



## **Policy Brief # PB-89-2024**

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# **Improving Rural Education for Social and Economic Uplift of Pakistan**

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by

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### Introduction

*“Education is the most powerful weapon that you can use to change the world.”  
(Mandela,2003)*

The growth of a nation relies on its education system, which fosters both individual and the national socio-economic prosperity. As recorded in 2023, 61.96%<sup>1</sup> of the Pakistani population resides in rural areas yet the rural education system is deplorably underdeveloped. Despite various efforts of private sector and the government, the rural literacy rate conducted in 2019 was 51%<sup>2</sup> and 74%<sup>3</sup> for urban areas. The regional literacy divide can be attributed to various reasons, ranging from poor education facilities to socio demographic factors. Residents of rural area are mostly unaware about the necessity of education and its benefits. They prioritize immediate income generation through labour and agriculture rather than sending their children to school. Those parents who are willing to send their children also feel reluctant because of inadequate facilities. Schools in rural areas lack basic facilities such as electricity and clean water and its infrastructure is poorly built. Teachers in rural schools are not well-trained either. Socio demographic factors such as; gender disparity, conservativeness, traditional views, interpretation of religion also a play a vital role in the high literacy rate in rural areas.

Schools and education settings in Pakistan differ tremendously in urban and rural areas. Urban schools are highly equipped with libraries, sports grounds, well-built

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<sup>1</sup> “Pakistan - Rural Population2024 Data 2025 Forecast 1960-2023 Historical.” n.d. Tradingeconomics.com. <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>.

<sup>2</sup> government of Pakistan. 2019. “Statistical Tables PSLM 2019-20 | Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.” Pbs.gov.pk. 2019. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/statistical-tables-pslm-2019-20>.

<sup>3</sup> government of Pakistan. 2019. “Statistical Tables PSLM 2019-20 | Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.” Pbs.gov.pk. 2019. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/statistical-tables-pslm-2019-20>.

infrastructure, computer labs, laboratories, progressive technology, internet, competitive curriculum and faculty.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, rural communities lack behind in a number of factors; they don't have access to libraries, sports grounds, latest technology or even internet, recorded in 2023, 88% of government schools and 76% of private schools don't have computer labs and 86% of government school ,72% of private schools don't have access to the internet in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Poorly built infrastructure and lack of basic necessities such as, clean water and electricity is another hurdle. There are few schools in rural areas, and children have to travel long distances to attend, which can lead to reduced attendance and particularly pose a major obstacle for girls. Gender inequality exists in the majority of Pakistan's underdeveloped regions, where people do not believe that girls' education is essential. Particularly for girls, the lack of schools close to home is a major obstacle to their education since parents who wish to send their daughters to school will be hesitant due to the vast distance. Accompanied by lesser transportation facilities, it becomes harder for children to access education<sup>6</sup>. An instance of it is when 7 students and a teacher remained stuck in a cable car at 900feet<sup>7</sup> in the Allai valley near Battagram, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for 16 hours on their way to school in August 2023<sup>8</sup>. Due to the curriculum, which is mostly focused on cramming rather than critical thinking, people who have access to education in rural areas continue to lag behind those who receive their education in metropolitan areas. Rural school teachers are frequently overworked and underqualified, which lowers the standard of schooling.

The table below represents the % of children enrolled in schools in rural areas of different provinces

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<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Anwar Farooq. 2024. "The Education Divide." *Pakistantoday.com.pk*. July 5, 2024. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/07/06/the-education-divide/>.

<sup>5</sup> [https://aserpakistan.org/document/2024/asere\\_national\\_2023.pdf](https://aserpakistan.org/document/2024/asere_national_2023.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Uddin, Salah, and Charlotte Greenfield. 2023. "Stranded Cable Car Highlights Pakistan School Accessibility Crisis." *Reuters*, August 27, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/stranded-cable-car-highlights-pakistan-school-accessibility-crisis-2023-08-26/>.

<sup>7</sup> Yusufzai, Mushtaq, and Miyvonne Burke. 2023. "Children Trapped in Cable Car 900 Feet above a Ravine." *NBC News*. August 22, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pakistan-chair-lift-children-stuck-rcna101136>.

<sup>8</sup> Uddin, Salah, and Charlotte Greenfield. 2023. "Stranded Cable Car Highlights Pakistan School Accessibility Crisis." *Reuters*, August 27, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/stranded-cable-car-highlights-pakistan-school-accessibility-crisis-2023-08-26/>.

		Province (Rural Areas)	Balochistan	Gilgit Baltistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Punjab (Rural)	Azad Jammu and Kashmir	Sindh
6 – 16 year old								
Children enrolled in school	%	Government Schools	67.55	58.9	67.9	65.3	51.7	75.9
	%	Private Schools	3.36	33.5	19.3	25.7	44.7	8.4
	%	Madrassah	4.30	1.1	2.1	1.3	0.8	0.3
	%	Total	75.27	93.7	89.7	92.9	97.7	85.9
Children not attending school	%		24.37	6.3	10.3	7.1	2.3	14.1
Children out of school	%	Girls	13	4	6	3	1.2	8
	%	Boys	10	2	4	4	1	6
Children enrolled in different grade levels	%	1	20	13	14	14	10	22
	%	5	12	12	12	13	11	10
	%	12	2	6	4	6	10	33
Source: ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION ASER-PAKISTAN 2023 <sup>9</sup>								

Balochistan's rural areas have the lowest percentage of children enrolled in school and the highest percentage of youngsters who have never attended or dropped out. Whereas Azad Jammu and Kashmir has the highest % of children enrolled in schools, followed by Gilgit Baltistan and Punjab. The gender gap is greatest in Balochistan and Sindh, where 13% and 8% of females, respectively, are not in school, compared to 10% and 6% of boys. The majority of children finish primary and elementary school, but as

<sup>9</sup> [https://aserpakistan.org/document/2024/aser\\_national\\_2023.pdf](https://aserpakistan.org/document/2024/aser_national_2023.pdf)

grade levels rise, fewer children are enrolled nationwide. Low % of children enrolled in schools of Balochistan and Sindh can be attributed to; poverty, lack of schools, poor infrastructure and social- cultural barriers, security and political instability. However, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Punjab have the highest number of children going to school because they have better educational infrastructure and government keeps a regular check and balance on schools in these regions.

According to the “2030 Education framework by UNESCO”<sup>10</sup> government should allocate 4%-6% of their GDP to education<sup>11</sup>. However, Pakistan allocates only 1.87%<sup>12</sup> of its budget on education. The government on Pakistan, decides its expenditure on the basis of population density, rural areas have less population and they mostly go unnoticed.

The high percentage of illiteracy in rural areas has far-reaching ramifications; it affects not just an individual's personal development but also the state. A state's socioeconomic progress and literacy are closely related. It directly affects stability, civic involvement, gender equality, and economic progress.<sup>13</sup> A high illiteracy rate influences a state's economic growth via decreasing productivity and labor market involvement. Pakistan currently has an unemployment rate of 8%<sup>14</sup> in 2024, hindering its economic growth. Poorer health outcomes and a higher hospitalization rate are caused by a lower health literacy rate. Gender equality is significantly impacted by literacy as well. Educated females enhance their children's education and health. Addition of women in the work force increases participation in the labor market due to high literacy rate. In 2024, Pakistan is ranked in the top 10 countries that face gender disparity in terms of girls' education. Additionally, literacy promotes cultural awareness and social cohesiveness, and nations with high literacy rates have more stable societies and civic engagement.

## Policy Recommendations:

### 1. Problem Solving and Critical Thinking Curriculum

Replace rote-learning with critical thinking and problem-solving techniques in the classroom. This step will promote autonomous thought, originality, and curiosity instead of studying and implying the same information as the writers of school textbooks. It can enable learners to take on the problems of the real world.

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<sup>10</sup> "Finance." 2016. Unesco. August 10, 2016. <https://gem-report-2016.unesco.org/en/chapter/target-4-8-finance/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Finance." 2016. Unesco. August 10, 2016. <https://gem-report-2016.unesco.org/en/chapter/target-4-8-finance/>.

<sup>12</sup> 2021. Unesco.org. 2021. <https://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> swargiary, Khritish. 2024. Literacy as a Catalyst for Socio- Economic Development: an analytical view of 2024 global data

<sup>14</sup> IMF. 2021. Imf.org. 2021. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/LUR@WEO/PAK/IDN/TLS>.

**2. Mobile Education Facilities:**

Mobile learning centers may be made out of vehicles like buses and vans. Give them access to cutting-edge technology, WiFi, educational resources, and. They can be equipped with solar panels, which will allow technology to be used and work well in places with little energy. These facilities are able to travel to isolated locations with few schools or restricted transit options. The transportable unit may travel with a rotating group of instructors or facilitators. Otherwise, live online or pre-recorded courses might be used by virtual teachers to teach. It would deliver education straight to students and lessen need on infrastructure. In addition to being a potentially economical option, it will provide rural kids access to technology. Road accessibility can be a problem in areas with bad roads; if at all feasible, smaller vehicles, such as motorcycles with educational packages, can be used.

**3. Initiatives for Community- Teacher Interaction**

Establish initiatives for teachers in rural and urban areas to share ideas. Rural teachers can have the opportunity to acquire new techniques to improve their teaching abilities, and urban teachers can volunteer to teach in rural schools for a few weeks. To increase their willingness, exchange instructors might be provided with lodging and a transit stipend.

**4. Educating Parents and Raising Their Awareness**

Inform parents of the importance of education, particularly for girls. Parents are more inclined to support their children's education when they understand the long-term advantages of education. As a result, communities will become more educated and poverty cycles will be broken.

**5. Financial Literacy for Rural Education**

Families can be empowered to use their resources more effectively by receiving financial literacy training, particularly in rural regions. When families comprehend budgeting and financial planning. Prioritizing education can result in better livelihoods and long-term social and economic advancement in rural areas.

**6. Scholarships and Microloans**

To encourage education, particularly female education, students can be provided with cash incentives depending on achievement, particularly. In order to reduce the number of dropouts due to financial limitations, parents should also be assisted with microloans to address their financial strains.

**7. Employing "Teacher Sponsorship" Programs to Crowdsource Teacher Employment**

Provide a mechanism for businesses or people to support teachers in rural areas. Make use of a platform that facilitates open financing and monitors mentorship and growth. This will assist maintain the quality of education by resolving the teachers' professional and financial difficulties.