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Gender-based Disparities in Access to Basic Education in Rural Areas of (KPK-Baluchistan) Pakistan

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Abstract

This study work seeks to explore the prevalent gender-based discrepancies in access to basic education within the rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, Pakistan. The study aims to explore the various challenges faced by rural children in receiving essential education, particularly with a focus on the gender-specific hurdles inhibiting girls' progress in school. Employing a qualitative research design, the study engages in an in-depth analysis of the numerous issues under consideration. The data collection approach involves comprehensive qualitative data collection, including interviews (n=25), second data review, and document analysis. The study gathers insights from parents, teachers, and community leaders through purposive sampling, striving for a deeper knowledge of the challenges. Thematic analysis is performed to develop meaningful patterns and themes from the acquired data, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. The outcomes of the study highlighted the gender-based discrepancies present in rural educational settings, highlighting the intricate web of problems preventing children's access to basic education. Cultural norms, economic restrictions, and infrastructural deficits appear as important hurdles, disproportionately influencing the educational progression of girls.

Keywords: Gender-based, Disparities, Basic Education

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1. Introduction

Pakistan, with its unique cultural variety and socio-economic factors, grapples with issues in its educational sector. While gains have been made towards education for all, regional discrepancies exist, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan. These locations have particular problems that demand targeted initiatives to reduce educational inequality. In Pakistan, education is a constitutional right, although the execution of the constitutional right to education in Pakistan differs between provinces, with variables such as gender gaps, poverty, and sociocultural,

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economic, and political difficulties contributing to the difference (Abid *et al.*, 2021). The 18th Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan has elevated the right to education to a basic right that is subject to judicial scrutiny, however the necessity for complementary legislation and policy-making is highlighted (Ullah, 2013). KPK and Baluchistan, typified by rough environments and cultural diversity, present particular barriers in ensuring fair access to quality education. The educational infrastructure in rural places typically lacks the resources and facilities offered in more urbanized areas, contributing to discrepancies in educational outcomes. Gender-based discrepancies further complicate the issues encountered by the educational system in KPK and Baluchistan. Despite concerted attempts to promote gender equality in education, girls in rural regions continue to experience challenges that limit their access to basic education. The maintenance of these discrepancies not only restricts individual potential but also impedes the broader socio-economic development of these regions. Addressing gender-based inequality is crucial for establishing a more inclusive and fair society. Girls' education has far-reaching consequences, increasing health outcomes, lowering poverty, and enhancing community development (Hong, 2019). Recognizing the relevance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty, it becomes necessary to examine the specific problems hindering girls in rural areas from acquiring a basic education (Prasad and Pathak, 2023). Rural students in KPK and Baluchistan experience a particular set of obstacles that augment the overall issues in the education sector. The geographical topography, typified by the Rocky Mountains and huge deserts, sometimes leads to the isolation of towns, making it logistically tough to create and maintain educational facilities. Limited access to schools and transportation further exacerbates the problems experienced by these children in pursuing education. Cultural conventions and societal expectations, especially surrounding gender roles, add another degree of complexity. These standards may perpetuate archaic ideas that weaken the value of education for girls. Economic constraints, widespread in certain places, result in families prioritizing immediate livelihood needs above long-term educational commitments. This study tries to untangle the intricacies of these issues, presenting a comprehensive knowledge of their hindrances on the learning and education of rural children in KPK and Baluchistan. By doing so, it intends to contribute to the creation of practical solutions and policies that help alleviate these issues and build a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Terms

2.1.1. Gender-Based Disparities

Differences in women's and men's access to resources, status, and well-being, which usually favor men and are often institutionalized through law, justice, and social norms. (European Institute for Gender Equality)

2.1.2. Access

Freedom or ability to obtain or make use of something (Merriam Webster)

2.1.3. Basic Education

Basic education includes literacy, numeracy, and other basic skills development for learners (U.S. Agency for International Development) here we mention this term as primary education.

2.1.4. Rural Areas

It refers to the population living outside settlements of 1,000 or fewer inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2007)

Research by Buchmann *et al.* (2008) and Dube (2015) points out the persistence of gender differences in education, notably in terms of enrollment, retention, and academic achievement. These discrepancies are driven by a multitude of reasons, including economic, cultural, and structural difficulties. Filmer (2005) further underscores the connection between gender and money in compounding these discrepancies, with wealth gaps often being bigger than gender gaps. Vassiliou (2009) underlines the varied character of these inequities, stating that they have become more complex over time and can severely affect economic growth and social inclusion. The global conversation on gender parity in education is complicated and nuanced. Russell (2016) and Durrani and Halai (2020) both note the problems of integrating global gender policy discourses into national education documents and the necessity to incorporate postcolonial contexts in the understanding of these discourses. Subrahmanian (2005) underlines the distinction between gender parity and gender equality goals, stressing the necessity for both quantitative and qualitative assessments of progress. Dejaeghere (2012) indicates that a capacities approach, involving public debate and dialogue, might be a beneficial instrument in fostering gender justice in education. These studies collectively underline the significance of addressing local factors, the contrast between gender parity and gender equality, and the promise of the capabilities approach in

achieving gender parity in education. The literature on gender differences in education in Pakistan offers a complex perspective of the subject. Lall (2009) underscores the impact of ethnic heterogeneity in attitudes towards girls' education, disputing the idea that poorer families prioritize boys' education. Afzal *et al.* (2014) underlines the impact of differential treatment of boys and girls, particularly in rural regions, and the need of education in decreasing this gap. Durrani (2008) and Jabeen *et al.* (2014) both emphasize the role of the curriculum in sustaining gender disparities, with Durrani (2008) stating that the curriculum perpetuates gender hierarchies and Jabeen *et al.* (2014) recognizing gender stereotyping and the restricted portrayal of female roles in textbooks. These studies collectively illustrate the intricate interplay of cultural, economic, and educational factors in producing gender gaps in schooling in Pakistan. A multitude of issues contribute to the challenges experienced by females in rural areas of Pakistan, notably in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan. These include economic imperatives, patriarchal systems, religious discourses, and entrenched traditions (Shah and Shah, 2012). Access to secondary education for girls is a critical concern, with rural girls trailing behind their urban counterparts and facing discrepancies among provinces (Sathar *et al.*, 2013). The development of private primary schooling in rural regions has not greatly enhanced females' participation, demonstrating the persistence of restrictions connected to policy and culture (Lloyd *et al.*, 2007). The influence of geography and religion on women's autonomy further highlights the need for a nuanced knowledge of the issues encountered by girls in rural Pakistan (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). Studies by scholars have highlighted the complex interplay of cultural norms, socio-economic circumstances, and institutional constraints that restrict girls' access to school in rural settings (Sarkar, 2014; Singh, 2010; Shah, 2012; Latif, 2010). In rural Bangladesh, traditional gendered norms, economic insolvency, religious misinterpretation, and gender-insensitive education institutions are important impediments (Sarkar, 2014). Similarly, in rural India, detrimental cultural practices, conflicting situations, and gender discrimination are recognized as impediments (Singh *et al.*, 2010). In rural Pakistan, the feudal patriarchal framework, religious discourses, gendered roles, and established traditions exacerbate the situation (Shah and Shah, 2012). A critical literacy curriculum, merging Freirean and feminist pedagogies with Islamic precepts, has been presented as a feasible solution in rural Pakistan (Latif, 2010). There are various research indicates the need for context-specific interventions to address the issues faced by rural females in Pakistan. Sawada and Lokshin (1999) emphasizes the relevance of supply-side policy measures, such as providing more girls' primary schools and employing more female teachers. Shah and Shah (2012) underlines the complex interplay of elements, including economic imperatives, patriarchal institutions, religious discourses, and gender norms, in impeding girl education in rural areas. Sarkar (2014) highlights traditional gendered norms, economic insolvency, religious misinterpretation, child marriage, and a gender-insensitive education system as important hurdles to girls' education in rural Bangladesh, which may also be relevant to the Pakistani context. Qamar (2012) further analyzes the importance of informal education in shaping gender learning in traditional rural societies, highlighting the necessity for interventions that target these social and cognitive learning systems. These studies jointly underline the need for comprehensive, context-specific interventions to improve educational results for rural girls in Pakistan. A study conducted in the Bangladesh context emphasized the intricate interplay of socio-cultural norms and economic inequities in perpetuating gender gaps in girls' education in rural settings. Traditional gendered norms and economic insolvency were found to limit girls' educational success (Sarkar, 2014). Similarly, in Pakistan, inflexible cultural traditions, poverty, and family preference for boys' education were recognized as important hurdles (Sattar *et al.*, 2012; Hashmi, 2008). These studies underline the necessity for initiatives addressing men's attitudes toward women, effective awareness efforts, and long-term policies to influence cultural attitudes. They also underline the importance of factors such as parental education, household wealth, and occupation in affecting girls' schooling (Hashmi *et al.*, 2008; Sandhu *et al.*, 2005). This research contributes to a more detailed knowledge of the localized variables perpetuating gender inequality.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Qualitative Research Approach

The qualitative research approach employed in this study involves the integration of interviews, a second data review, and document analysis. This triangulation of methods is designed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, enriching the depth and credibility of the findings. In the first method, the second data review, we encompass the examination of existing publicly usable data and other academic works relevant to the research topic. This approach provided valuable insights that contributed to framing the study within the broader scholarly discourse. The second method was interviews with Parents (N-10), Teachers (N-10), and Community Leaders (N-5). The third method, document analysis, involves a systematic examination of written reports associated with the phenomenon like ASER 2023, Pakistan (Punjab) Education Fact Sheets I 2022, Learning quality in the Katchi Abadis of Pakistan. This triangulation of these approaches synergistically provides us with a more comprehensive exploration of the subject. By drawing on

multiple perspectives and data sources, we enhance the richness of their findings, fostering a nuanced and holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Our sample includes Parents (N-10) including mothers and fathers, Teachers(N-10) including 5 males and 5 females, and Community Leaders(N-5), through online videos.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data was collected through interviews, after transcribing all interview recordings, we started the process of data analysis. The authors analyzed the data iteratively using (ATLAS ti. 23) qualitative analysis software. The second data review, and document analysis went through a rigorous qualitative analysis, employing thematic analysis. Authors of the study employed thematic analysis for this study because of its suitability in uncovering patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data. The process involves the following steps:

3.3. Data Familiarization

Firstly, we generated initial codes to identify patterns and key concepts. Code data systematically to categorize information. Then identified overarching themes emerging from the coded data. Group related codes into potential themes. Secondly, evaluated and refined identified themes through iterative review. Ensured that themes accurately represented the content and nuances of the data. Clearly defined and named each theme to articulate its significance. In the next step, we developed a coding framework for consistent application. Interpreted the meaning and implications of each theme. Contextualize findings within the broader socio-cultural and educational landscape. At last, we employed triangulation by comparing findings from different data sources (interviews, literature review, and document analysis). Verified consistency and convergence of information across various data collection methods.

4. Findings

4.1. Existence of Gender-based Disparities

The findings of the study revealed the prevalence of considerable gender-based discrepancies in receiving education, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, findings corroborated by prior research (Lloyd et al., 2005; Sawada and Lokshin, 2007; Sathar et al., 2013). These discrepancies are evident in both enrollment and retention rates, with girls experiencing more impediments to school than boys. Factors such as the presence of all-girls public schools, school quality, and home assets strongly influence the decision to enroll girls in school. Supply-side constraints, particularly the lack of demand for primary schools for girls, further exacerbate these inequities (Sawada, 2007). The transition to secondary school is particularly tough for rural girls, with access being a crucial determinant and public schools being the predominant option. These findings underline the need for focused initiatives to reduce the gender-based gaps in schooling in rural Pakistan.

4.2. Enrollment Disparities

Findings have identified some factors contributing to lower enrollment rates for girls compared to boys. These include poverty, insecurity, and parental attitudes towards education. One teacher expressed his views about this as

“As an educator, I firmly believe that a child’s learning environment is profoundly influenced by various external factors beyond the classroom. Factors such as poverty, insecurity, and parental attitudes towards education play pivotal roles in shaping a student’s academic journey in our Province”.

The gender gap is especially prominent in rural parts of KPK and Baluchistan (Pakistan), where cultural norms and societal goals generally prioritize males’ education (Afzal et al., 2014). According to ASER Pakistan 2021, in KPK,

In 2021, 27% of children were reported to be out of school which has increased when compared to 2019 (9%). Amongst the enrolled students in government schools, 64% were boys and 36% were girls whereas in private schools 63% of enrolled children were boys and 37% were girls.

Here we can see a clear difference in the ratio of boy’s and girl’s enrollment. The National Policy on Education has established lofty targets for girls’ primary enrollment, but these have not been adequately achieved due to rapid population expansion, low political will, and poor resource management. Let’s see the perspective of local authorities regarding this, which states. Let’s see the opinion of local leaders about this, which states

“As a Union Council (UC) leader, we must acknowledge the challenges hindering the effective implementation of the National Policy on Education, especially regarding girls’ primary enrollment in KPK province. The ambitious targets set by the policy are commendable, but the reality is that rapid population growth, insufficient political will, and poor resource management have prevented us from achieving these goals”.

4.3. Retention Challenges for Girls

Retention rates for girls diminish as they advance through more advanced levels, with a noticeable dip in secondary education. Cultural traditions, such as early marriages and societal judgments denigrating girls' education, contribute to girls discontinuing their education prematurely. Some Parents say that:

“As parents, we deeply understand the impact of cultural traditions and societal norms on our daughters' education in KPK and Baluchistan. We recognize that early marriages and the prevailing perception of girls' education as less valuable directly contribute to girls discontinuing their education prematurely. Despite our desire to support our daughters' education, we often face pressure from our communities to conform to these traditional practices. It's a complex challenge that requires a collective effort to address and change mindsets towards the importance of girls' education.”

4.4. Lack of Access to Institution

The research implies that both genders face challenges in obtaining an excellent education, but girls encounter additional barriers due to the absence of female teachers, inadequate sanitation facilities, and long distances to schools. The low availability of girls' schools and the absence of female teachers operate as deterrents, thus increasing gender-based inequities. One UC leader admits this issue in a way:

As a community leader, I strongly believe that addressing the limited availability of girls' schools and the absence of female teachers is crucial in reducing gender-based disparities in education. By providing equal access to education for girls and ensuring the representation of female teachers, we can create an environment where all children have the opportunity to thrive and succeed regardless of gender. It is our responsibility to advocate for policies and initiatives that promote gender equality in education, as it is essential for building inclusive and equitable communities.

4.5. Economic Constraints

The finding reveals that Economic challenges, such as poverty and the need for child labor, force families to prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term educational investments. Uniform costs, transportation expenses, and the lack of financial incentives for girls' education contribute to disparities. According to ASER PAKISTAN 2021 REPORT, in KPK, 6% of surveyed government primary schools had computer labs and 4% had internet facilities.

In Baluchistan Province,

10% of the government primary schools and 0% private primary schools received grants.

These Economic Constraints directly impact access to basic education.

5. Discussion

The highlighted gender-based inequities and issues have major ramifications for the whole educational environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan. These inequities contribute to lower educational attainment for girls, limiting their access to knowledge, skills, and opportunities. The ramifications extend beyond individual educational performance, affecting the socio-economic development and well-being of the entire community. The data show that gender-based gaps in education perpetuate existing gender inequalities within the communities. Cultural conventions, economic restraints, and limited access to female role models reinforce traditional gender roles, supporting public beliefs that favor males' education over girls. This cycle of inequality further complicates efforts to establish gender equality in the long term. The problems experienced by rural youngsters, especially females, hamper the region's economic and social growth. Similarly, Gender inequality in rural areas, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is a significant barrier to economic and social development (Azuh et al., 2017). A lessened focus on girls' education lowers the potential talent pool, hurting the community's ability to grow economically and socially. Investments in education, particularly for girls, are vital for breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development. The identified problems underscore the necessity for focused governmental actions. Policymakers should examine various solutions that address cultural obstacles, reduce economic restrictions, and improve infrastructure. Initiatives targeted at supporting female education, giving financial incentives, and assuring the presence of female teachers can contribute to removing the barriers mentioned in the study (Unterhalter et al., 2014). Comparing the findings with current research on similar themes reveals regional differences that affect the challenges in KPK and Baluchistan. While worldwide literature highlights common themes of gender-based inequality, our study underlines the particular socio-cultural milieu of the region. The intersectionality of obstacles, such as the impact of cultural norms and economic constraints, demands context-specific treatments that incorporate local peculiarities. Comparative examination with literature from other regions emphasizes

the significance of infrastructural constraints in rural education. The paucity of girls' schools, limited transportation, and inaccessible geographical areas appear as persistent themes. Research by (Porter, 2007) and (Jamal, 2016) also concluded the same findings in the context of Africa. Understanding these connections enables the adoption of successful solutions applied elsewhere to address similar difficulties in KPK and Baluchistan. Regional and cultural variables have a crucial role in shaping educational gaps. Comparative investigation demonstrates that cultural norms about gender roles greatly affect educational prospects for girls. Acknowledging and comprehending these cultural dynamics is vital for developing interventions that resonate with the local environment and promote cultural sensitivity. Comparing findings with successful interventions published in the literature provides significant information for building effective tactics. Interventions that prioritize community engagement, remove economic constraints, and incorporate female educators have demonstrated promise in other places. Identifying effective models and applying them to the unique environment of KPK and Baluchistan might guide targeted interventions with a higher possibility of success. In conclusion, the discussion shows the far-reaching repercussions of gender-based inequities on the broader educational environment in KPK and Baluchistan. By comparing findings with current literature, the study underscores the necessity for context-specific interventions that address regional and cultural differences. Achieving educational fairness demands a determined effort to dismantle the complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural constraints, establishing an atmosphere where every kid, regardless of gender, may access and benefit from quality education.

6. Policy Recommendations

Strategies should be formulated and executed that specifically address gender-based inequities in rural education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan. Ensure that policies prioritize gender inclusion, supporting equal chances for boys and girls in terms of enrollment, retention, and access to excellent education.

Introduce financial incentives, such as scholarships or stipends, expressly targeting girls in rural areas to alleviate economic barriers. These incentives might serve as motivators for families to prioritize and invest in the education of their daughters.

Develop measures to recruit and educate more female teachers, particularly in areas with a lack of female educators. Female instructors serve as key role models and can contribute to establishing a more inclusive educational environment. Invest in the development of infrastructure, particularly the formation of new girls' schools and improvements in transit facilities.

Addressing infrastructural shortcomings is vital for boosting accessibility and creating a conducive learning environment. Implement sensitization activities at the community and school levels to confront and change deep-seated cultural attitudes that limit girls' education. Engage community leaders, religious figures, and influencers to promote and participate in these programs. Organize workshops and awareness sessions in conjunction with local NGOs to equip communities, especially parents, with knowledge about the benefits of education. These workshops can address misconceptions, challenge prejudices, and show the long-term positive impact of educating both boys and girls. Develop programs that actively involve parents in their children's education, emphasizing the necessity of joint responsibility for both boys' and girls' academic success. Establish parent-teacher associations and plan frequent meetings to foster a feeling of community and shared commitment to education.

Launch activities that incorporate accomplished women from the local community as mentors for schoolgirls. Female mentors can provide guidance, motivation, and practical counsel, contributing to breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging females to seek education.

Encourage community-driven solutions by including local leaders in the creation and execution of educational projects. Leverage the influence of community leaders to campaign for and promote gender-inclusive education, ensuring that interventions correspond with local needs and cultural sensitivity.

Establish community-led monitoring groups to track the progress of educational projects.

These committees can provide vital feedback, identify concerns, and coordinate with educational authorities to solve new issues swiftly.

By implementing these policy proposals and community involvement techniques, stakeholders can work jointly to minimize gender-based inequities in rural education in KPK and Baluchistan.

7. Conclusion

This research discovered the educational landscape of rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan, with a specific focus on gender-based gaps in access to basic education. The important findings can be summarized as follows:

Girls constantly experience lower enrollment rates compared to boys, attributable to cultural norms and socio-economic issues. Retention rates for girls fall in secondary education, affected by early marriage patterns and societal beliefs. Both genders experience problems in getting adequate education, with infrastructural shortcomings hitting girls disproportionately. Cultural obstacles, economic limits, and architectural deficits connect to produce a complicated web of challenges for rural children. Limited female role models, scarce female teachers, and geographical remoteness further impede access to education. The difficulties described contribute to a cycle of gender-based disadvantages, increasing existing inequalities within the communities. Cultural norms greatly influence educational possibilities, sustaining old gender roles and expectations. Infrastructural problems, economic restraints, and restricted access to female role models overlap, producing hurdles that affect both boys and girls.

Contributions

In-depth Understanding: The study contributes to an in-depth comprehension of the particular issues encountered by rural children in KPK and Baluchistan, emphasizing gender-based inequities.

Policy Implications: The policy proposals give tangible ways for policymakers to address cultural, economic, and infrastructural impediments, aiming for more inclusive and equitable educational policies.

Community Involvement Strategies: The debate on incorporating local communities provides practical techniques to gather community support, acknowledging the vital role of community engagement in sustained educational progress.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research must be undertaken longitudinal studies that monitor the long-term impact of policies on gender-based gaps in schooling. Must be studied comparative analyses with other locations confronting similar difficulties to uncover transferable solutions. Investigate the intersectionality of obstacles, considering aspects such as disability, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

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