The Influence of Cultural and Social Factors on Education in Pakistan

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Abstract
This study aims to investigate the influence of cultural and social factors on education in Pakistan. The cultural and social features that effect on education in Pakistan would be socio-economic disparities, digital divide, gender inequalities, and rigid social system. Such cultural and social aspects seem to have affected Pakistani education in negative ways. First, socioeconomic disparities in Pakistan tend to perpetuate an unequal access to quality education. Second, digital divide has exacerbated disparities in education, impeding educational access and chance for lifelong learning. Third, gender disparities have resulted in unequal access to educational opportunities. Fourth, rigid educational system has led to the low quality of education and its inability to adapt to changing needs of the modern globalized society. In order to progress the change in education, investigating more economic output towards the implementation of more innovative educational policies and plans would be needed.
Keywords: Cultural and Social Factors on Education, Socio-Economic Disparities, Digital Divide, Gender Inequalities, Rigid Social System, Education in Pakistan

Introduction
Education would be an integral part of a society, which could potentially influence many different facets of society. At the same time, the shape of education could vary along with diverse features of each society as well because social and cultural values or beliefs could affect how education is perceived, implemented, and prioritized in that society (Ahmad et al., 2018). This is because, education is largely affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate family and school settings to broad cultural values, laws, and customs (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Therefore, it is necessary to consider such social and cultural elements to understand education in a society deeply.

In Pakistan, there has been many different educational needs owing to its cultural and social features such as socio-economic and gender inequalities, digital divides, and rigid social

system (Government of Pakistan, 2009). If negative factors for education are not improved, it is likely to consequently result in a high failure rate in education and educational inequalities in Pakistan (Bakar, 2018). For example, heavy emphasis on gender segregation led to women's facing higher barriers to education (UNESCO, 2018) and different socio-economic status caused inequalities of educational opportunities as well in Pakistan (World Bank, 2020). Not only that, regarding teaching methods, traditional teaching approaches or the preference of rote learning tend to apparently be hindered students' critical and creative thinking and learning. Such inequal environments and biased approach in education would limit the possibility of progress towards a more inclusive or advanced society in the end.

Admitting that the cultural and social circumstances in Pakistan seem to hinder the equal opportunities and access for and the effectiveness of education, systematic research on the cultural and societal influences on education in Pakistan is hard to find. Although there are studies on the flaws and defects in education, such studies do not put importance on the interaction between the cultural and social factors and education. As education in a society is constantly affected by and interacted with the cultural and social features of it, it is urged to have broad and dynamic understanding of education in Pakistan on cultural and social terms.

Research Question: What are the impacts of cultural and social factors on education in Pakistan?

This research aims to examine the impact of cultural and social factors on education in Pakistan. Such study would help gaining insights on how to enhance the quality of education in the country by critically identifying the challenges and problems of education in Pakistan and further contribute to finding solutions to reduce such detrimental aspects. The research objectives are 1) to identify the cultural and social features in Pakistan, and 2) to investigate Educational Influences of Cultural and Social Aspects. Such research would contribute to understanding and enhancing the educational surroundings and circumstances in Pakistan in more comprehensive and systemic perspectives, and drawing practical implications regarding government policies on education more effectively, which eventually will benefit the learners in Pakistan, by providing them with more access to education and opportunity for future life chances and lifelong learning.

Research Methodology

This study employs a literature review methodology to investigate the Influence of cultural and social factors on education in Pakistan. The research procedure involved two main stages: searching and selecting relevant literature, and then drawing implications, analysing, and synthesizing the studies.

During the initial phase of searching and selecting relevant literature, the literature review methods described by Creswell (2021); Creswell and Clark (2017); Hart (2018) were utilized. A preliminary reading was conducted to identify keywords such as "education in Pakistan" "cultural influences on education in Pakistan" "social influences on education in Pakistan" "cultural and social factors on education" "cultural and social features in Pakistan", etc. These keywords were employed to search relevant literature in databases including Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), Scopus, other academic databases, and Google Scholar.

The selection of literature was based on criteria such as authority, seminality, and relevancy (Hart, 2001, 2018). Selected studies underwent a focused review, with cited references also being considered for inclusion. Non-authenticated, not peer-reviewed, outdated, or biased articles were excluded to ensure the quality and reliability of the selected literature.

This iterative process continued until saturation was achieved, allowing the search to progress from general to specific and from classic to recent works. Subsequently, implications were drawn from the reviewed literature, and an analysis and synthesis of the findings were conducted.

It is important to acknowledge the limitation of this research method, as it solely relies on literature review. Therefore, further empirical research is recommended to complement and validate the findings derived from the literature review process.

Findings of Literature Review

1. Cultural and Social Features in Pakistan

It seems necessary to examine the cultural and social features in Pakistan to discuss their effect on education. Those factors could be classified into four categories: socio-economic disparities, digital divide, gender inequalities, and rigid social system.

1) Socio-economic Disparities

First and foremost, Pakistan has long been facing a great deal of socio-economic disparities across the nation, hindering the country's overall development. (Khan and Hussain, 2020). Although the government has made efforts to support people with lower socioeconomic status, it is still difficult to resolve the extreme gap among the social classes (Aleandri & Refrigeri, 2013). Government programs and vocational training were aimed to boost productivity, competitiveness, benefiting individuals with lower socio-economic classes and unemployment (Werner et al., 2015). However, such efforts were constrained by several reasons. For instance, most of the policies and programs were paper-based, and corruption and ineffective bureaucracy made difficult to implement them locally (Ahsan, 2003). There was also lack of fundings. A nation's political, social, and economic growth is seriously threatened by such obstacles, leaving the poor alone (Plessis, 2014). Although the government still takes several extreme measures, it seems hard to decrease the gap between high and low socio-economic classes and enhance social mobility (Akram 2020; Brezis, 2017).

2) Digital Divide

Such disparities in socio-economic status are close related to digital divide in Pakistan as well. Despite the technological advancements, Pakistan still has a sizable digital divide problem. In terms of urban-rural perspectives, Urban centers typically have better access to digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet, while rural areas often lack such services. 35% of households in rural Pakistan, compared to 70% of households in urban areas, have access to the internet (Khan et al., 2019). What is more, rural and low-income household areas seem to continuously face greater barriers to having reliable internet subscriptions and devices like computers or smartphones, limiting their participation in the digital economy and access to online resources (Khan et al., 2019).

3) Gender Inequalities

Next, gender disparities, like in many other countries, are rooted in Pakistani for a long time, manifesting in various aspects of life, such as employment, healthcare, political representation, and so on. To illustrate, many women are discouraged from working outside the home due to traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Even if women do participate in the labor force, they often face a wage gap, with women earning less than men for the same work (World Economic Forum, 2022). Moreover, there are gender-based

violence, including domestic violence and honor killings, which remains a serious issue in Pakistan (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Child marriages are prevalent, with a high percentage of girls married before the legal age of 18, which not only deprives girls of education and opportunities but also exposes them to health risks (The Borgen Project, 2014). In relation to the digital divide mentioned above, there is also often a gender gap in the access to and the use of technology as well, particularly in rural areas (Ahmed, 2022). Such digital divide can also further limit women's economic and educational opportunities interconnectedly. Cultural norms, limited mobility for women, and reduced access to technology resources can hinder women's participation in the digital sphere.

4) Rigid Social System
Pakistan's social environment is frequently described as having aspects of inflexibility and rigidity, which presents difficulties in a number of areas. Many aspects of society exhibit this rigidity, such as the bureaucracy, which is frequently criticized for its inaction, slowness, and hate to change. Corruption, red tape, and regulatory barriers are known to be significant obstacles to doing business in Pakistan (World Bank, 2020). Not only that, excessive paperwork, hierarchical systems, and a lack of transparency are characteristics of bureaucratic hierarchies that eventually impede productivity and adaptability to change (Ali et al., 2018). Such deeply ingrained bureaucracy may delay innovation and advancement, resulting in an atmosphere that is constrictive to both individuals and organizations. Furthermore, obstacles to transformation and personal mobility may be posed by deep-rooted cultural norms and societal expectations (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This rigidity applies to broader societal standards as well, such the power of conservative interpretations of religion and tradition, which can obstruct progressive reforms (Shah, 2017).

2. Educational Influences of Cultural and Social Aspects
Cultural and social aspects such as socioeconomic disparities, digital divide, gender inequalities, and rigid social system have affected Pakistani education in negative ways and further work together to produce an educational environment that suppresses individual's potential.

1) Influences of Socio-Economic Disparities
First, socioeconomic disparities in Pakistan have significant effect on education, perpetuating an unequal access to quality education, particularly with children from lower income households and marginalized communities facing greater barriers to school enrolment and attendance with poor resource, inadequately trained teachers, substandard infrastructure, and limited access to educational materials (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2015; National Education Assessment System, 2017). Such children also show higher dropout rates as well because they are often forced to work or help support their families Patrinos (2010) and restricted access to higher education, limiting their opportunities for personal and career growth Carnoy & Loyalka (2017), thereby contributing to high youth unemployment and underemployment rates later on (Arunatilake & Thattai, 2013). Efforts to address educational disparities for groups like low-income students and minorities include various government policies such as targeted funding for under-resourced schools, early childhood interventions like preschool programs, and diversity initiatives to address teacher bias. Beyond government initiatives, non-governmental organizations, international partners, community organizations, educators, and families also play crucial roles in advocating for and

implementing solutions. However, the challenges of addressing socioeconomic disparities in education in Pakistan seem to remain substantial, requiring sustained commitment and investment in educational reform and social development.

2) Influences of Digital Divide

Next, the digital divide in Pakistan has exacerbated disparities in educational access, quality, and outcomes (UNESCO, 2020). The advantages of technology innovations in education are not equally spread throughout Pakistan, despite the fact that they provide significant promise for lifelong learning and educational accessibility (Digital Rights Foundation, 2023). The digital divide significantly restricts access to online educational resources and remote learning platforms for many students in Pakistan, particularly those in rural and low-income areas (World Bank, 2021). Students with limited or no access to digital devices and the internet are at a disadvantage compared to their peers who can access online educational content, leading to unequal learning opportunities (Warschauer, 2004). Moreover, socioeconomic disparities also intersect with the digital divide, which means children from low-income households are more likely to lack access to digital resources, further widening the educational gap (DiMaggio et al., 2004). Furthermore, online learning frequently relies on proficiency in the English language, which can be detrimental for those who lack that ability (Sivaraman2014). Although there were efforts from government such as initiatives to expand digital infrastructure and provide digital devices to students in need to mitigate the effects of the digital divide, these efforts faced challenges as well (Adnam, 2020). Addressing the digital divide comprehensively seems to require a combination of policy measures, infrastructure development, and targeted support for marginalized communities.

3) Influences of Gender Inequalities

Gender disparities in education have long-lasting and far-reaching effects on both individual and societal levels, resulting in unequal access to educational opportunities for girls and women in Pakistan. Cultural norms and social expectations in Pakistan often prioritize domestic roles for girls and women over education, leading to limited opportunities for personal and professional development (Shah, 2018). One of the key influences of gender disparities on education in Pakistan is the confluence of low enrollment rates, early dropouts, and limited access to higher education for girls, particularly in rural and conservative areas. These areas are often characterized by cultural norms and gender roles that discourage female education due to factors like early marriages, family responsibilities, and limited access to quality education, ultimately hindering girls' educational attainment (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2021). The rate of female education is only 49%, whereas the rate for men is 70%. Fewer girls pursue advanced degrees compared to boys, which further affects their career prospects and opportunities for leadership roles in the future (Gakidou & Levin-Rector, 2007), with the shortage of female teachers and role models in schools can limit girls' aspirations and confidence to pursue education and careers (Iqbal, 2017). Efforts to resolve gender disparity problem in education encompass government policies promoting girls' education, awareness campaigns, and initiatives to provide financial incentives to families for sending their daughters to school. While progress has been made, gender disparities in education remain a critical issue, and ongoing efforts are essential to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system in Pakistan.

4) Influences of Rigid Social System

Last but not least, inflexible social systems in Pakistan have negatively affected education system in Pakistan, encouraging a conformist mindset that stifles progress. Pakistan's educational system has faced criticism for being outdated and inflexible, facing various challenges that impact the quality of the overall education and its ability to adapt to changing needs (Imran & Aslam, 2013; Rahim, 2017). To begin with, the educational system in Pakistan is often criticized for not promoting higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, problem solving skills and creativity Ali & Hussain (2016) along with the overemphasis on standardized testing and examinations (Riaz, 2017). Traditional teaching techniques and strict curricula are known to frequently fail to provide pupils in Pakistan with critical thinking and skill sets needed to succeed in the modern world (UNESCO, 2021). The curriculum is overloaded, focusing on rote learning and neglecting critical thinking and problem-solving skills (World Bank, 2022). In addition, rote learning is frequently used as the main teaching and learning method in classroom, which disregards the development of ability to practically apply of what has been learned. Instead of actively exploring or engaging in authentic tasks, students get habituated to memorizing facts, which leaves them unprepared for the ever-changing demands of the modern society (Brumfit, 1995; Rahim, 2017). When these elements come together, they form a complicated web of issues that must be resolved if Pakistan's society and educational system are to reach their full potential. As a result, graduates in Pakistan are often reported to be ill-prepared for the needs of modern businesses, where critical reflection and creativity are crucial (Haider & Khan, 2023; World Bank, 2021).

Discussion: Challenges and Opportunities

The Right to Free and Compulsory schooling Act of 2012 established compulsory schooling for children between the ages of five and sixteen. In underserved rural communities in particular, the goal of this campaign was to increase enrollment rates. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (2020) notes that although the effort has made headway, issues including inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of teachers still exist. Underprivileged students, minorities, and girls are among the underprivileged populations that are the focus of many financial assistance and scholarship programs. These initiatives, which include Waseela-e-Taleem, under the Prime Minister Imran Khan, are designed to remove financial obstacles and encourage poor populations to pursue higher education by paying for living expenses, books, and tuition (Government of Pakistan, 2023).

Not only that, vocational training programs have been developed by the government in recognition of the need for skilled workforce. These programs, provided by the Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) Authority, increase people's employability and economic prospects by giving them the necessary skills for a variety of sectors (TEVT Authority, n.d.). Additionally, improve adult literacy rates, especially for women and rural communities, is the goal of the National Literacy Mission, which was established in 1990. This effort aims to empower people and encourage lifelong learning through a variety of initiatives, such as learning hubs and public-grounded agendas (UNESCO, n.d.).

In general, the Ministry of Education is aware of how technology might improve education in Pakistan, but owing to infrastructural, resource, and training constraints, it finds it difficult to successfully adopt technology-based solutions. Access to education is extended beyond of traditional classrooms through programs like Tele Taleem and Pakistan Educational Gateway, which provide digital platforms and online learning materials (Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, 2023). On top of that, the government promotes non-

formal education initiatives including Katchi Abadis (informal settlements) and Madaris (religious schools), acknowledging the diversity of learning demands. These initiatives support underprivileged populations and offer substitute routes for education and skill-building (Aga Khan University, 2022).

However, Pakistan devotes a comparatively small portion of its total economic output towards education, leading to deficiencies in underfunded educational institutions and insufficient resources. Pakistan's current public spending on education is only 1.97% of its GDP (World Bank, 2022). A lot of policies are still just texts with no clear instructions or operational frameworks to put them into practice locally. Local officials become unclear and confused as a result, which causes implementation to be delayed or ineffective with rigid educational systems (UNDP, 2020). Equal access to education is hampered by political and economic divisions, and the effectiveness of government efforts to address social injustices is constrained by a lack of funding (PEFA, 2022). Furthermore, a nation's political, social, and economic growth is seriously threatened by corruption in education because it compromises the availability, affordability, and quality of education, especially for the poor, and is incompatible with the development of law-abiding citizens (Plessis, 2014). Several issues, such as insufficient local capability, a lack of coordination across government departments, and deficient monitoring and evaluation systems, are impeding the implementation of policies and maintain the inflexible educational systems (Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2023). Major obstacles to progressing the change in educational system in Pakistan include poorly created and incompetently implemented education policies and plans (Ahsan, 2003).

Conclusion

Educational access and achievement would significantly impact social mobility. However, disparities exist between different socio-economic classes or genders, with those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds facing challenges in accessing high-quality education in Pakistan. Students in rural area or female students would also easily face additional hurdles in higher education while students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds, urban area, or male students would have access to greater resources, leading to higher academic achievement and social mobility. The digital gap must be closed as well, and disadvantaged people must have access to the required infrastructure and assistance in order to fully engage in online learning platforms and benefit from lifelong learning. Furthermore, outdated educational system and teaching and learning methods would impede the development of students through education (Brezis, 2017).

Addressing these social and cultural issues and ensuring both equal and appropriate educational opportunities for all would be essential in fostering future advancement in Pakistan. Apart from the government initiatives to decrease socio-economic or gender disparities, the development of digital infrastructure in underserved areas should be given top priority by the government, and underprivileged communities should be given devices and internet access. It is also important to launch programs to advance digital literacy, giving underprivileged people the skills they need to successfully use online platforms. Access to digital resources and support for online learning can be facilitated by neighborhood community centers and educational institutions, which could in the end lead to mitigate the disparities.

Lastly, educators would need to create a flexible curriculum that is more responsive to the changing social needs, fostering a more holistic and globally competitive approach and realize

the need for comprehensive reforms and investments in the educational sector. Not only that, by adopting teaching and learning strategies and methods that encourage higher order thinking skills, educators can help students prepare for s globalized world (Mahmood et al., 2020).

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