



Advancing Equity and Quality in Education: A Study of the Punjab Education Foundation's Public–Private Partnership Model in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

This research examines the educational landscape of Punjab, Pakistan, where both public and private schooling systems have struggled to deliver equitable, accessible, and high-quality education. Public schools continue to face challenges related to limited resources, weak governance, and inadequate teaching capacity, leading to persistent disparities in enrolment and learning outcomes. Conversely, although private schools have expanded across the province, their services remain largely inaccessible to low-income households due to financial constraints and varying instructional quality. In response to these systemic gaps, the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) has introduced an innovative public–private partnership model aimed at expanding access to quality education for disadvantaged populations. This study analyzes the role of PEF in enhancing enrolment, strengthening accountability structures, and improving the overall learning environment in partner schools. The findings indicate that PEF has effectively leveraged the strengths of both sectors to promote inclusivity and raise educational standards. The research concludes that PEF represents a viable and scalable model for addressing educational inequities and offers valuable policy insights for regions facing similar challenges.

Keywords: Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Public–Private Partnership, Educational Equity, Access to Quality Education, School Reform in Punjab

Introduction:

Education has long been regarded as the bedrock of society advancement, serving as a driver of economic expansion, social development, and individual empowerment. The Punjab province in Pakistan's heartland is a monument to this belief, recognizing the critical role that education plays in determining the fate of its people. The PEF rises as a beacon of hope as the dawn of a new era illuminates the horizon, addressing the vital need for accessible and excellent education for all. This chapter dives into the Punjab Education Foundation's tremendous significance, revealing its beginnings, ambitions, and transformational impact on the educational landscape. In a world characterized by fast globalization and technological breakthroughs, education has

evolved into a potent tool capable of breaking the bonds of ignorance and opening doors to limitless prospects. However, the path to educational equity is laden with difficulties, particularly in areas where socioeconomic disparities and insufficient resources make it difficult to realize every child's potential. The Punjab Education Foundation originates in this atmosphere, committed to bridging the gap between privilege and poverty, urban and rural, by guaranteeing that the light of education reaches even the most remote parts of the province. A significant institution has emerged as a cornerstone in the struggle for educational justice and social transformation in the busy Centre of Pakistan's Punjab state. The PEF exemplifies the province's dedication to break down barriers and ushering in an era of accessible and high-quality education for all. We will go through the pages of this chapter to understand the fundamental need that gave birth to the Punjab Education Foundation and how its actions have catalyzed a wave of positive change across the educational landscape.

Education System in Punjab:

Punjab, Pakistan's largest province, faces significant education challenges despite its crucial role in shaping the future of its 22 million youth. The public-school system struggles with inadequate resources, unequal access, and inefficient governance. To address this, initiatives like the Foundation Assisted School model, Quality Assurance Program, and National Education Policy 2017 have been launched. The government aims to increase enrollment, improve quality, enhance teacher training, and promote community involvement. Punjab, Pakistan's most populated region, has played a critical part in the country's educational growth. The education system of Punjab has a key role in moulding the future of its population and promoting social and economic growth. Education has a long history in Punjab, dating back to ancient civilizations, when centres of learning were built in the region, contributing to the spread of knowledge. During British colonial administration, Punjab became a hub of education, with the construction of Western-influenced educational institutions. The British established a formal educational system that focused on English language skills and current disciplines. This time laid the groundwork for Punjab's contemporary education system and paved the way for future educational changes. Education in Punjab, Pakistan, has been marked by a combination of achievements, challenges, and continual efforts to better the educational system since independence. After Pakistan's independence in 1947, Punjab continued to perform significant role in establishing the country's educational landscape. The Punjab government launched programmes to increase access to education, boost literacy rates, and improve school quality. During this time, one of the most important accomplishments was the establishment of a comprehensive network of educational institutions throughout the province. Punjab experienced upsurge in numbers of boys and girl's schools and colleges, with the goal of reaching a larger segment of the people with education. The government implemented policies and programmes to encourage primary as well as secondary level education, that resulted to higher enrolment rates and greater access to basic education. However, the post-independence era also posed hurdles to Punjab's educational progress. Socioeconomic inequities continued, resulting in unequal access to quality education across the population. Rural communities, in particular, experienced infrastructure constraints and insufficient resources, stifling educational advancement. Gender gaps remained an issue, with initiatives to promote girls' education being met with opposition owing to cultural norms and socioeconomic considerations. (Ahmed, 2005)

Early days of Independence:

From the day of the independence of Pakistan, the state of education in Punjab and throughout Pakistan faced various challenges. Scarce resources, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of

skilled teachers were major impediments to providing effective education. The education system of Punjab, Pakistan's largest province, witnessed both remarkable progress and severe problems. During this time, the government has made remarkable changes to handle these problems as well as prioritised the establishment of educational institutions and the promotion of basic literacy. Pakistan's journey to educational empowerment began with a staggering challenge 85% of its population was illiterate at the time of independence in 1947. However, the province of Punjab has made remarkable progress in education reform since then. The 1947 All-Pakistan Education Conference was a pivotal moment, laying the groundwork for the nation's education system with a focus on Curriculum Creation, Language Policy, Inclusive Education, and harnessing education as a tool for Nation-Building and Socioeconomic Advancement. Today, Punjab continues to prioritize education, implementing strategic initiatives to enhance quality, accessibility, and inclusivity. The country's progress in education is also reflected in various initiatives aimed at empowering youth and promoting social cohesion. For instance, the Youth Empowerment Programme (Kamyab Jawan) has provided skills development training to thousands of young people, focusing on entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and critical thinking. Such efforts demonstrate Pakistan's commitment to education as a catalyst for socioeconomic growth and development. (Rana, 2024)

Educational growth and development:

Education Conference 1947:

Since Pakistan's inception, education has been recognized as a pivotal factor in the country's progress and development. Pakistan's founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, documented education as a vital component of the country's progress and development from its earliest days. He emphasized the significance of education in shaping the nation's future. Stating in his introductory address at the first education conference in November 1947, Jinnah said;

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to the Pakistan Educational Conference, being held tomorrow in Karachi. This gathering of esteemed educators, policymakers, and stakeholders is a crucial step towards shaping the future of our nation. I extend my warmest wishes for highly successful discussions that yield practical and fruitful outcomes. Pakistan's history underscores the significance of education in driving national progress. Since its inception, education has been recognized as a vital component of the country's development. Our founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, emphasized the importance of education in shaping the nation's future. Unfortunately, under foreign rule, the education of our people was neglected for over a century, hindering our growth and potential. To achieve substantial progress, we must prioritize education, aligning our policies with our cultural heritage, history, and modern global developments. This requires a holistic approach, addressing the current shortcomings in our education system. We must recognize that education extends beyond academics, encompassing character-building, critical thinking, and skills development. In this context, several key objectives emerge. Firstly, we must mobilize our people through education, empowering citizens to drive national progress. Secondly, we must build character in our future

generations, instilling values of honor, integrity, and selfless service. Thirdly, we must foster economic growth by equipping our youth with skills for scientific commerce, trade, and industry. Lastly, we must prepare Pakistan to compete in the rapidly advancing world, recognizing the imperative of global competitiveness. (Jinnah, 1947)

Jinnah's vision for Pakistan's education system was rooted in his commitment to equality, justice, and social progress. He believed that education should foster critical thinking, creativity, and character-building, enabling future generations to become responsible, informed, and active citizens. His leadership and advocacy for education played a pivotal role in laying the foundation for Pakistan's educational infrastructure. His appreciation for education highlighted the importance of scientific and technical training, vocational education, and character-building. He emphasized that education should equip future generations to play their part in various branches of economic life, doing honor to Pakistan. By focusing on these objectives, we can ensure our future generations are well-equipped to lead Pakistan towards a brighter future. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize the urgency of our task. We must invest in education, prioritizing resources and expertise to drive meaningful change. By working together, we can create a robust education system that empowers Pakistan to realize its full potential. In conclusion, the Pakistan Educational Conference represents a critical milestone in our nation's journey. I urge all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue, sharing expertise and insights to shape a brighter future for Pakistan. Together, we can build an education system that honors our heritage, addresses our challenges, and propels our nation towards greatness.

National Education Commission 1959:

On December 3, 1958, the Government of Pakistan established the National Education Commission under the leadership of Syed Muhammad Sharif. This landmark decision reflected the government's recognition of the need for a radical transformation of the country's education system. At the time, Pakistan's education sector faced numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, outdated curricula, and insufficient resources. The commission was formally inaugurated by President Mohammad Ayub Khan on January 5, 1959. (Nawai Waqt, 1959) In his address, President Khan underscored the importance of reforming the education system to align with Pakistan's spiritual, moral, and cultural values. He emphasized the need for an education system that would equip future generations with the skills and knowledge required to drive national progress in science, technology, and other fields. (Ayub Khan, 1959). The National Education Commission aimed to propose a reconstructed educational framework for Pakistan. After conducting a thorough analysis of the prevailing education system, previous reports, and international reform movements, the commission submitted a comprehensive report in August 1959. The report presented a range of recommendations designed to overhaul Pakistan's education sector. (Government of Pakistan, 1960)

Key recommendations included:

- Character building and moral education
- Compulsory primary education
- Technical and vocational training
- Adoption of Urdu as the national language and medium of instruction
- A three-year degree Program
- Elimination of illiteracy

- Establishment of a University Grants Commission
- Compulsory religious education at three levels (Middle, Secondary, and University)
- Improved teaching quality, particularly in religious institutions (Madaras)

Despite the commission's diligent efforts, its recommendations were not implemented by the government. However, the National Education Commission's report remains a significant milestone in Pakistan's education history, highlighting the need for systemic reform and innovation. The commission's work continues to inspire efforts to improve Pakistan's education sector, ensuring that future generations receive a high-quality education that prepares them for success. The National Education Commission's legacy serves as a reminder of the importance of investing in education and prioritizing the development of human capital. By revisiting the commission's recommendations and building on its work, Pakistan can move closer to realizing its vision of a knowledgeable, skilled, and prosperous society.

Educational Approach 1969:

In September 1969, Air Marshal Noor Khan, then Governor of West Pakistan under Martial Law, took a significant step towards reforming the province's education sector. He distributed a set of government-submitted proposals for supervised education, aiming to bring about positive change in the way education was delivered in the region. The circulation of these proposals was noteworthy, considering the martial law regime in place at the time. Despite the challenging circumstances, Air Marshal Noor Khan recognized the importance of education in shaping Pakistan's future. His initiative demonstrated a commitment to improving the education system, which had been a subject of discussion since the National Education Commission's report in 1959 (Faizi, 2020). Although the report was only available for a quarter of the year, it outlined significant recommendations. Many of these proposals aligned with existing policies, indicating a continuity of efforts to reform education in Pakistan. Notably, the proposals emphasized the importance of Islamic identity, highlighting its integral role in Pakistan's education system. The proposals underscored the significance of Islamic values and principles in shaping the nation's education system. This focus on Islamic identity reflected the government's desire to ensure that education in Pakistan was rooted in the country's cultural and religious heritage. By incorporating Islamic studies into the curriculum, the proposals aimed to foster a sense of national identity and promote moral values among students. (Government of Pakistan, 1979). Air Marshal Noor Khan's initiative contributed to the ongoing conversation about education reform in Pakistan. His efforts, although part of a broader martial law regime, demonstrated recognition of education's critical role in shaping the nation's future. While the proposals' immediate impact may have been limited, they added to the cumulative efforts aimed at transforming Pakistan's education sector. In conclusion, Air Marshal Noor Khan's supervised education proposals marked an important milestone in Pakistan's education history. By emphasizing Islamic identity and aligning with existing policies, these proposals reflected a commitment to education reform and nation-building.

Education Policy 1970:

In accordance to the instructions of CMLA Yahya Khan and Noor Khan's circulation, Federal Education Ministry introduced 'National Education Policy 1970' in November 1969, which was adopted in March 1970 by the cabinet. (Nawai Waqt, 1970a) This policy focused upon ideological orientation of the country, decentralization of educational administration, formation of national education units, and eradication of illiteracy. But due to uncertain conditions of the country and separation of East Pakistan, this policy could not be implemented.

National Education Plan 1972:

The President of Pakistan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, in his address to the nation on 15th March 1972, presented the salient features of Education Policy 1972-80. He observed that the education system imposed in the past was much rigid inflexible and was availed only by the privileged few who constitute the elite group in the country. The expenditure on education was mostly incurred on “bricks and mortars” as compared to that on teachers and books. (Bhutto, 1972)

After few week considerations, Bhutto's Educational Minister Hafeez Pirzada introduced an educational plan. During introducing education plan Pirzada criticized the past education arrangements and declared them insufficient in accordance to country's conditions.(Faizi,2020) Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's educational plan was a visionary strategy aimed at transforming Pakistan's education landscape. Its primary objectives included universal education, equality in education, personality development, and curriculum development tailored to the country's socio-economic needs. The plan had several key features. These included integrated technical and science education aligned with international standards, active participation of parents, teachers, and students, and nationalization of private education institutions. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's educational plan was ground breaking initiative that aimed to revolutionize Pakistan's education landscape. At its core, the plan focused on Universal Education, ensuring that every individual, regardless of socio-economic background, had access to quality learning. This was complemented by Equality in Education, which sought to provide equal opportunities for boys and girls, addressing disparities based on socio-economic status. The plan also emphasized Personality Development, fostering well-rounded individuals through holistic education. Additionally, Socio-Economic Relevance was a key feature, with curricula developed to cater to Pakistan's societal and economic needs. Furthermore, Bhutto's plan promoted Integrated Technical and Science Education, embracing international standards in technical and science education. Furthermore, the government announced free education up to class ten for both boys and girls. (Rehman and Sewani, 2013)

By implementing these features, Bhutto's government worked tirelessly to design educational programs that would benefit the entire nation. This effort was part of a broader vision to transform Pakistan's society and economy, making education a cornerstone of national development. Bhutto's commitment to education was unwavering, and his legacy continues to inspire efforts towards creating a more educated and enlightened Pakistan. During the last weeks of 1972, the Bhutto government initiated efforts to implement this plan, directing all public and private schools to provide free education up to the middle level. This bold move was designed to empower future generations and pave the way for a more educated and enlightened Pakistan. However, numerous private institutions refused to comply, prompting the government to nationalize them. Building on this momentum, the government launched the second phase of free education in 1974. This phase saw instructions issued to all institutions to provide free education, further expanding access to quality learning. Bhutto's educational reforms were part of a broader vision for Pakistan's development, which also included economic reforms and land reforms. His government's efforts aimed to address the country's long-standing issues, such as inequality and lack of access to education, and lay the foundation for a more equitable society. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nationalization strategy was a pivotal component of his vision to create a more equitable and socialist society in Pakistan. The education sector was a primary focus, with nationalization aimed at reducing the dominance of the privileged class and promoting equal access to quality

education for all segments of society. The objectives of nationalization were multifaceted. By taking control of educational institutions, Bhutto's government sought to reduce socio-economic disparities by providing education to marginalized communities. Nationalization also aimed to foster national identity and unity through standardized education, increase government control over education to ensure quality and accountability, and prevent exploitation by private institutions. (Syed, 1991). To achieve these goals, Bhutto's government implemented several key initiatives. The Private Educational Institutions (Promotion and Regulation) Ordinance of 1972 enabled the government to take over private schools and colleges. Additionally, universities and higher education institutions were placed under government control to ensure equal access. Standardization of curricula was also implemented to promote unity and national identity. However, Bhutto's nationalization initiatives faced criticism and opposition. Critics argued that sudden nationalization could compromise quality and efficiency, and expressed concerns about bureaucratic management and potential declines in educational standards. The autonomy and innovation of private institutions were also seen as being stifled, and the government's ability to manage a vast network of institutions was questioned. Despite these challenges, Bhutto's nationalization policies had a lasting impact on Pakistan's education landscape. The initiatives increased access to education for marginalized communities, standardized education across Pakistan, and reduced private sector dominance in education. While controversy surrounds the effectiveness and long-term consequences of nationalization, Bhutto's commitment to socialism and equality remains a defining feature of his legacy. Bhutto's nationalization policies were part of a broader vision for Pakistan's development, which also included economic reforms and land reforms. His government's efforts aimed to address the country's long-standing issues, such as inequality and lack of access to education, and lay the foundation for a more equitable society. (Hussain & Yawar, 2014).

National Education Policy 1979:

An Education Conference was held at Islamabad in 1977, which provided both spirit and substance to the National Education Policy 1979, by Martial Law regime. The factors which led to the formulation of policy are better reflected in the statement of Minister of Education on the Policy while presenting its salient features in the cabinet meeting on 12th October, 1978. He said that the irregular efforts made by various governments in the past were mainly confined to lip service and left much to be desired. The nation was still without any clear direction resulting in confusion and unrest among people. (Government of Pakistan, 1979)

The policy was officially announced in February 1979. Fostering loyalty to Islam, creation of concept of Muslim Ummah, promotion of science and technology, merging madrassa and traditional education, curriculum revision, Urdu as medium of instruction, and separate set ups for male and female students were the key features of the policy. The Zia government presented the focus of newly introduced education policy in its inaugural session as; "Pakistan's foundation was built on the unwavering dedication of the subcontinent's Muslims, who were willing to lay down their lives in accordance with the Quran and Hadith, without any pressure. Through our national plan, we will ensure that education rooted in Islamic values remains aligned with the social needs of our nation." (Faizi, 2013). The regime focused to Islamize all the spheres of life, especially ideology for independence of Pakistan. The regime can just focus the islamization and other features of the policy could not be implemented due to lack of financial resources and various other factors.

National Education Policy 1992:

The newly elected IJI government initiated for new education policy in early days of 1990s. A conference to collect the proposals about education policy was held in April 1991 in Islamabad. A large number of scholars, religious leaders, writers, scientists and Lawyers were invited in the conference. The edifice of the National Education Policy 1992, had been structured on the basis of “guide-lines” provided by the Prime Minister’s Directive in later days of 1991, on the basis of the input received from contract educationists, administrators and members of the Standing Committees of the National Assembly and the Senate. The Federal Minister of Education announced the policy on 20th December, 1992. (Government of Pakistan, 1992). Fakhar Imam, the minister, introduced this policy, leveraging the legislative foundation laid by Nawaz Sharif. The plan comprised 26 sections, explicitly addressing past policy disappointments. District-level meetings were held to facilitate its execution. At its core, this initiative sought to create a modern, accessible educational framework for Pakistan's Muslim population, aligning with 21st-century requirements. The policy emphasised the significance of ensuring equal access to high-quality education for all parts of society, regardless of socioeconomic status. It aimed to promote universal primary education, decrease gender inequities, and ensure that basic facilities and qualified teachers were available in schools throughout the province. The 1992 Education Policy also emphasised the importance of curriculum change in order to connect educational material with changing societal and economic demands. The policy's introduction was preceded by an acknowledgment of past disappointments. By recognizing the limitations of previous initiatives, the government demonstrated its commitment to learning from mistakes and improving the educational landscape. District-level meetings were convened to facilitate policy execution, gather feedback, and ensure active participation from educators, administrators, and community leaders. At its core, this initiative sought to establish an efficient educational system, aligned with 21st-century requirements. The policy emphasized accessibility, aiming to make quality education available to all Muslim Pakistanis. Key objectives included improving literacy rates and educational outcomes nationwide, enhancing Pakistan's global competitiveness through skilled human capital, fostering critical thinking and creativity among students, and promoting Islamic values and national identity. To achieve these goals, the government focused on capacity-building initiatives for teachers and staff, enhancing pedagogical skills to deliver high-quality education. Better-equipped educational institutions, with modern infrastructure and resources, were also a priority. The expected outcomes included increased access to quality education, particularly for marginalized communities, enhanced teacher training, and improved student performance leading to a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The successful implementation of this policy had the potential to transform Pakistan's education landscape, aligning with national aspirations and global standards. By prioritizing education, the government recognized its critical role in shaping the country's future. This initiative demonstrated a commitment to empowering future generations, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive Pakistan's growth and development. The policy's impact extended beyond the education sector, contributing to Pakistan's socio-economic progress. By investing in human capital, the government aimed to reduce inequality, promote social mobility, and foster a more informed, engaged citizenry. As Pakistan continues to evolve, the legacy of this policy will remain a vital component of its development narrative (GOP, 1992). Punjab Education Foundation was also introduced during this tenure.

Implementation on Policies and Issues of School Education:

Despite concerted efforts and developing education regulations, the school education system in Punjab, Pakistan, continues to face a slew of obstacles that impede its development towards

providing quality and equitable education for all. Several education policies and strategies implemented in Punjab, Pakistan, persistent inadequacies and issues continue to plague the education system. While these policies sought to address many areas of education, such as access, quality, curriculum, and infrastructure, a number of systemic and contextual factors contributed to the perpetuation of these difficulties.

Issues in School Education in Punjab:

In Punjab, Pakistan, school education has a number of obstacles and issues that limit its ability to provide quality and equal learning opportunities for all pupils. Inadequate infrastructure and facilities compound the situation, resulting in substandard learning settings. Furthermore, the scarcity of trained instructors, as well as their unequal distribution throughout rural and urban areas, impedes the delivery of effective education. One of the most significant difficulties is overcrowding in classrooms, which strains resources and hinders the personalised attention that pupils demand. The curriculum may also encounter issues in terms of relevance and adaptation to changing labour market needs, restricting students' preparation for the workforce. Furthermore, socioeconomic inequality and gender-based discrimination persist, limiting girls' and marginalised populations' access to school. Inadequate financing and resource mismanagement stymie educational changes and advances. The use of antiquated teaching methods, as well as a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, may impede students' overall growth. The following sections highlight the significant concerns and issues in school education in Punjab, Pakistan.

Lack of Access to Quality Education:

Many children, particularly those from low-income families and marginalised communities, faced severe challenges to obtaining a good education. The whole learning experience was hampered since public schools frequently lacked important resources such as well-equipped classrooms, suitable educational materials, and educated teachers. Furthermore, the urban-rural split in educational infrastructure and resources worsened educational opportunity discrepancies. Lack of access to adequate education not only hampered children's academic and personal development, but also perpetuated societal disparities. The following are some of the significant barriers to decent education in Punjab.

Disparities in educational opportunities:

Disparities in educational opportunities within Pakistan's school education system remain a major topic. These gaps are caused by a variety of causes, including socioeconomic inequities, regional differences, and gender prejudices. Despite attempts to enhance access to school for all children, significant disparities remain, impeding the development of a genuinely inclusive and equitable educational landscape. In Punjab, socioeconomic inequalities play a critical role in determining educational differences. Due to socioeconomic constraints, children from disadvantaged homes frequently lack access to quality education. In economically disadvantaged schools, limited resources result in inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and overcrowded classrooms. This exacerbates the gap between students from rich and disadvantaged backgrounds. The region has seen significant inequalities in educational infrastructure and resources between urban and rural communities, with urban centres generally having stronger educational infrastructure and resources than their rural equivalents. Public schools in remote locations frequently suffer from poor facilities, a lack of skilled teachers, and limited access to instructional materials, resulting in inferior academic standards and outcomes. Furthermore, gender discrepancies continue, especially in conservative communities where girls

face cultural and societal impediments to entering school or having equal educational chances as boys. Gender prejudices continue to be a major issue in Punjab's educational system. Despite recent advancements, girls continue to confront impediments to education. Cultural conventions, early marriage, and safety concerns frequently prevent females from attending school, especially in rural and conservative communities. Enrolment statistics reflect the gender divide, with fewer females attending school than boys.

Limited access for Children from Low-income Families:

In Punjab, Pakistan, limited access to quality education for low-income families is a major challenge, hindering social mobility and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Despite the government's efforts to increase educational prospects, considerable inequities remain, especially in rural areas where infrastructure and resources are frequently insufficient. Limited access for children from low-income families has been a significant challenge, perpetuating regional educational inequalities. Financial restrictions are a major factor in limiting access to high-quality education. Many low-income families in Punjab struggle to pay for school fees, uniforms, and books, forcing them to choose between taking their children to school and meeting other fundamental necessities. This leads to a greater dropout rate among students from low-income families, compounding the problem. In Pakistan, over 22.6 million children, the majority of who belonged to low-income families, were not attending school. The situation in Punjab is particularly terrible, with a disproportionately high number of children out of school, particularly in rural and remote areas. As a result, many economically disadvantaged children are unable to attend school or are forced to drop out at a young age. This lack of educational opportunities not only deprives these children of essential learning opportunities, but also jeopardises their long-term prospects for social and economic mobility.

Challenges faced by Marginalized Communities:

In Punjab, Pakistan, marginalized people confront several barriers to attain adequate school education, resulting in considerable discrepancies in educational opportunity. Economic restraints frequently prohibit families from affording school-related expenses such as tuition, uniforms, and textbooks, making it difficult for their children to attend school on a regular basis. Furthermore, in some marginalized areas, a lack of information about the importance of education and cultural norms may dissuade parents from sending their children, particularly girls, to school. Furthermore, the geographical location of these communities can be a barrier, as they may live in rural places with limited access to schools or experience transportation issues to educational institutions. Furthermore, prejudice and biases towards marginalised groups in mainstream schools can create a hostile learning environment, limiting students from these communities' educational opportunities. To solve these issues, there is an urgent need for focused efforts and inclusive policies that focus on giving equitable educational opportunities to all students, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity.

Inequity in Educational Opportunities:

One of the most significant discrepancies is the urban-rural gap, in which metropolitan areas have greater educational infrastructure and resources than rural ones. This unequal distribution of educational facilities has an impact on students' learning experiences and outcomes, with rural children experiencing larger barriers to quality education. Furthermore, gender imbalance is also a major issue, particularly in conservative communities where cultural norms and social biases might hinder girls' access to school. Furthermore, children from marginalised groups sometimes face educational disparities as a result of economic constraints, discrimination, and a lack of

awareness about the value of education in their community. These imbalances have a significant impact on children's entire development and opportunity, perpetuating social and economic disparities.

Quality Differences in Urban-Rural Public Schools:

Quality gaps between urban and rural public schools in Punjab, Pakistan, have long been a concern, contributing to educational outcomes inequities. In general, urban public schools have superior access to resources such as well-equipped classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and modern teaching tools. Furthermore, because of their closeness to urban centres, where employment opportunities and utilities are more readily available, urban schools frequently attract more skilled and experienced instructors. On the other hand, rural public schools frequently suffered from lack of basic infrastructure and teaching supplies. As they were resulting in a poor learning environment. The dearth of trained teachers in rural locations exacerbates the quality disparities, impacting pupils' entire educational experience. As a result, students in metropolitan public schools have higher academic performance and more chances for extracurricular activities, whereas children in rural schools confront substantial hurdles throughout their educational journey.

Difference in Student Performance:

The impact of numerous factors on educational outcomes and student performance in Punjab, Pakistan, has been a topic of study and concern. According to research, access to excellent education, availability of resources, and teacher qualities all have a major impact on students' academic success. Schools with stronger infrastructure, well-equipped classrooms, and access to educational materials tend to provide better academic achievements. Furthermore, the presence of qualified and motivated teachers has a positive impact on the learning experiences and overall performance of pupils. Students' academic achievement is generally poorer at schools with minimal resources, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of skilled teachers. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors like as parental education and income levels have a significant impact on educational achievements. Children from low-income households and from marginalised areas are more likely to encounter educational difficulties, resulting in achievement discrepancies. (Aslam et al., 2012)

Teacher Absenteeism and Quality:

Teacher absenteeism and its impact on educational quality have long been a source of concern in Punjab, Pakistan. High rates of teacher absenteeism have been observed in public schools, causing interruptions in the teaching-learning process and jeopardising children' academic progress. Teacher absenteeism can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including a lack of desire, insufficient rewards, and difficult working conditions. When teachers are absent regularly, students miss out on critical instructional time and personalised attention, which can have a negative impact on their learning outcomes. Furthermore, teacher absence adds to a reduction in overall educational quality by impeding curriculum delivery and the adoption of effective teaching practises. The following are the key effects of teacher absenteeism and quality;

Prevalence of Teacher Absenteeism in Public Sector Schools:

The prevalence of teacher absenteeism in Punjab, Pakistan, public sector schools has been a serious concern influencing educational quality. Several studies have emphasised the severity of this issue, with a significant number of teachers routinely absent from courses. According to research conducted in Punjab, teacher absenteeism rates ranged from 20% to 30%. Low

motivation, insufficient rewards, difficult working conditions, and a lack of suitable monitoring methods are all factors that contribute to teacher absenteeism. When teachers are absent, pupils' instructional time and access to excellent education suffer as a result of this frequent issue. Addressing teacher absenteeism is critical for ensuring effective teaching and learning in public schools and improving educational outcomes for Punjab students.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Absenteeism:

A variety of variables contribute to teacher absenteeism in Punjab, Pakistan, which has emerged as a critical issue affecting educational quality. One of the key reasons is a lack of motivation among instructors, which is frequently driven by work dissatisfaction and limited professional advancement chances. Inadequate incentives and compensation also contribute to the teacher's demonization and higher absenteeism rates. Furthermore, difficult working conditions such as hefty workloads, a lack of support, and administrative challenges can all lead to teacher burnout and absence. In addition, the lack of adequate monitoring and accountability measures in schools may allow some instructors to take unauthorised leave without penalties. Furthermore, geographical limits, particularly in distant places, may make it difficult for teachers to commute to schools on a regular basis. Addressing these contributing causes and implementing effective ways to enhance teacher motivation, provide better incentives, and improve working conditions are critical steps towards reducing teacher absenteeism and improving overall educational quality in Punjab.

Role Funds in Enhancing Educational Standards:

Adequate and planned budget allocation enables the enhancement of school infrastructure, such as the construction and repair of classrooms and facilities, resulting in a more conducive learning environment for students. Furthermore, money allows for the provision of necessary educational resources such as textbooks, learning materials, and technology, which enhance students' learning experiences and assist their academic advancement. Furthermore, investing in teacher training and professional development through funding allows educators to keep current with modern teaching approaches and novel pedagogies, which ultimately benefits student learning results. Furthermore, funds can be used to conduct extracurricular programmes, workshops, and educational initiatives that promote students' overall development.

Strategies for Addressing Challenge:

First and foremost, infrastructural and educational facilities should be prioritised. Building new schools and classrooms with contemporary amenities will aid in accommodating the expanding student population. Furthermore, remodelling existing facilities to maximise space utilisation can help to decrease overpopulation. Another critical solution is to hire and train more qualified instructors to accommodate the rising student population. Implementing teacher development programmes that emphasise efficient classroom management and innovative teaching strategies would enhance students' learning experiences in overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, utilising technology can be advantageous in this context. Using e-learning platforms and interactive digital materials to supplement traditional teaching methods and provide personalised learning experiences can help to mitigate the issues created by big class numbers. It is critical to work with local communities and stakeholders to gain support for educational reforms. A collaborative effort can be made to manage overcrowding and improve educational quality by involving parents, community leaders, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Emergence of Private Schools:

The public education system frequently fails to deliver quality education to all pupils due to a huge population and insufficient resources. Private schools provide an important alternative for families that cannot afford expensive private schools or are dissatisfied with the quality of public schools. By providing accessible education to children from low-income families, these schools assist bridge the education gap, particularly in distant and underserved communities. According to research, private schools in Pakistan frequently beat government-run schools in terms of learning outcomes and educational quality. (Andrabi et al., 2007). These schools have become more popular over time as a result of a number of causes, including the public sector's incapacity to offer high-quality education to everyone, the need for cost-effective alternatives, and the rising discontent with the quality of education in government-run schools. The following are some of the major factors that have contributed to the rise of private schools. The education system of Punjab, Pakistan has various issues, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and unequal access to excellent education. In response to these issues, private schools have developed as a prominent alternative, playing a critical role in improving educational possibilities for low-income students. Following is a discussion of some of the key functions and importance of private schools in Punjab's educational system, focusing on their effects on accessibility, learning results, and general improvements in educational quality.

Addressing Accessibility and Inclusion:

Particularly in Punjab's rural and underdeveloped areas, low-cost private schools have been crucial in solving the issue of accessibility to education. These schools frequently operate in places where there are few or insufficiently equipped public schools to meet the educational demands of the community. As a result, private schools give kids who may otherwise miss out on an education a crucial route and help raise literacy rates and educational attainment in the area.

Enhancing the Quality of Education:

According to research, private schools in Pakistan typically outperform publicly funded institutions in terms of academic success and learning outcomes. According to a research, pupils in Pakistan who attend private schools performed much better on math and language tests than students who attend public schools. These schools frequently choose qualified teachers who are more committed to their kids' educational success and accountable for it, which results in better learning experiences.

Fostering Innovation in Teaching and Learning:

In Punjab, less expensive private schools have shown more flexibility in implementing cutting edge teaching strategies and integrating technology into their classrooms. They are able to experiment with new teaching methods and react to shifting educational requirements and preferences, which increases student engagement and motivation. As a result, these institutions act as hubs for educational innovation that can have a positive impact on the larger education industry.

Complementing the gaps of Public Education system:

Private schools in Punjab frequently enhance the public education system by giving parents and children more choices, as opposed to competing with it. Due to the competition created by these institutions, both public and private schools are motivated to raise their academic standards. Additionally, they can lessen some of the pressure on crammed government schools, enhancing

their general effectiveness and quality. In Punjab, private schools actively involve parents in their children's education, fostering a solid collaboration between parents and educators. Parents are crucial in encouraging and supporting their children's educational journey; therefore, this enhanced parental participation benefits students' entire learning experience. Such involvement also helps schools operate more transparently and with better accountability. (Tooley & Dixon, 2011)

Challenges Faced by Private Schools:

Private schools play an important part in Pakistan's education system, providing a different way to the country's wavering public education system. Private schools in Pakistan face a number of significant challenges, including issues of affordability and accessibility, quality and standardisation concerns, insufficient regulatory frameworks and oversight, exploitative practises, and socio-cultural challenges. Although these schools significantly contribute to increasing access to education, they also face a number of difficulties that limit their viability and efficiency. The main concerns that private schools in Punjab face are examined in this article, including funding, teacher quality, facilities, regulation, and social perceptions. These obstacles impede the provision of quality education and the overall development of Pakistan's private education sector.

Affordability and Accessibility:

Affordability and accessibility are two major issues that private schools face in Pakistan. Many private schools have heavy tuition prices, making decent education unaffordable for a large segment of the population, particularly those from low-income families. This affordability gap maintains educational disparities and restricts marginalised communities' access to quality education. Furthermore, private schools are frequently concentrated in metropolitan areas, increasing the accessibility issue, particularly for children living in rural areas. These schools frequently struggle to pay for operating costs and make investments in required supplies since they serve low-income households. Budget constraints may result in a deteriorated physical environment, subpar instructional resources, and underpaid teachers. Furthermore, the long-term viability of these organisations may be threatened by economic volatility and erratic funding sources.

Quality and Standardization:

Maintaining consistent quality across all the private schools remains a serious concern. The lack of a standardised curriculum and assessment system contributes to differences in educational content and standards between private institutions. As a result, there is a lack of consistency in the level of education delivered by private schools across the country. Poor teachers training and professional development opportunities in private schools further leads to a problem in maintaining the quality of teaching. Budgetary constraints imposed on schools often result in lower remuneration for teachers compared to public or esteemed private institutions. This disparity creates significant challenges in attracting and retaining top talent, as qualified educators are naturally drawn to better-paying opportunities. The retention issue is further compounded by limited prospects for professional growth and development. Teachers in these schools frequently lack access to ongoing training, workshops, and conferences that foster pedagogical enhancement and knowledge updates. This dearth of opportunities not only demotivates instructors but also adversely affects overall academic achievement. The consequences of this cycle are far-reaching. Lower salaries deter highly qualified teachers from considering employment, while limited benefits and incentives discourage top talent from

joining. Insufficient professional development opportunities lead to stagnation, and the lack of investment in teacher growth fosters dissatisfaction. This, in turn, hinders student learning outcomes, perpetuating the cycle of underinvestment. Suboptimal teacher quality directly impacts academic achievement, underscoring the need for strategic solutions. To break this cycle, schools must prioritize teacher compensation and professional development. Exploring alternative funding sources to enhance teacher salaries, partnering with educational institutions for training and mentorship programs, and encouraging community involvement to support teacher development are critical steps. By addressing these challenges, schools can create a positive feedback loop. Attracting and retaining top educators will ultimately enhance student outcomes, foster academic excellence, and promote a culture of continuous improvement. Investing in teacher development is crucial for long-term success. By recognizing the value of educators and providing them with the resources they need to thrive, schools can empower the next generation of leaders, innovators, and citizens.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources:

In Punjab, private schools with heavy tuition fee may avail good infrastructure and provide better resources. But low-cost private schools usually run in resource-constrained settings with inadequate infrastructure and educational resources. Many of these schools lack appropriate facilities like playgrounds, libraries, and laboratories and operate in cramped, compact rooms. The exposure of students to a variety of learning situations may be hampered by the lack of contemporary educational technologies and instructional resources. The regulatory framework and oversight of private schools face considerable issues. There is not an effective system for monitoring and regulating private schools and this system creates results as a lack of transparency and accountability in private schools in Pakistan. This also increases chances for unqualified individuals to establish schools without achieving necessary educational criteria, endangering educational quality and student well-being. (Faisal et al., 2016)

Regulation and Policy Challenges:

Regulatory obstacles present serious difficulties for Punjab's affordable private schools. Regulations that are unclear or onerous can result in higher compliance expenses and bureaucratic red tape, which makes it challenging for these institutions to operate effectively. Furthermore, ambiguous government regulations and inconsistent enforcement may provide these institutions legal ambiguity, which would hinder their expansion and development. Private schools in Pakistan have been chastised for indulging in exploitative practises such as random fee increases, hidden charges, and the sale of overpriced textbooks and uniforms. These practises place a financial burden on parents and impede access to high-quality education. In the absence of effective laws and control, private schools might take advantage of limited alternative options of the parents and negatively spoiling the educational possibilities of pupils.

Socio-Cultural Challenges:

Low-cost private schools could experience social stigma and unfavourable judgements from some societal groups, notwithstanding their contributions to increasing educational access. Critics claim that these institutions may put profit over student learning or operate with insufficient control. It can be difficult for these schools to change these opinions and build trust in the neighbourhood. Private schools in Pakistan encounter socio-cultural difficulties that affect their functioning. These issues include resistance to co-education, inadequate representation of female students and teachers, and a lack of integration of extracurricular activities and sports into

the curriculum. Such problems have an impact on the overall educational experience and hinder the holistic development of the students.

Learning Crisis and Need for an Educational Foundation:

The education system of Pakistan, like that of many other developing countries, is experiencing a learning crisis. Despite enormous attempts to boost enrolment rates, a significant proportion of pupils in Punjab, Pakistan, are failing to acquire the fundamental basic abilities of reading, writing, and mathematics. By investigating the learning crisis in Punjab and emphasising the importance of establishing a foundation dedicated to enhancing learning outcomes. We can shed light on the importance of such a foundation in improving education in the region by evaluating the problems and potential solutions. (Khan et al., 2016)

Effective solutions require a multi-faceted approach:

By adopting these strategies, Punjab can overcome the learning crisis and create a robust education system, empowering future generations to thrive. In this severe situation, Foundations play a critical role in tackling these difficulties and improving the education sector. A foundation can operate as a change agent by undertaking projects that improve marginalised groups' access to quality education. The foundation aspires to bridge the education gap and ensure that even impoverished students have access to great education through collaborations with private institutions and financial aid to qualified students. The foundation's initiatives can assist reshape the education environment in Punjab, fostering inclusivity and creating a brighter future for the region's young, by taking a comprehensive strategy and holding private schools accountable for maintaining high standards.

Establishment of Punjab Education Foundation:

Recognising the crucial role that education plays in the socioeconomic development of the state, the government of Punjab took decisive action by realising the need for a strong foundation to assist the education sector. The Punjab Education Foundation was created in response to the rising demand for high-quality education and the need to close the gap between public and private educational institutions. The foundation was established with the goal of ensuring that all people, particularly those from underprivileged and marginalised groups, have access to high-quality education. On December 17, 1991, Mian Manzoor Wattoo, the Punjab's then-Chief Minister, made an official announcement about the formation of the Punjab Education Foundation. Its main goal from the beginning was to transform the educational landscape by advocating for an inclusive, equitable, and cost-effective educational system. PEF aims to give low-income families the resources and support they need to send their kids to private schools across the province. The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, which sets the Punjab Education Foundation's approach apart from more traditional educational interventions, is one of its basic components. By working with private schools under this creative approach, the government ensures a steady flow of financing for high-quality education. By combining the knowledge and resources of the public and private sectors, this cooperation has successfully raised the bar for education as a whole. (Rizvi, 2016)

The foundation is essential in assessing and monitoring partner schools' performance to make sure that academic standards are being upheld. Only universities satisfying the necessary requirements are involved in the programme, according to the PEF's transparent and merit-based partner school selection process. This tactical approach encourages accountability and ensures that financial support is given to the most qualified and deserving schools. The Punjab Education

Foundation has accomplished its goals with amazing accomplishment over the years. It has significantly increased the number of kids enrolling in private schools, particularly those from underprivileged homes. As a result, the foundation has greatly improved the province's literacy rates and levels of educational attainment.

Conclusion:

This research highlights the crucial role of the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) in addressing long-standing weaknesses within Punjab's education system. For decades, neither public nor private schools have been able to ensure equitable and reliable access to quality education. Public schools frequently suffer from issues such as poor infrastructure, limited financial capacity, inadequate teacher preparation, and weak mechanisms of transparency and accountability. These challenges have contributed to persistent gaps in enrolment, retention, and student learning, particularly among disadvantaged communities. At the same time, the expansion of private schools has not translated into universal access, as high fees and inconsistent educational standards continue to exclude a large segment of the population. In this context, PEF has emerged as a significant and innovative institutional response. Through its public-private partnership model, the foundation has introduced a mechanism that draws on the strengths of both sectors while minimizing their limitations. By providing financial support to deserving students from low-income households, PEF has widened access to private schooling for groups that were previously excluded. Its structured monitoring, evaluation, and accountability processes further ensure that partner schools adhere to defined academic standards, thereby contributing to improved teaching and learning practices. Overall, the study concludes that PEF has become a practical and effective strategy for reducing educational disparities in Punjab. Its approach demonstrates how collaborative and well-regulated partnerships can enhance access, improve quality, and support a more inclusive education system. The success of PEF offers valuable insights for policy-makers and serves as a potential model for other regions seeking sustainable solutions to similar educational challenges.

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