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DOI: 10.29052/2413-4252.v8.i1.2022.27-32

Citation: Askari A, Jawed A & Askari S. Women Education in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities. *IJWE*. 2022; 8(1): 27-32

Corresponding Author Email:
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Funding: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

Conflicts of Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Received 12/07/2022

Accepted 06/10/2022

First Published 01/12/2022

Original Article

Women Education in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities.

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Abstract

Background: Pakistan is a country where women's education has been a topic of discussion for decades. Despite the government's efforts to improve the literacy rate and promote education, many challenges still prevent women from gaining access to education. This research paper explores the challenges and opportunities for women's education in Pakistan and how to overcome those challenges.

Methodology: The study qualitatively analyzed the existing literature on women's education in Pakistan. Using data from the Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys, articles from Academic Journals, Reports, chapters, and Newspapers. The analysis is based on the challenges and opportunities for women's education in Pakistan.

Results: Pakistan's literacy rate is 46%, with a significant urban-rural divide, with 80% literacy in urban areas and 20% in rural areas. Cultural norms and conservative attitudes towards gender roles, poverty, lack of educational facilities, security, and a scarcity of female teachers are the main challenges to women's education in Pakistan. However, the government of Pakistan is trying to improve women's education through initiatives like girls' schools, scholarships, e-learning, and technology.

Conclusion: women's education in Pakistan faces numerous challenges, including cultural norms, poverty, and lack of educational facilities. However, opportunities such as government initiatives, women's empowerment, and the role of technology also exist to improve women's education. It is essential to highlight the challenges to overcome them and progress.

Keywords

Women Education, Challenges, Opportunities, Pakistan.

Introduction

Education is considered to be a fundamental right of every individual. However, in many parts of the world, including Pakistan, women are deprived of this basic right. According to the Pakistan Education Statistics Report 2019-20, the literacy rate of women in Pakistan is 59%, significantly lower than that of men (71%)¹. This disparity has various reasons, including cultural norms, poverty, and lack of educational facilities. This research paper will examine the challenges and opportunities for women's education in Pakistan and how to overcome these challenges.

Women's education has become a political issue in Pakistan in the last few decades². There is a concern about the delay and slow progress in developing women's educational opportunities. The state of women's education in Pakistan has grown increasingly important due to the increasing depth of knowledge regarding the issue. Currently, Pakistan has one of the lowest female literacy rates among all Asian states (25%), and it is only slightly higher than the global average (24%)³. While women's education alone may not be sufficient to resolve this problem, it could certainly be one part of the puzzle.

The current state of women's education in Pakistan is both alarming and a source of disenchantment. The advancement of higher education and women's involvement in education can reciprocally support one another, leading to progress and success for the female population. Lack of access to education leads to low utilization of the labor force, unequal distribution of household tasks, limited social mobility, and unequal distribution of wealth. Women's access to education, at all levels, is limited. The government has made significant and commendable efforts in expanding educational opportunities for girls and women; nonetheless, the factors that continue to impede progress remain strong^{4,5}. To date, women continue to be underrepresented in higher education and are less

likely to complete a degree than their male counterparts.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is particularly suitable for studying complex and context-dependent phenomena such as women's education in Pakistan. This research paper is based on a qualitative analysis of the existing literature on women's education in Pakistan. The literature was collected from various sources, including academic journals, reports, chapters, and newspapers. The analysis is based on the challenges and opportunities for women's education in Pakistan.

Results

The State of Education in Pakistan is one of the nation's most important problems. According to the Planning Commission report, Pakistan's literacy rate is 46%. In urban areas, the literacy rate is 80%, while only 20% is in rural areas. The reason for low literacy rates may be either because of non-existing infrastructure or poverty, which prevents people from having higher education. Although women had always been deprived of education, there were no specific research papers on this topic.

There are many reasons for the lack of education among women in Pakistan. One of the primary causes of this problem is the reluctance of parents to send their girls to school. Other factors are the poor quality and quantity of infrastructure available at schools and colleges lack of qualified teachers and students with appropriate educational qualifications.

Challenges for Women's Education in Pakistan

Numerous challenges prevent women from gaining access to education in Pakistan. These challenges include cultural norms, poverty, lack of educational facilities, economic constraints, and security concerns, refer to figure 1.

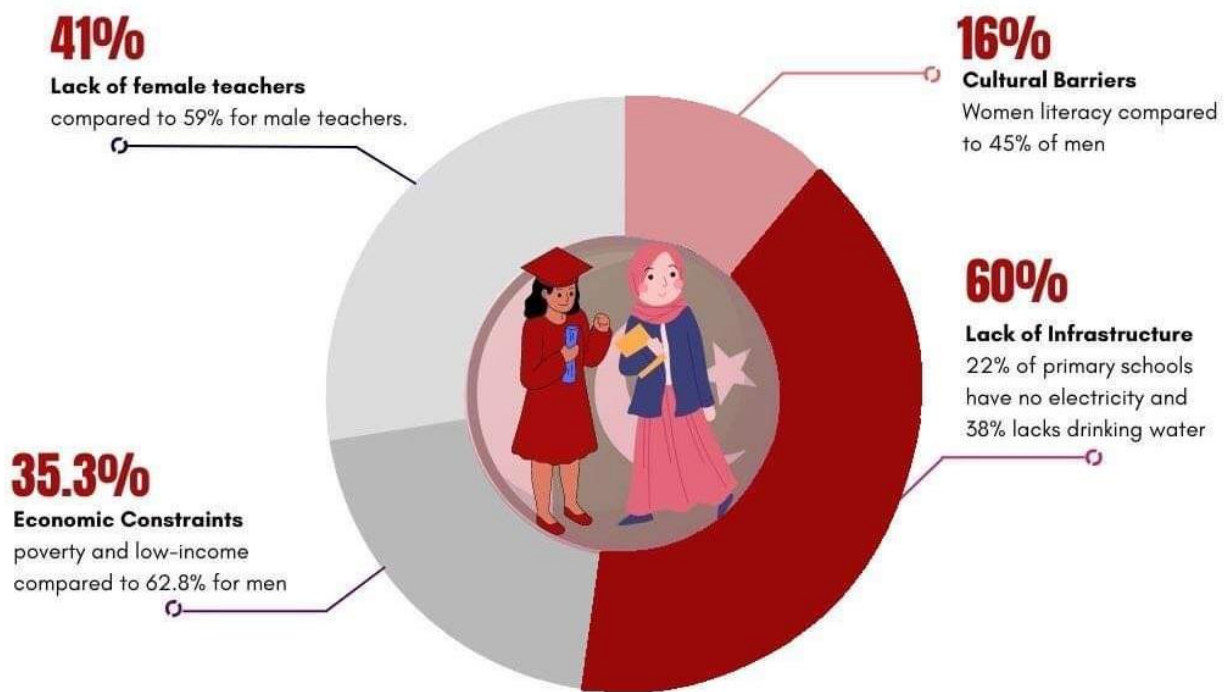


Figure 1: Statistics exhibiting the major factors hindering women's education in Pakistan.

- **Cultural norms**

Cultural norms are one of the significant barriers to women's education in Pakistan. Women are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities such as household chores and child-bearing over education. These responsibilities are part of societal norms and conservative attitudes toward gender roles, especially in rural areas. They are also discouraged from pursuing higher education, as it is believed to make them less desirable as wives.

- **Poverty**

Poverty is another significant challenge for women's education in Pakistan. Many families cannot afford to send their daughters to school, as they need them to work and contribute to their income. This is especially true in rural areas, where poverty rates are higher.

- **Educational facilities**

The lack of educational facilities is also a major challenge for women's education in Pakistan. Many areas do not have schools, and those that do often lack proper infrastructure and qualified teachers.

This makes it difficult for women to access education, particularly in rural areas.

- **Economic constraints**

Economic constraints also play a crucial role in hurdles for women's education in Pakistan. Especially in rural areas where financial burden and poverty often force families to prioritize sending sons to school as they will help run the family in the future, whereas their daughters are kept home for domestic chores. Due to economic constraints literacy rate for women in rural areas is only 35.3%, compared to 62.8% for men.

- **Security consternations**

Women's security and safety are the major concerns in Pakistan, particularly in areas where widespread conflicts and violence are present. This causes difficulty for the girls to attend school on a regular basis, as they may face abuse, violence, or/and harassment on their way home from school or way to school from home. Moreover, according to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, sexual violence against females in Pakistan has increased in recent years.

- **Lack of female teachers**

The scarcity of female teachers in the field of education is also a notable blockade to women's education in Pakistan. In many areas, there are very few female teachers, making it difficult for girls to feel comfortable and supported in their educational environment. According to a report by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, the proportion of female teachers in primary schools is only 41%, compared to 59% for male teachers. In rural areas, this proportion is even lower, with only 35% of primary school teachers being female.

Opportunities for Women's Education in Pakistan

Despite the challenges, there are also several opportunities for women's education in Pakistan. These opportunities include government initiatives, women's empowerment, and the role of technology.

- **Government role**

The government of Pakistan has implemented several initiatives to improve women's education in the country. For example, the government has introduced scholarships for female students, established girls' schools in rural areas, and launched campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of women's education.

- **Women's empowerment**

Women's empowerment is also an essential factor in improving women's education in Pakistan. When women are empowered, they are more likely to seek education and break cultural norms that prevent them from pursuing higher education. Empowerment can be achieved through increased access to economic opportunities, political participation, and social support.

- **Online Education**

Technology is also playing a significant role in improving women's education in Pakistan. E-learning platforms and digital libraries are making education more accessible to women in remote areas. These platforms provide women with the

opportunity to learn at their own pace and in a safe environment.

Although these opportunities look promising and may impact the women's education system, it still requires awareness of these initiatives and also requires acceptance of the current issues that women in Pakistan face to overcome anything that limits women's education.

Discussion

As a small nation with a large population, education is considered the foundation for the progress and economic development of any country⁶. It has great importance on the economic growth and social welfare of any country. Pakistan is also equipped with all facilities to conduct research in various fields of education, which are related to women's empowerment, the social and economic situation of girls and women, etc^{7,8}. It is well known that women need more attention in order to achieve equality, justice, equal opportunity and reduce inequalities between genders^{9,10}. We can also say they are very important because women are the guardians of society, constituting 50 percent of the total population. Thus, they play an important role in the decision-making process regarding family planning issues, health care delivery, etc.

While Pakistan was among the countries that accorded women equal rights with men, there is currently a greater disparity between male and female education when it comes to literacy which caused restricted access to education for women in Pakistan¹¹. The constitution guarantees equal rights, but women's access is not equally enforced, especially in rural areas where political party affiliation is more important than basic human and women's rights^{12,13}. At the present time, Women still lag far behind male students after primary and secondary school levels. In Pakistan, only 12% of female students will continue their education beyond high school^{14,15}.

In Pakistan, the data on female literacy reflects the extent of gender inequality in society. Despite improvements in education campaign strategies

and practices, women's literacy rate significantly differs from men's. The gaps between women and men have been increasing with time. A higher access report on girls' education shows that despite efforts by international organizations like UNDP and UNFPA, these loopholes still exist, improving the education sector for both sexes. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2018-19, the literacy rate for females in Pakistan is 58%, compared to 71% for males. This gender gap exceeds in the rural areas even more, where the literacy rate of females is as low as 32%¹⁶.

The net rate of enrollment for girls in primary education in Pakistan was 74%, compared to 86% for boys in the year 2017¹⁷. It was also seen that the gender gap in secondary education, with a net enrollment rate of 31% for girls and 46% for boys. According to a report by the Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17, the gross enrollment rate (GER) of girls in primary education was 72%, compared to 85% for boys. In secondary education, the GER of girls was 35%, compared to 45% for boys. These percentages recommend that there is still a substantial gap between boys and girls in terms of access to education in Pakistan¹⁶.

The Pakistan constitution guarantees equal opportunity and freedom to all citizens who belong to it regardless of sex, race, color, and social status. It also promises protection against unfair discrimination on the basis of religion, race, or language¹¹. Pakistan is one of the lowest-ranking countries in terms of women's education, literacy, and health. It has the lowest ratio of literate women in South Asia. The situation has become worse in recent years due to persistent illiteracy and the poor status of the education system. Pakistan's performance in schooling is also at an all-time low. In fact, no country has done so poorly over three successive years (Trends and prospects -UNESCO). The country has failed to introduce universal free primary education, and there has been a drastic decline in enrolments at all levels as well as proportionate enrolment at higher levels.

Conclusion

In conclusion, women's education in Pakistan faces numerous challenges, including cultural norms, poverty, and a lack of educational facilities. However, there are also opportunities to improve women's education in the country, such as government initiatives, women's empowerment, and the role of technology. It is essential to address the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities to ensure that women in Pakistan have access to education and the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge all our internees at the ECD PREP Program for their interest and dedication towards research and innovation in the early years of childhood development.

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