



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Empowering Women's Educational Journeys: Navigating Challenges in Pursuit of Higher Education in Dera Ghazi Khan**

**<sup>1</sup>Musarrat Habib\* <sup>2</sup> Laiba Ejaz and <sup>3</sup> Gulshan Fatima Alvi**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Ph. D Scholar, Department of Education, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author:** musarrat.javaidd@ed.uol.edu.pk

**ABSTRACT**

The present study examined the challenges faced by female students in accessing higher education in Dera Ghazi Khan, a marginalised region in Punjab, Pakistan. In such underprivileged areas, women encounter significant barriers, including social, cultural, financial, gender-related, and infrastructural impediments. Employing a mixed-methods research approach, we surveyed 450 students and conducted interviews with 13 teachers from female colleges in Dera Ghazi Khan, selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Quantitative analysis revealed that early marriage, traditional customs, restricted mobility, rural living, and economic constraints significantly obstruct female education. Thematic analysis of teacher interviews highlighted societal norms and the perception of female education as less valuable than male education. Additional challenges include a shortage of educational institutions and teachers, transportation issues, and a lack of awareness about higher education opportunities. The study recommends increasing scholarships, improving transportation, creating job opportunities, and raising awareness to enhance female education in the region.

**KEYWORDS** Cultural Norms, Female Education, Gender Inequality, Higher Education Barriers

**Introduction**

At There is a worldwide agreement on the significance of educating both genders for development. However, some countries do not priorities female education. Despite the widespread recognition of the value of educating girls, around 180 million out of 300 million uneducated children are female (Alvi et al., 2024; Naeem & Dahar, 2016). In underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan, the importance of women's higher education is relatively low (Haider, 2008).

The world confesses that girls who get higher education play a significant role in a country's economic and socio-cultural development. Higher education is a pillar of strength for empowering girls' education in many ways, such as supporting competent females in leading the people and empowering them as shining examples for young girls. It also assists girls in selecting their fields of knowledge either as decision-makers by the impact on policy problems linked with societal, financial, and cultural progress or through their involvement in household life (Shaukat & Pell, 2015).

A nation cannot truly develop until the marginalised groups of society cannot participate equally in every aspect of life (Amjad et al., 2022, a, b). Women's education is essential for long-term progress in any civilisation or nation. Still, history has shown that women have consistently faced inequality and that their access to fundamental rights and opportunities has been disproportionately restricted (González et al., 2020). One of the places where tribal culture exists is in the Punjabi district of Dera Ghazi Khan. In native communities, women have few educational options (Ahmad et al., 2022).

In Pakistan, gender inequality is pervasive, particularly in rural regions. Lower female enrollment in higher education is caused by poverty, domestic work, co-education,

early marriage, and parents' lack of knowledge about higher education (Salik & Zhiyong, 2014). Many studies have been done regarding female students' social, cultural, and domestic problems. However, these studies neglected the issues of female higher education in the most deprived areas of district D.G Khan and the poor physical infrastructure of the female colleges. The government has made some reforms to develop female education in backward areas, such as providing scholarships to females. However, there is still a need to explore the obstacles that females face, especially in higher education; therefore, the current study is designed to explore the barriers female students face in acquiring higher education.

## **Literature Review**

A country's comprehensive development is impossible without equal participation of women in education (Tabassum et al., 2024). It holds that the absence of a bigger proportion of educated and technically skilled women is a major factor in the general underperformance in economic and social advancement in the majority of developing countries, including Pakistan. Females are a massive portion of the population. We cannot build our nation if we cannot educate such a significant portion of our population. Pakistanis' lack of advancement is particularly apparent in terms of female education. In Pakistan, women's education is not given much consideration. People do not educate their daughters or sisters because they believe females burden their fathers and brothers (Chaudhry, 2007).

The study shows that different sociolinguistic and geographic regions, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Afghanistan, consistently experience gender disparity. Education aids girls' empowerment on the social and cultural levels. Unfortunately, females are discouraged from seeking an education that will prepare them for a better-paying job (Chitrakar, 2007).

Involvement in the families, at jobs, or in the household, numerous females are not getting an education. Together with the problem of poverty, there exist strict mindsets and allegories about female education. According to this perspective, educated women could go against accepted social, cultural, and familial norms and harm their families (Rafaeli, 2020).

Marriage frequently appears to be the greatest option for families in deep poverty to protect girls' futures and reduce their financial burden. Marriage of school-aged girls was seen to be the greatest obstacle to achieving higher education and fostering gender equality for females due to the expensive costs of higher education and the notion that girls' potential to make an income is relatively low (Bibi et al., 2023).

UNESCO (2012) describes Pakistan as one country with low literacy rates. According to the Worldwide Human Indicators Database, the literacy rate in Pakistan is 130/141 countries. They considered the female literacy rate and reported that it was much worse than the males. UNICEF (2012) outlines that positive endeavours are needed to build on the female literacy rate to contribute to the modern era's progress (Amjad et al., 2020, 2021, 2023, a, b, c).

Naz and Ashraf (2020) stated that aside from sociocultural restrictions, there are also economic ones, such as the economic dependence of women on males in society; this further lowers the status of women in terms of education because women are not allowed to participate in the economic realms of life that men earn. Similarly, it is believed that the main precipitating elements contributing to women's deprivation are pervasive poverty, low family income every month, and desires for male family members to pursue higher education. In terms of empowering women through education, the political system, policy-making, and governmental function are also weaker, which makes women more dependent than men.

Mehmood et al. (2018) conducted a study to explore the socio-cultural challenges to higher education of women in Pakistan. The data was obtained through a questionnaire and feedback from 601 respondents. The study concluded that in Pakistan, women are an underprivileged part of society. Although numerous policies for female education have been announced by the government in the last few years, due to poor implementation, all became useless. The scarcity and distance of educational institutions and lack of transportation facilities restrict females from acquiring higher education. Distance impedes female education because it increases the expenses of transport. Traditional and outdated cultural standards of society are also obstacles to girls' higher education. Less privileged people are unable to afford female higher education. They cannot bear the expenses of books, fees, and transport, depicting poverty hindering girls' higher education. Further, the study stated that gender inequity is the reason that deprived females to enrol in higher education. Child marriage is the factor that damages female education as in backward areas, instead of education, the preference of parents is a marriage of their daughter. As a result, it is tough for females to get higher education and to become literate people in society.

The main barrier to higher-level continuing education is financial limitations (Tabbasam et al., 2023). Women cannot enrol in most higher education institutions, including colleges and universities, because they are co-educational. Some families restrict girls from pursuing higher education. Male teachers' education of female students is prohibited in remote areas. Girls also have everyday household tasks to do in addition to their education. Most parents prohibit their girls from going outside because they are worried about their mobility (Ashraf, 2019; Qureshi et al., 2023).

The international report asserts that the education system of Pakistan is immensely underdeveloped, and due to a lack of economic resources, it is also in its worst condition. Pakistan's population has one of the lowest levels of education globally, which is insufficient given the nation's economic strength and potential. This issue includes a low budget for education, political unrest, corruption, a lack of control, and poor curriculum. As a result, people distrust the government and have faith in the private sector, even when the impoverished cannot access it. Despite the fact that most people live in rural regions, the majority of private schools are found in urban centres. Development challenges related to the gender gap and the divides between the rich and the poor are essential. As a result, Pakistan still has the lowest literacy rate (Benz, 2012).

Economic issues are constantly and heavily influencing the education industry. Poverty restricts families and nations from investing in education, a significant factor in the low literacy rate due to the worse economic conditions. Pakistan has the lowest GDP expenditure on education (2% of GDP). As the nation's economy is mainly rural, the majority of the population relies on agriculture for a living. Owners in this industry, however, are powerful and wealthy. They pay the underpaid workers cheap salaries and have confined wealth in their own hands. Due to these laws, most residents of the county's rural districts experience economic disparity. Consequently, the low income and lack of economic resources stem from poor people enrolling their younger folks in proper education (Khan et al., 2015).

Because of fewer institutions, there are inadequate amenities almost all over the country. Inadequate administration and a teacher shortage have decreased the quantity and quality of female education, especially in rural and distant areas of the country. The government's lack of investment in women's education is another significant cause and obstacle in the country. These elements include the non-enforcement of the regulation requiring female students to attend educational institutions, gender discrimination, exorbitant fees, and other educational expenses (Somani, 2017).

Female education is hampered by several factors, particularly in rural areas, including gender inequity, racism, dearth of resources, distances, physical

limitations, cultural barriers, and economic restrictions. The public confronts several problems due to inadequate funding and poor resource management. These problems also include lack of education, high private college tuition and related costs, a failure to enforce compulsory education, poor infrastructure, instruction of educational institutions, teacher absences, a shortage of qualified teachers, and difficulties sending girls to school due to external factors like child labour, gender bias, early marriage, and insecurity (Sajjad, 2018).

The majority of developed nations have witnessed substantial increases in the percentage of female literacy in recent years, and women participate with men in all facets of life in these countries. The output of women significantly contributes to the nation's socioeconomic development. In underdeveloped countries, especially in South Asia, gender discrimination is a widespread issue that negatively impacts the majority of women, so in these countries, the situation is different. Therefore, it is recommended that society as a whole must be aware of the value of girls' education (Singh & Rabindranath, 2020).

Bandiera et al. (2019) found that the concept of care is generally connected with the role of females in our society, besides the excessive burden of society and expectations. They regularly fulfil their responsibilities as domestic workers while also dealing with prejudice when trying to get the facilities they need. Women suffer hindrances and male dominance in society, and education is the initial phase in helping them overcome these challenges. Because of these issues, females are facing economic difficulties. Technological innovations can facilitate them and provide equal education opportunities (Amjad et al., 2024, a, b, c; Shafqat & Amjad, 2024).

Due to several factors, including socioeconomic disadvantage and gender bias, the female literacy rate is low in Pakistan. Parents see girls' education as a financial loss since they believe that women will one day leave the family after marriage. Parents are, therefore, more likely to educate only their boys. For education, females suffer domestic violence at home. They fight for their rights independently; their families do not motivate and assist them. Girls must overcome several socioeconomic obstacles in order to succeed in their studies and future careers, including parental employment, family income, and extreme perceptions towards female education. Because of the co-educational system, it is difficult for women to get an education. As a result, it is recommended that various stakeholders inform people and make them aware of the value of female education (Fatima et al., 2018).

Pakistan has seen a significant advancement in women's education in recent years. Women succeed academically and assume several responsibilities in various disciplines at all levels. They became well-known and successful in all fields that were previously considered to be limited to males. Unfortunately, gender inequality in families and society impedes this development process, as this relatively low figure shows. Most families and community members think having a family and getting married is better than returning for education (Malik & Nawaz, 2016).

Unterhalter et al. (2014) reported that the theories asserted that the standards of society and values make the public's point of view about female education, politics, and women's involvement in institutions. The leading control of men and inequity from the family in the distribution of properties make females backward and break the supreme rights of women in all aspects of life. This inequity is the reason for the low female literacy rate. The change theory proposes a few solutions to solve the problems with the help of resources such as educational institutions, transport, and new policies that must be made to eradicate unfairness for females in education and scholarships. The government should discourage those obstacles and social norms that deprive women of their rights.

Ali et al. (2015) found that in one of the backward areas of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan, females are suffering through tough times for education. People differentiate females from family to society. The leading behaviour of patriarchal families constantly props up their

boys in all fields of life. There is a huge difference between male and female literacy rates. Females face trouble getting an education, such as long distances to schools and expenditure on education. The low income of parents, early marriage, and household management are reasons that prevent girls from getting higher education. It is determined from the above factors that girls still suffer from various problems with education. The research study concluded that scarcity of transport, long distance of educational institutions, costs for education, domestic work, outdated customs, and poverty obstruct female education (Ali et al., 2015).

Ahmad et al. (2022) reported that due to many social, Cultural, and economic barriers, most of Pakistan's female population could not enrol in higher education, which is a big problem for the country. Most women are prohibited from seeking higher education by the patriarchal society. Due to social and cultural restrictions, women cannot pursue higher education. In order to achieve a respectable social status, parents want their daughters to pursue higher education. However, significant obstacles to higher education include a lack of opportunities, patriarchy, restrictions on women's movement, veil (Pardah), early marriage, and the high cost of public transport. Besides their challenges, including long distances and a lack of awareness about higher education, women are getting higher education.

Jamshaid (2020) conducted a study in Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, to investigate female students' restrictions in getting an education by adopting a quantitative research method. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data from 400 females. The findings of the study showed that due to the patriarchal structure, the majority of women were unable to pursue higher education. Parents acknowledged that their daughters should pursue higher education, but they could not provide them with the resources they need to do so. Parents wanted to educate their daughters equally for a decent status in society but could not afford it due to poverty and many other problems. The main findings indicated that women face numerous obstacles to pursuing higher education, including large distances, veils (purdah), a lack of awareness of higher education, home duties, early marriage, and security-related challenges.

Aftab et al. (2023) explored cultural barriers female students face in obtaining higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan. The nature of the study was quantitative, and a survey was conducted to gather data through a questionnaire. The study investigated how families might encourage female education in tribal areas. Parents play an essential role in encouraging girls' education. The study's second goal is to analyse the difficulties girls in tribal regions experience in getting an education. According to the study, there are several significant barriers to female higher education, including a lack of low-quality education, early marriage, a shortage of female teachers, the unavailability of female institutions, a scarcity of fundamental infrastructure, and untrained teachers. The study further concluded that obstacles to female education also include a dearth of literacy programs, illiterate mothers, and inadequate school monitoring. The reason for the low incidence of female literacy in tribal people is that there are not enough facilities and educational institutions, and most crucially, the state has not done enough to ensure that tribal women have access to their fundamental rights and good education. The cultural barriers Faced by females in obtaining higher education in tribal areas of Pakistan should be reduced by using awareness programs.

## **Methodology**

A mixed-method research approach was used to find the challenges female students face in acquiring higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan. Surveying graduate and postgraduate students from district D G Khan colleges collected quantitative data. Female college teachers were interviewed to get in-depth information about the challenges faced by female students in the acquisition of higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan. The

population of the study was all female colleges in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan. According to the Higher Education Department (2022), eight (8) female colleges are in the Dera Ghazi Khan district. In these colleges, a total of 9131 students are enrolled. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to collect data from students of female colleges in the D G Khan district. Five percent (5%) of 9131 students, i.e., 450 from all-female colleges of district Dera Ghazi Khan, were the study's sample.

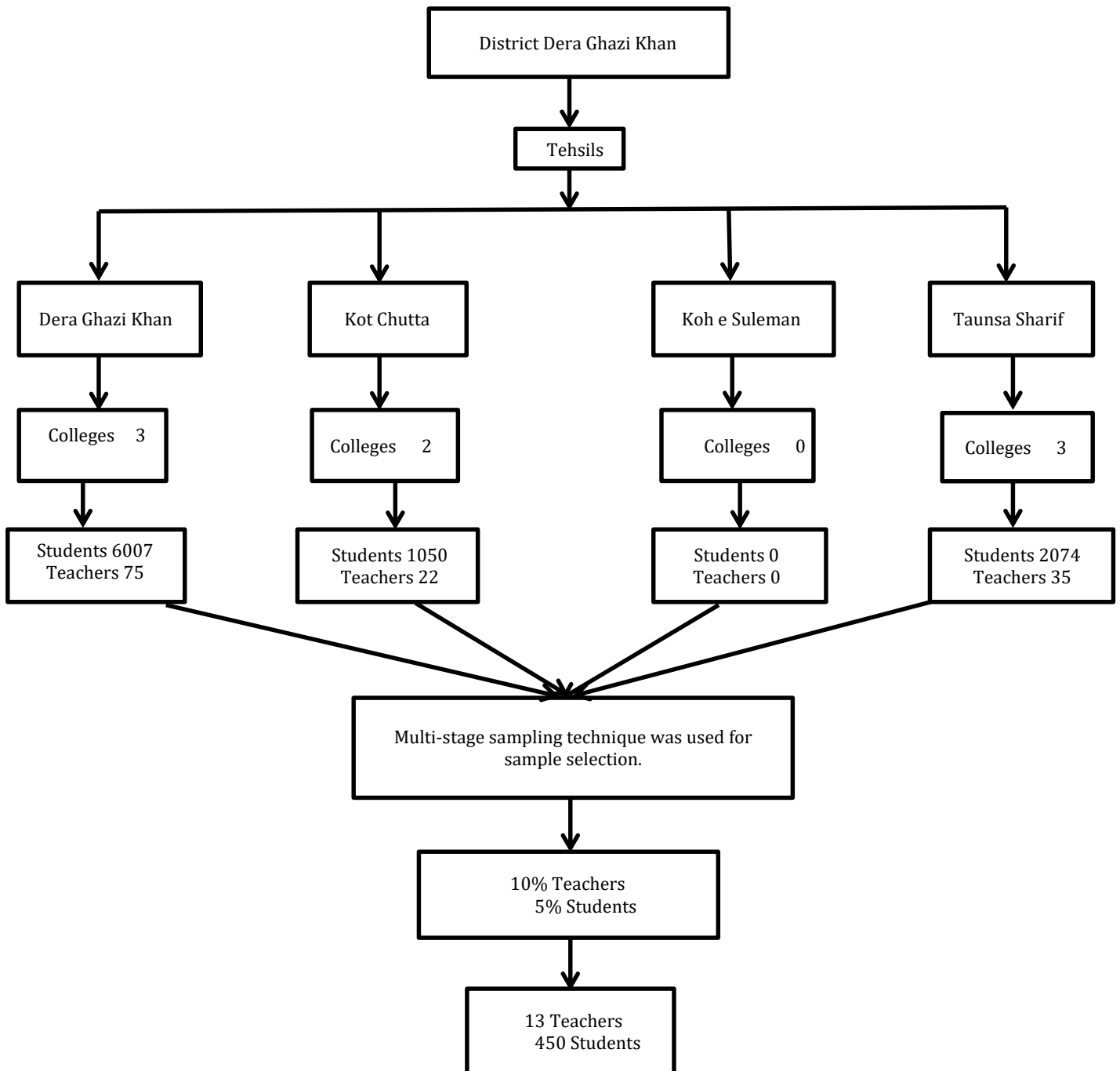


Figure 1 Sampling Framework

The study instruments were a self-developed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the teachers developed by the researchers. The questionnaire's reliability was .813. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and an independent sample t-

test. The data collected from interviews underwent qualitative analysis using thematic analysis techniques.

## Result and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Scores of Female Students' Perception of Socio-Cultural Barriers**

Sr	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)			
1	The early marriage restricts higher education.	171(38)	203(45.1)	36(8)	25(5.6)	15(3.3)	4.09	.98
2	Education will motivate them to demand appropriate property rights, so higher education less supports females.	120(26.7)	188(41.8)	69(15.3)	60(13.3)	13(2.9)	3.76	1.07
3	The social values create Problems for females are higher.	153(34)	218(48.4)	44(9.8)	32(7.1)	3(.7)	4.08	.88
4	Long-distance educational institutions cause hurdles to female higher education.	168(37.3)	194(43.1)	46(10.2)	25(5.6)	17(3.8)	4.05	1.02
5	The teacher shortage is one reason for the low literacy rate among female students.	137(30.4)	151(33.6)	94(20.9)	60(13.3)	8(1.8)	3.78	1.07
6	Old traditional customs create difficulties for female higher education.	176(39.1)	172(38.2)	54(12.0)	44(9.8)	4(.9)	4.05	.99
7	Female mobility for education is considered unethical.	111(24.7)	182(40.4)	83(18.4)	48(10.7)	26(5.8)	3.68	1.13
9	Females are considered insecure while going for higher education.	115(25.6)	170(37.8)	56(12.4)	56(12.4)	53(1.8)	3.53	1.31
10	Living in a rural setting is the reason for the problems of getting higher education.	155(34.4)	230(51.1)	33(7.3)	18(4)	14(3.1)	4.10	.92

Table 1 indicates the female students' responses to sociocultural barriers to acquiring higher education in District D G Khan. The responses are given in percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Scores of Female Students' Perception of Economic Barriers**

Sr No	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)			
12	Parents cannot bear the expenses of female higher education.	120(26.7)	188(41.7)	81(18)	53(11.8)	8(1.8)	3.80	1.03
13	Female education is considered non-returnable.	92(20.4)	185(41.1)	64(14.2)	93(20.7)	16(3.6)	3.54	1.13
14	Due to financial limitations parents prefer boy's education over girls.	149(33.1)	190(42.2)	52(11.6)	52(11.6)	7(1.5)	3.94	1.02
15	Well-off families allow their daughters to pursue higher education.	153(34)	207(46)	64(14.2)	21(4.7)	5(1.1)	4.05	.875
16	Financial problems are the only obstacle to female higher education.	115(25.6)	146(32.4)	104(23.1)	61(13.6)	24(5.3)	3.59	1.16

Table 2 indicates the female students' responses to economic barriers to acquiring higher education in District D G Khan. The responses are given in percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Table 3**  
**The Descriptive Score for Female Students' Perception of Lack of Sufficient Facilities and Physical Infrastructural Barriers**

Sr No	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)			
17	The lack of educational institutions is a major hurdle to women's higher education.	124(27.6)	203(45.1)	66(14.7)	37(8.2)	20(4.4)	3.83	1.06
18	The lack of college classrooms is a major problem in female higher education.	117(26)	134(29.8)	67(14.9)	98(21.8)	34(7.5)	3.45	1.29
19	Classrooms with proper are not available,	171(38)	148(32.9)	44(9.8)	81(18)	6(1.3)	3.88	1.14

	especially for the research students.							
20	Due to the unavailability of Proper transportation, females face problems.	155(34.4)	225(50)	44(9.8)	23(5.1)	3(.7)	4.12	.832
21	Parents are reluctant to permit their daughters to attend college due to poor transportation.	130(28.9)	225(50)	58(12.9)	32(7.1)	5(1.1)	3.98	.897
22	Computer lab facilities are low.	208(46.2)	162(36)	25(5.6)	48(10.7)	7(1.5)	4.15	1.03

Table 3 indicates the female students' responses about the lack of sufficient facilities and physical infrastructural barriers to acquiring higher education in District D G Khan. The responses are given in percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Table 4**  
**The Descriptive Score for Female Students' Perception of Gender Difference and Patriarchal Family Issues**

Sr No	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
		F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)			
23	Preference given to sons leads to the low participation of females in higher education.	125(27.8)	203(45.1)	62(13.8)	58(12.9)	2(.4)	3.87	.978
24	There is gender inequality in getting higher education.	122(27.1)	220(48.9)	67(14.9)	36(8)	5(1.1)	3.93	.915
25	The patriarchal family system creates issues for females to get access to higher education.	107(23.8)	219(48.7)	81(18)	37(8.2)	6(1.3)	3.85	.920
26	Parents are hesitant to educate females because they are likely to use their education in the future.	75(16.7)	197(43.8)	82(18.2)	79(17.5)	17(3.8)	3.52	1.08
27	Occurrence of Discrimination between daughters and sons creates issues in female higher education.	88(19.6)	188(41.8)	77(17.1)	86(19.1)	11(2.4)	3.57	1.08
28	Daughters are meant For domestic work only.	86(19.1)	121(26.9)	53(11.8)	106(23.5)	84(18.7)	3.04	1.42
29	Female education is considered unproductive compared to male education.	113(25.1)	186(41.3)	46(10.2)	74(16.4)	31(7)	3.61	1.22
30	Daughters must leave home after marriage, so higher education is considered unimportant.	112(24.9)	125(27.8)	59(13.1)	107(23.8)	47(10.4)	3.33	1.35

Table 4 shows the female students' responses to gender differences and patriarchal family issues regarding acquiring higher education in District D G Khan. The responses are given in percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

**Table 5**  
**Independent Sample t-Test for Comparison of Qualification of Respondents**

Groups	Mean	SD	DF	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Bachelor	113.7	12.47	448	.215	.830
Master	113.4	13.14			



Table 5 revealed that an independent sample t-test was used to find out the difference between the respondents of bachelor's and Master's levels about the challenges faced by female students in the acquisition of higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan. According to the above findings, there is no significant difference between the opinions of graduate and post-graduate students about barriers faced by female students in district Dera Ghazi Khan (DF=448,  $t = .215$ , Sig=.830). The mean of responses of bachelor students is 113.7, and the Standard deviation is 12.47. The mean of master students' responses is 113.4, and the standard deviation is 13.14. This indicated that the responses of both groups were the same. The students of bachelor's and master's levels were in favour of the statement regarding socio-cultural barriers, economic barriers, lack of sufficient facilities and infrastructural barriers, and gender difference and patriarchal family issues.

**Table 6**  
**Independent Sample t-test for Comparison of Rural and Urban Areas of Respondents**

Groups	Mean	SD	DF	t	Sig (2 tailed)
Rural	112.6	12.44	448	-1.53	.126
Urban	114.4	12.97			

Table 6 shows that an independent sample t-test was used to determine the difference between responses from urban and rural areas of district D G Khan. The Mean of rural students' responses was 12.44, and the standard deviation was 12.07. The mean of urban students' responses was 112.7, and the Standard deviation was 12.97 (DF=448,  $t = -1.53$ , Sig=.126), which indicated that there was no significant difference between the perception of students of rural and urban areas regarding barriers faced by female students in the acquisition of higher education in district Dera Ghazi Khan.

## Findings

Qualitative data collected through interviews with female college teachers was analysed through thematic analysis. The data was converted into transcripts, then codes and themes were created.

The main themes that emerged were Females' mobility, lack of awareness, household responsibilities, environment of higher education institutions, economic issues, early marriage, and insecure transport system. All thirteen respondents were labelled as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12 and R13.

According to R3,

*"Environment for girls Education is 60 to 70% safe. Cultural settings and trends matter for female higher education. If a family wants to educate a girl, they arrange security, but if they do not want to, they restrict higher education."*

R2, R3, R4, R5, R7, R8, R11, R12, and R13 believed that females are not allowed to travel alone and that female mobility is dishonourable, which makes it difficult for females to get higher education.

R5 said,

*"Environment is safe and secure for female Education. Security is available for colleges to provide safety to the institutions."*

R6 told,

*"50% safe and 50% not safe because transport is not safe females are facing problems for transport. Most of the females are not allowed to travel because of poor transport. However, inside the institution, the environment is safe and secure."*

R3 said,

*“Early marriage creates a hinder for female higher education because a girl cannot take so many responsibilities during college or university studies. Another thing is, in-laws do not financially support females for higher education.”*

According to R4,

*“Poverty is the main problem for female higher education. Some people are below the line of poverty. They cannot support their daughters for higher education.”*

R1 said,

*“Due to inflation, parents can hardly afford the primary needs of their children, so in these conditions, how can they afford higher education for females.”*

R1 said:

*“For sure, patriarchal families create obstacles as some families support female higher education, but they cannot educate them due to financial issues. They prefer male education because when he earns, it will be beneficial for the family. However, a girl will leave home after marriage, so female higher education is considered non-profitable.”*

R4 said,

*“Transport is a major problem because it is poor and insecure for girls. Safe transport is almost unavailable if available, not for less privileged people because it is expensive and they cannot afford it.”*

## **Discussion**

The study highlights critical barriers that female students face in pursuing higher education. The challenges related to safety perceptions, early marriages, and social barriers like traditional values and rural setups are significant. Economic issues impede female higher education as parents cannot bear the expenses of female higher education; therefore, they prefer boys' education because they think that boys' education is beneficial compared to girls' education. The findings support the results of Jamshaid (2020), who explored the socioeconomic and cultural constraints that deprived females of higher education, Limitations on women's mobility in society, long distance, veil, early marriage, economic issues, and the cost of public transportation are significant barriers to pursuing higher education.

The study's findings revealed that the consensus among respondents regarding the significant impact of insufficient facilities and infrastructural barriers on female higher education is a critical finding. The lack of educational institutions, transport facilities, and necessary resources like computers and labs creates substantial hurdles for female students. Addressing these infrastructural gaps is essential for promoting equitable access to quality higher education for female students in the region. The results of this study aligned with the findings of Aftab et al. (2023) determined that major barriers to female higher education include a lack of basic infrastructure, the absence of girls' educational institutions, a shortage of female teachers, poor quality instruction, a lack of supervision, and early marriage. Gender differences and the patriarchal system prove to be the main hurdles to female higher education as parents prefer boys' education because they are of the view that female higher education is non-returnable as they leave home after marriage. The results of current findings are supported by the study of Ali et al. (2015). Females face discrimination from family to society. The patriarchal system's prominent

behaviour constantly promotes their sons in all aspects of life. There exists a literacy gap between males and females.

### **Conclusion**

The study's findings highlight several significant social barriers that hinder female education, including early marriage, social values, conservative culture, old traditional customs, living in rural areas, and the distance to educational institutions. These factors collectively contribute to the challenges girls and women face in accessing and pursuing higher education. The study's conclusions highlight additional barriers to female higher education, such as the perception of female mobility as unethical, the fear of property rights demands, and the challenges posed by living in rural areas. These factors further underscore the complex social and cultural obstacles girls and women face in pursuing higher education. The study's findings emphasise the significant impact of economic factors on female higher education. Poverty creates hurdles as parents often struggle to afford the expenses associated with higher education for their daughters. There is a prevailing perception that female education is not as financially beneficial as boys' education, leading to a preference for investing in boys' education. However, it is noted that well-off families are more supportive of their daughters' education. Financial challenges emerge as a prominent obstacle to girls and women pursuing higher education.

Perception of students about the lack of sufficient facilities and infrastructural barriers showed that these are major obstacles to female education (Ong et al., 2024). For research students, proper facilities are not available in the classrooms. Furthermore, insufficient transport facilities also provide a valid reason for parents to stop their daughters for higher education.

Gender differences and patriarchal family issues create problems for female higher education. According to the study, parents prefer boys' education as female higher education is considered non-profitable, so boys' education is preferred.

The study found no significant difference between the perceptions of graduate and postgraduate female students regarding the challenges female students face in acquiring higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan. It also revealed no significant difference between the perceptions of rural and urban students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the recommendations need to address various aspects of the challenges faced by female students in accessing higher education. Allocating more female scholarships can directly support economically disadvantaged students. Improving transport facilities can help alleviate the long-distance barrier to educational institutions. Providing job opportunities can empower women economically and socially. Conducting awareness campaigns can change societal attitudes and promote the value of female education. These efforts together can contribute significantly to enhancing opportunities for female higher education in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan.

**References**

- Aftab, M. J., Ali, H. H., & Bashir, R. (2023). The Cultural Barriers Faced by Women in Acquiring Higher Education in Tribal Areas of Pakistan: A Case of Dera Ghazi Khan. *IUB Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 82-94.
- Ahmad, S., Afzal, F., Jamshaid, S., & Rahman, Z. U. (2022). Female higher education in the perspective of economic, social, and cultural barriers in developing economies reference to Pakistan. *Webology*, 19(3), 3225-3234.
- Ali, R., Jumani, N. B., & Ejaz, S. (2015). Higher education of women In Pakistan: Promises, achievements and barriers. *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan*, 22 (2), 59-75.
- Alvi, G. F., Habib, M., & Sittar, K. (2024). Investigating Task-Oriented Leader's behavior in Public and Private Universities to Establish the Structure of Quality Improvement. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(2), 887-895
- Amjad, A. I., Arshad, L., & Saleem, Z. (2024). Mediation Effect of Students' Creativity on the Relationship between Leadership on Academic Success: Well-Being as Moderator. *Educational Research and Innovation (ERI)*, 4(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.61866/eri.v4i1.60>
- Amjad, A. I., Aslam, S., & Hamedani, S. S. (2024b). Exploring Structural Injustices in School Education: A Study on Intergenerational Repair. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 9, p. 1395069). Frontiers. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1395069>
- Amjad, A. I., Aslam, S., & Tabassum, U. (2024c). Tech-infused classrooms: A comprehensive study on the interplay of mobile learning, ChatGPT and social media in academic attainment. *European Journal of Education*, e12625. <https://doi.org/10.1111/EJED.12625>
- Amjad, A. I., Batool, N., & Tabassum, U. (2023). Modulating inclusive education in early childhood: The role of teachers' attitude and self-efficacy in shaping their awareness and readiness. *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education*, 7(2), 55-76. <https://doi.org/10.30971/jecce.v7i1.886>
- Amjad, A. I., Habib, M., & Saeed, M. (2022b). Effect of brain-based learning on students' mathematics performance at the elementary level. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 4(03), 38-51. <https://doi.org/10.52567/pjsr.v4i03.684>
- Amjad, A. I., Habib, M., & Tabbasam, U. (2024a). Effect of Brain-Based Learning on Students' Extrinsic Motivation to Learn Mathematics: Introducing Neuroscience to Schools. *Journal of Sustainable Education*1(1), 1-12. <https://journals.uol.edu.pk/jse/article/view/2617>
- Amjad, A. I., Habib, M., Tabbasam, U., Alvi, G. F., Taseer, N. A., & Noreen, I. (2023a). The impact of brain-based learning on students' intrinsic motivation to learn and perform in mathematics: A neuroscientific study in school psychology. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 16(1), 111-122. <https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2023.318>

- Amjad, A. I., Iqbal, H., & Manzar-Abbas, S. S. (2020). Teachers' awareness about inclusive education in Punjab: A descriptive enquiry. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4(1), 161-178. <http://journal.aiou.edu.pk/journal1/index.php/JIE/article/view/419/106>
- Amjad, A. I., Ishaque, M. M., & Rafique, M. U. (2023b). Unravelling the psychological underpinnings of classroom dynamics: A study on teacher-student interaction. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 239-250. [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023\(4-III\)24](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2023(4-III)24)
- Amjad, A. I., Malik, M. A., & Tabassum, U. (2021). Ready to accept? Investigating Pakistani school teachers' readiness for inclusive education. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(9). 7442-7456.
- Amjad, A. I., Tabassum, U., & Habib, M. (2023c). Uncovering teachers' concerns and multi-dimensional attitude towards inclusive education: Who's included and who's excluded. *Journal of Contemporary Trends and Issues in Education*, 3(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.55628/jctie.v3i1.71>
- Amjad, A. I., Tabbasam, U., & Abbas, N. (2022a). The effect of brain-based learning on students' self-efficacy to learn and perform mathematics: Implication of Neuroscience into school psychology. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(3), 683-695. [http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-III\)60](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-III)60)
- Amjad, A. I., Tabbasam, U., & Ara, N. (2022). Neuroscientific study on the effect of brain-based learning on students' intrinsic motivation to learn mathematics. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 728-742. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022\(3-II\)69](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022(3-II)69)
- Ashraf, S. (2019). *Parents' views regarding their children's education and future in Pakistan* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).
- Bandiera, O., Buehren, N., Goldstein, M., Rasul, I., & Smurra, A. (2019). The economic lives of young women in the time of Ebola: lessons from an empowerment program. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, (8760).
- Benz, A. (2012). The Crisis of School Education in Pakistan of Government's Failure and New Hopes in the Growing Private Education Sector. *Internationales Asienforum*, 43(3-4), 240-241.
- Chaudhry, I. S. (2007). Gender inequality in education and economic growth: case study of Pakistan. *Pakistan Horizon*, 60(4), 81-91.
- Chitrakar, R. (2007). Overcoming barriers to girl's education in South Asia. United Nations child fund. Education for all. *The Regional Office of South Asia Nepal*.
- Fatima, H., Malik, Z. U. A., & Fatima, A. (2018). Education Barriers for Females in Pakistani Society. *International Journal for Social Studies*, 4(1), 2455-3220.
- González, G. E., Fontana, J. R., & Azcárate, P. (2020). Education for sustainability and the
- Haider, S. Z. (2008). Challenges in higher education: Special reference to Pakistan and South Asian developing countries. *Nonpartisan Education Review*, 4(2).

- Jamshaid, S. (2020). Socio-Economic and cultural constraints in higher education of females in Pakistan: (A Case Study of Dera Ghazi Khan). *Journal of Statistics Computing and Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(2), 37-51.
- Khan, M. Z., Rehman, S., & Rehman, C. A. (2015). Education and income inequality in Pakistan'. *Management & Administrative Science Review*, 4(1), 134-45.
- Malik, Z. U. A., Nawaz, A. (2016). Female education problems in Pakistan. *Journal of educational science and research*, 6(1), 1-4.
- Mehmood, S., Chong, L., & Hussain, M. (2018). Females higher education in Pakistan: An analysis of socio-economic and cultural challenges. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(6), 379-397.
- Naeem, T., & Dahar, M. A. (2016). Investigation of problems faced by female students at higher education level. *Sci.Int. (Lahore)*, 28(2),1997-2000.
- Naz, A., & Ashraf, F. (2020). The relationship between higher education and women empowerment in Pakistan. *UMT Education Review*, 3(2), 65-84.
- Ong, D. J., Aslam, S., & Amjad, A. I. (2024). Interactive Tablets: Catalyzing Engaged Science Learning in English Instruction. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(5), 413-423. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n5p413>
- Qureshi, N. S., Iqbal, M. Z., & Amjad, A. I. (2023). Revitalizing Ancient Tales: Unleashing the Impact of Digital Storytelling on Self-Awareness and Transformation of Aspiring Teachers. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 7(4), 458-471. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023\(7-IV\)42](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023(7-IV)42)
- Rafaeli, T. (2020). The link between girls' life skills intervention in emergencies and their return to education post-crisis and prevention of unwanted pregnancies and early marriage. *Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development*. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15274>
- Sajjad, M. (2018). Female Education in Rural Areas of Pakistan: Barriers and Dreams of Parents. *The 28th Foreign Correspondent Report*.
- Salik, M., & Zhiyong, Z. (2014). Gender discrimination and inequalities in higher Education: A case study of rural areas of Pakistan. *Academic Research International*, 5(2), 269-276
- Shafqat, F., & Amjad, A. I. (2024). Examining Students' Perceptions, Experiences, and Ethical Concerns about Using ChatGPT for Academic Support: A Phenomenological Study. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 8(2), 443-455. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024\(8-II\)36](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2024(8-II)36)
- Shaukat, S., & Pell, W. A. (2015). Personal and social problems faced by women in higher education. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2), 101-109.
- Singh, A. K., & Rabindranath, M. (2020). Gender divide in education in India: a critical study based on functionalist theory of education. *Journal of Critical Review*, 7(2), 2394-5125.

- Somani, T. (2017). Importance of educating girls for the overall development of society: a global perspective. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 7(1), 125–139.
- sustainable development goals: pre-service teacher's perceptions and knowledge. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7741. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187741>
- Tabassum, U., Qiang, X., Abbas, J., Amjad, A.I., & Al-Sulaiti, K.I. (2024). Students' help-seeking mediates the relationship between happiness and self-strength: a comparative study on Chinese and Pakistani adolescents, *Kybernetes*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-09-2023-1706>
- Tabbasam, U., Amjad, A. I., Ahmed, T., & Qiang, X. (2023). Comparison of self-strength, seeking help and happiness between Pakistani and Chinese adolescents: a positive psychology inquiry. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion* 25(3), 389-402. <https://doi.org/10.32604/ijmhp.2023.024130>
- Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Graham, M. E., Parkes, J., & Saito, M. (2014). Interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality: Education rigorous literature review. *Department for International Development*.