into a perpetual cycle of educational disadvantage.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: One of the most important shortcomings of policy dealing with education is its allocation to different spending departments. Urban schools could receive funding with policies accessing intensive monitoring, but those within deprive marginalized rural settings remain largely neglected. The persistent inequity in resources is one of the reasons rural students do not receive comparable education to urban students.

Another participant stated similarly that: In understaffed communities where government action is lacking, NGOs mark the gap. Even with this help, there is a lack of input on policy design. It would be easier if the government worked with us and heard from other such experts so that policies devised could lead to meaningful change in impoverished areas.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: Corruption and mismanagement are two elements that mirror the lack of accountability within government controlled educational systems. Policies are put in place, but none of these have accompanying evaluation frameworks to assess their effectiveness, and this absence is what continues to enable educational reforms to fail.

### **Accessibility and Infrastructure Challenges**

#### **Lack of Schools in Marginalized Areas**

Government officials have acknowledged that schools cannot be built in each rural locality owing to geographical barriers and financial limitations. They promoted public-private partnerships as the solution. NGO representatives, however, were more critical of these training programs, pointing to long distances required to travel as well as lack of transportation and community reluctance as some of the major barriers to their accessibility.

#### **Government Education Officials' Perspectives**

One of the participants said that: The government has a long-term plan to increase school enrollment, particularly in the marginalized states. But in remote villages, building schools is often not financially viable because building schools is expensive, lacks infrastructure and people are sparse. Rather, we are focusing our investment on those areas of higher long-term feasibility and impact per school.

Another participant shared a similar stance that:

In order to tackle the shortage of schools in marginalized areas, we are expanding the public-private partnership program by establishing the low-cost schools. This enables NGOs and private agents to bring their resources to address gaps in government capacity. By sharing the responsibility, we can make progress in increasing educational access in rural communities without overburdening government resources.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: In some of these low-population rural communities, student enrollment is simply too low to justify building new schools. Instead, we are looking to improve existing institutions and upgrade their facilities and their teacher training and resources, which would allow them to take in more students from the villages nearby. It also does so by better utilizing resources, while expanding the opportunities for education.

Another participant stated similarly that: Where traditional schools can't be built, we're looking into alternative learning centers and community-based schools. These more flexible models for education give students the opportunity to attend school close to home, which reduces dropout rates. Working alongside communities to align these initiatives with local needs and cultural sensitivities.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: We do strive for 100% enrolment, but socio-economic impediments and cultural norms continue to be a challenge. In numerous marginalized communities, children — particularly girls — suffer from mobility restrictions, financial hardship or pressure to marry young, which keeps them out of school. We are implementing awareness campaigns and conditional support programs to promote the enrollment rates in these fields in these areas.

#### **NGO Education Officials' Perspectives**

One of the participants said that: Children of South Punjab have to walk 5 to 10 kilometers daily just to come to a school. As a result, students do not regularly attend classes, a situation which fuels the dropout crisis, or in some cases, its abandonment every education. The lack of school facilities close by makes it difficult for students, especially girls, to continue education beyond primary levels.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: In numerous remote villages, families have no options for formal schooling because there are no government schools. So children either discontinue altogether or switch to a madrassa-based education, which typically has no formal curriculum. If not addressed, these communities will be left behind in mainstream education and skills development opportunities.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: There are many reasons for this disparity, but one of them is the lack of emphasis by the government on rural education — forcing NGOs to step in and fill this gap. But the state should not abnegate its responsibility to provide basic education. The government should allocate more funds towards rural education and involve with NGOs rather than relying solely on the too-much non-governmental work.

Another participant stated similarly that: Mobile schools and digital learning centers need to be implemented to enable access to education in remote areas. Alternative models will provide flexible and technology-driven solutions to underserved geographic areas, where students are unable to travel significant distances can still have access to quality learning opportunities closer to home.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: We need more village-based education programs, particularly for girls who may not have been able to travel far for an education due to cultural factors.

Establishing community-run schools in small, out-of-the-way settlements would help more girls get an education, while respecting local customs. In the absence of localized solutions, female literacy rates will continue to be far behind.”

#### Poor Infrastructure in Existing Schools

Government and NGO officials are also in agreement on the fact that rural school infrastructure is not at par. Government officials cited limited budgets as the primary reason, while officials of NGOs attributed the problems in rural schools to mismanagement and an urban-centric policy framework.

One of the participants said that: We are slowly but surely improving school infrastructure, we introduce renovations, new classrooms, better facilities on a gradually basis. But we cannot address every one of those issues at once due to budget constraints. We want to make a change but understand that we have to focus on the most critical needs and provide for the best improvements possible over time so that we can improve learning environments in the most marginalized areas. Another participant shared a similar stance that: We have undertaken new projects such as solar energy systems to overcome the lack of electricity and schemes to give clean drinking water to enhance school facilities in far-flung areas. It directs to basic necessities in learning environment as in village areas the basic infrastructure development is delayed.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: A large part of the education budget goes toward paying teacher salaries and administrative costs. Although salaries are an essential part of forming a skilled workforce, we know we have to invest more to upgrade school buildings, classrooms and critical infrastructure in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Another participant stated similarly that: We have renovation and maintenance programs, but progress is usually slowed down by bureaucratic procedures, such as approval processes and funding delays. These are some of the challenges that we face, but we're trying to work on demolishing unnecessary administrative hurdles to make sure that infrastructure improvements in marginalized kids cannot be delayed unnecessarily.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: We are in active engagement to attract private sector investments and build public-private partnerships to upgrade rural school infrastructure. Involving corporate benefactors and non-profits on the other hand can diversify funding sources and expedite setting up essential school facilities, guaranteeing that students in rural orphanages are afforded the same quality of education as those nearer to urban centers.

#### NGO Education Officials' Perspectives

One of the participants said that: Many government schools in South Punjab lack basic amenities like toilets, clean drinking water and electricity, rendering them unable to learn. Without them, hygiene practices would be poor, attendance would decline, and the future of girls is particularly compromised as their behavior changes and they drop out of the system because of the lack of sanitation facilities.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: In rural schools, students frequently sit on mats under trees owing to a shortage of proper classrooms and furniture.

Severe weather intense heat or freezing winters makes learning harder still. In the absence of basic infrastructure, education in marginalized areas is poor, making it impossible for students to compete with those in urban areas.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: Many schools are deficient in boundary walls that makes them vulnerable to outside access with safety hazards especially for girls leading to increased dropout rates,” he stressed. The parents feel discouraged to send their daughters to school due to security concerns such as harassment and interference of community. If the government does not create safe environments for female education in marginalized communities, such education will continue to lag behind. Another participant stated similarly that: The government also prefers to develop urban schools, turning away from rural schools. The schools in villages and small towns suffer from broken buildings, inadequate lighting, and overcrowded classrooms infrastructure projects primarily cover city-based schools. "There needs to be a more equal distribution of resources to bridge the rural-urban education gap.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: The dismal condition of school infrastructure is one of the major reasons for high dropout rates and low learning outcomes in marginalized areas. With no electricity, destroyed classrooms, and insufficient facilities, students are struggling to focus on learning. It is important to note that no policy intervention will sufficiently raise educational standards in poorer areas while these core obstacles remain unaddressed.

#### **Teacher Shortage and Absenteeism**

Government officials admitted there was also a shortage of qualified teachers, an apparent consequence of low incentives to post in the countryside. NGOs criticized teacher absenteeism as a result of weak monitoring mechanisms and a lack of accountability in remote schools.

One of the participants said that: Digital attendance systems have been introduced in schools to monitor teacher absenteeism to increase accountability. But enforcing strict attendance has proved difficult, with some teachers circumventing the system or excusing absences by pointing to difficult working conditions in rural areas. Regular follow-ups and monitoring are also required for effectiveness.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: In order to attract more teachers to these schools, we are exploring the possibility of offering financial incentives, higher salaries, housing allowances, and transport subsidies are other measures being considered to encourage teachers to move to rural-posts. The aim is to ease the urban-rural disparity between teachers, by making rural postings more attractive. But budgetary constraints and lengthy bureaucratic processes have slow walked full implementation of such incentives.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: Because of better living conditions, healthcare facilities, and educational opportunities for their children, many teachers are actively seeking postings in urban areas. This has made it difficult to fill rural schools. We're formulating policies that will promote longer rural postings, such as urban transfers on priority for the teachers who work in the rural set-up for a certain time.

Another participant stated similarly that: There are administrative clearances at multiple levels in the teacher recruitment process, which delays hiring and makes rural postings hard to fill. Even if teachers are recruited, many decline rural appointments. We are looking at fast-tracking options for recruitment and mandatory rural service clauses so that schools in backward areas are properly filled.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: We know that insufficient teacher training leads to poor learning outcomes for children. In rural institutes, many teachers have not been exposed to modern techniques. In response, we are scaling professional development offerings on active learning strategies, technology integration, and subject-specific pedagogy to improve teacher quality in underserved regions.

#### **NGO Education Officials' Perspectives:**

One of the participants said that: Teacher absenteeism is one of the biggest challenges in rural schools. Most government teachers either abstain from work regularly or engage unqualified substitutes to carry out duties in their place. Lack of strict accountability measures has allowed these practices to continue, which, in turn, has resulted in poor learning outcomes at schools and waste of public money spent on education.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: A shortage of trained teachers means marginalized schools have poor learning outcomes and low student retention. If their teachers are not prepared to teach, students can struggle with basic literacy and numeracy. Without specialized training programs for rural, South Asian students will remain academically behind their urban counterparts.

The similar stance is stated by another participants that: Many rural schools experience acute teacher shortages, with the local education departments relying on unfit teachers as makeshift temporary alternatives. Although this strategy fills the vacancies, it detracts from the systems of education because these individuals do not possess the requisite pedagogical skills or understanding to provide worthwhile instruction and access for students to deep learning.

Another participant stated similarly that: Marginalized Schools teachers require continuous professional development, but most government-run intensive training programs are retrograde, theoretical, and removed from the ground realities faced by teachers in classrooms. We believe that, to remain relevant and impactful, teacher training must emphasize practical skills, classroom management and modern pedagogical techniques that have been effective in enhancing teaching and promoting learning processes in rural areas.

Another participant shared a similar stance that: NGOs have started training grass-string community-based teachers who have a stake in local education and understand cultural barriers. But the government does not formally acknowledge these educators, which makes it difficult for them to get secure teaching posts. We also require policy reforms to incorporate community teachers into the mainstream education system.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative study investigated the impact of policies regarding education in the South Punjab region's marginalized areas. Findings reveal a chronic divide between policy and practice owing to systemic bureaucratic lapses, poor monitoring, weak infrastructure, and low accountability. These problems, coupled with policy attempts from 2000 to 2017, specifically target rural and female students. Solving these problems demands greater coordinated action, strategic community mobilization, increased public and private investment and collaboration. The persistent gap in education relative to other social markers for disadvantaged groups will become entrenched without sustained intervention.

## Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, it has been recommended that the government should ensure the effective implementation of the educational policies. Similarly, school education department should upgrade the school infrastructure, promote equity in education for marginalized areas and also foster public-private partnership for better education.

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