



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Constitutional Pledges, Ground Realities and Horizontal Inequalities  
for Education in South Punjab, Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Constitution of Pakistan is a comprehensive document, that guarantees fundamental human rights to all Pakistanis. However, despite the guarantees the constitution provides, Horizontal Inequalities and disparities remain rampant in Pakistan. Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan guarantees free and universal education to all children aged 5 to 16 but with abysmal levels of literacy in areas of high absolute poverty and deprivation, education remains low on the list of priorities. This research explores the Horizontal Inequalities and disparity in education in three Saraiki ethnicity majority districts in South Punjab through discourse analysis of secondary data acquired from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, in light of Constitutional guarantees. It also takes a deep dive into the reasons why people may consider education of their children a "non-priority" by taking first-hand accounts through in-depth interviews with respondents with one or more children out of school through qualitative thematic analysis. The results indicate that due to the lack of implementation of Article 25(A), ethnic Saraikis experience high levels of inequalities in education. Furthermore, it was found that poverty and lack of resources were the reasons behind low enrollment and dropout rates for the respondents.

**KEYWORDS** Article 25(A), Horizontal inequalities, Education, Deprivation

**Introduction**

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan is an all-encompassing document that provides an outline of the rights, responsibilities and duties of each citizen in Pakistan. From defining the laws to the consequences of not doing so, the Constitution makes no distinction for any characteristic beyond one's control including gender, caste, creed, color, ethnicity or religion (Constitution, 1973). Despite the Constitution being an ideal document, the lapse between policy and reality is too great to ignore. This situation is not distinct to Pakistan alone. Globally, levels of inequalities are continuing to rise to unprecedented extents, widening the divide between the rich and the poor and the haves and the have-nots (Vieira, 2012). In Pakistan as well, these inequalities are manifested at both economic and societal levels, reverberating through each aspect of human life, particularly impacting the vulnerable and the marginalized in socio-economic aspects.

**Understanding Horizontal and Vertical Inequalities**

Since the beginning of contemporary human history, inequalities have been a consistent part of human life across the world (Milanovic, 2016). Beginning from the basic social stratification that differentiated between the wealthy and the poor through categories like the Aristocracy and the Peasantry or the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat (Kaya, 2008). With time the stratification became more nuanced, particularly instigated by the Industrial Revolution. Since then, with the emergence of the middle class, inequalities between and within nations have continued to increase, leading to the distinction we know today as the Global South and the Global North (Firebaugh, 2011). In addition to the inequalities between

nation, inequalities within nations continue to heighten with growing competition over scarce resources.

While enough research has been conducted and a fair amount of evidence has been collected on income and wealth inequality, one dimension that continues to permeate each level of our society, both implicitly and explicitly, is societal inequalities (Hollander, 2000). Societal or social inequalities are the type of inequalities that arise and prevent different sections or groups in a society from accessing opportunities, facilities and goods and services equally (Beck, 2007). Depending on the reasons behind these inequalities, they can be divided into two distinct categories; Horizontal and Vertical Inequalities (Vanneman, 2013). Vertical inequalities are the type of social inequalities that are prevalent between individuals, groups or households based on purely economic metrics, primarily income. In other words, the natural inequality that arises when one individual or household is bringing in more income relative to others, and the resulting increase in standards of living, spending, and savings, are vertical inequalities (Jayaraj, 2006).

Predominantly used to understand the levels of poverty in any area, VIs stem from reasons that are mostly in one's control; simply, the amount of work put in to generate income. However, Horizontal Inequalities are the type of inequalities that arise and persist between groups owing to reasons that are beyond the group's control and associated with their identity, including race, ethnicity, religion or cultural affiliation (Fiske, 2020). These inequalities stemming from reasons beyond one's own control are a major obstacle to the well-being and development of groups as they derive from unchangeable factors, deprive the groups of a fighting chance in an already competitive market, and are reinforced through social consensus. As a result, HIs bring elements of injustice and inequity to societies that further solidify deprivation and underdevelopment for select groups that are already battling vulnerabilities (Canelas, 2018).

## **Literature Review**

### **Horizontal Inequalities for Ethnic Saraikis in Pakistan**

One of the regions existing as a primary example of Horizontal Inequalities (HIs) in Pakistan is South Punjab (Sultan, 2019). This ethnically Saraiki majority region exists as a lone contradiction in an otherwise affluent province; the province with the largest economy in Pakistan, contributing the most to the National GDP (Development, 2023). Punjab province also fares substantially well in all socioeconomic indicators compared to the other three provinces; ranking the best in most indicators. For instance, the overall level of Food Insecurity (Moderate or Severe) in Pakistan is 16.44, the number for Punjab is 15.66, second-lowest in the country. Similarly, although the percentage of households with mobile/internet access in the country stands at 11.75%, the number in Punjab is higher not only than the national average but all other provinces at well, standing at 12.9% (Staff, 2019).

In spite of the overall development of Punjab, its Southern region is home to some of the most intense underdevelopment and socioeconomic indicators in the country; all of which are predominantly home to a Saraiki majority population, (UNDP, 2022). The Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives in 2023 identified the 20 poorest districts in the country. With findings extrapolated from the Multidimensional Poverty Index, Punjab was found to be the province with the least amount of poorest district; 1, while Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa were home to 11, 5 and 3 of the poorest districts in the country (MOPD, 2023). Solidifying the argument for Horizontal Inequalities, the figure revealed that the one poorest district in the province was none other than an ethnically Saraiki district from South Punjab; Rajanpur (Nawab, 2022). Similarly, the overall Poverty Headcount Ratio over time has also been distinctly higher in the South Punjab region with districts Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan and Bahawalpur on the highest end of the spectrum and districts Lahore, Jehlum, Rawalpindi, Gujrat and Sialkot on the lowest end (PPAF, 2018).

The Horizontal Inequalities become further evident upon an observation of historical multidimensional poverty in Punjab. All contemporary analyses and researches reiterate the idea that Saraiki majority districts are home to some of the lowest socioeconomic indicators in the country, in stark contrast to Northern Punjab (Kifayat-Ullah., 2023). For instance, district wise headcount ranks put Rajanpur, Jhang, Layyah, Dera Ghazi Khan and Muzaffargarh, five of the most prominent districts in South Punjab at the lowest end of the rung indicating the highest headcount for multidimensional poverty from 2007-2018 (Nawab, 2022). These inequalities are reflected in a time-series analysis of percentage levels of multidimensional poverty as well. To indicate this, the table given below presents the percentage of Multidimensional Poverty for years 2004-05, 2008-09, and 2014-15, highlighting the three districts with the highest and three with the lowest percentage of multidimensional poverty over the specified years;

**Table 01**  
**Multidimensional poverty index across districts in Punjab**

Year	Area	Highest Poverty (%)	Area	Lowest Poverty (%)
2004-05	Muzaffargarh	79.4	Lahore	15.9
	Rajanpur	77.1	Chakwal	22.4
	D. G. Khan	75.3	Rawalpindi	23.9
2008-09	Muzaffargarh	73.2	Lahore	10.3
	Rajanpur	87.3	Jhelum	8.3
	D. G. Khan	78.6	Rawalpindi	11.6
2014-15	Muzaffargarh	64.8	Lahore	4.3
	Rajanpur	64.4	Jhelum	8.5
	D. G. Khan	63.7	Rawalpindi	7.5

Source: (Environment, Development and Sustainability, 2023)

Table 1 shows the clear disparity in poverty through the Multidimensional poverty index across districts in Punjab. The evidences provided above sufficiently highlight the fact that the South Punjab region has experienced systemic Horizontal Inequalities that have perpetrated multidimensional, acute poverty in the region (Munir, 2020). As a result, despite the overall prosperity of the province relative to the rest of the country, the Southern region continues to experience severe deprivation exacerbated by consistent neglect of the issue and discrimination, keeping the populace trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty throughout history and for years to come.

### **The impact of inequalities and the problem in education**

The prime issue with horizontal inequalities is not even the fact that they are neglected and often not observed or talked about in discussions of development and equality, it is the fact that these inequalities have a vast array of outcomes on society and individuals that reach grave extents, to say the least (Stewart, The Dynamics of Horizontal Inequalities: UNDP Human Development Report, 2016). The most direct and distinct impact of horizontal inequalities is manifested along socioeconomic lines. Among the primary socioeconomic indicators, education is one of the worst impacted indicators whenever and wherever horizontal inequalities are prevalent (Stewart, 2002). Whether it is simply owing to social exclusion, certain groups being ostracized, systemically low access to employment opportunities leading to acute poverty, or the incidence of violent conflict, evidence shows that the prevalence of horizontal inequalities is almost always accompanied by low levels of education (Langer, 2019). The importance of education, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, was highlighted through the Millennium Development Goals at an international level (Sharma, 2014). For the first time in human history, all nations joined hands to achieve a uniform set of goals and objectives related to the development and well-being of humans across the world. Owing to the urgency of the goals, education became a part of a global movement towards development, as nations and governments across the world introduced initiatives, policies and laws to encourage universal education. In

Pakistan, the public and private sectors joined hands to increase awareness about the importance of education, as well as to increase levels of enrolment and literacy across the country, particularly in areas with high levels of underdevelopment and low levels of literacy (Malik, 2010).

### **Material and Methods**

This research is a qualitative research including two primary elements. The analysis of the lapse and disparity in education when it comes to South Punjab relative to the rest of the Punjab province and the seeming failure of efforts to implement Article 25(A) in the region has been carried out through Discourse Analysis based on secondary data published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurements Survey (2019-20). The research compares the progress in education of districts Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan with the Punjab province overall to understand the anomaly in light of Horizontal Inequalities. Additionally, to get an in-depth perspective of the reasons why education of their children is not considered a matter of utmost importance and considered a non-priority, resulting in lower levels of literacy and enrolment, in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen parents. The interviews were based on a structured interview guide containing questions based on developing an understanding of the reasons behind this issue. The respondents for the interviews were all acquired from district Muzaffargarh and consisted of 9 mothers and 6 fathers. The respondents were all acquired from Muzaffargarh city through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. There was no distinction made for gender for the respondents; however, the only criteria for selecting respondents were parents that had either taken their children out of school or had not enrolled them in school to begin with.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Constitutional Guarantees for Education in Pakistan and Article 25(A)**

In line with the universal acknowledgement of education as a fundamental human right, the Pakistani Constitution also recognizes the paramount nature of education; and as a result, provides the guarantee for free, universal education to every child in Pakistan (Khan F. N., 2019). The initial commitment to free and universal education in Pakistan came through Article 37(b) (Part II, Chapter 2) of the Pakistani Constitution (Constitution, 1973). Mentioned in the Principles of Policy, the article stated;

***“The State shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory Secondary Education within minimum possible period.” Article 37 (b), Part II, Chapter 2, Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973.***

Yet despite this commitment, the progress in terms of education remained stagnated, to say the least. While many regions did well and levels of literacy tangibly increased, the lack of urgency remained the issue behind the lack of commitment to holistic and immediate action towards education (Farooq, 2018). Despite the right to education, state expenditure and overall attention remained low; indicated through the meagre portion of the GDP dedicated to achieving the crucial goal of education. The following table highlights the literacy rate, government expenditure on education and portion of GDP spent towards education in Pakistan from the period of 1995 to 2018 (Khan, 2022);

**Table 02**  
**Analysis of overall Literacy, State education expenditure, GDP allocation for Education**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Literacy Rate</b>	<b>Education Expenditure</b>	<b>Percentage of GDP spent on education</b>
1995-96	39.6	42.195	2.817
1999-00	45	54.002	2.611
2003-04	51.6	97.7	1.8
2007-08	56	187.7	2.635

2011-12	58	393.5	2.222
2015-16	58	663.3	2.65
2017-18	58	902.7	2.76

Source: (Farah Khan. et al., 2022)

Table 2 shows that although levels of literacy in the country have risen over time, the overall government expenditure has remained low and has even declined since the year 1995. The data highlights the negligence towards education from 1995-96 to 2017-18 with the literacy rate for the former being 39.6% with 2.817% of the GDP being allocated towards education, and for the latter being 58% with 2.76% of the GDP allocated towards education. Despite the lack of spending by the government, levels of literacy overall have risen in the country over the years. The urgency for this quest and a full-fledged action-based approach towards education was intensified with the Millennium Development Goals; attaching an element of time sensitivity to the end goal of universal education (Ashraf, 2013). It was a combination of these global commitments, human rights charters and a failure to achieve universal education in over six decades that led to the amendment in the Pakistani Constitution that we refer to as the Eighteenth Amendment. Under the Constitution Act, of 2010 (18th Amendment to the Constitution), the Right to Education was made justiciable through the addition of article 25-A (Haroon, 2021). Under this article, the state is obligated to not only make the provision of education compulsory for all but also to provide free education to all children aged 5-16 years, in any manner deemed appropriate by the law. The official statement of the Article 25-A holds (Constitution, 1973);

***“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 5 to 16 years in such a manner as may be determined by law.” Article 25 A, Part-II, Chapter 1, Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973.***

Seemingly containing the same essence as Article 37(b) of the Constitution, the revolutionary thing about the Amendment was that it made it the responsibility of not just the parliament but also the provincial assemblies to ensure the provision of free and universal education for all children, without any distinction for elements that may contribute to horizontal or vertical inequalities (Critelli, 2010). As a direct result of this Amendment impacts were seen reverberating throughout the country towards education including the introduction of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in the Islamabad Capital Territory in 2012, the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2013 and the Baluchistan Compulsory Education Ordinance in 2014.

Since the introduction of Article 25(A) the government has been vocal about the need to implement the Amendment unanimously. The Prime Minister of Pakistan in 2014 vouched for doubling the budget towards education and dedicating 4% of the National GDP towards education; yet, despite this commitment the percentage has dropped to a shocking 1.7% for the fiscal year 2022-23, rising minimally from the 1.4% of the fiscal year 2021-22. Each year the implementation of Article 25(A) is highlighted as an agenda of utmost priority, the determining factor in achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education); however, with over 22 million children currently out of school, 42% government schools functioning without any electricity and 49% and 40% schools lacking functioning toilets and access to suitable/clean drinking water (Taimur, 2017), the achievement of this objective and the implementation of the Article 25(A) seem to be a pipe dream at best.

### **Disparity in Education in Punjab**

South Punjab has long been the unit of analysis for students of poverty and deprivation. An area in the heart of the Punjab province boasting rich, fertile land forming the basis of agriculture in Pakistan, South Punjab has been a hub of economic activity, culture, and civilization. Despite the centralized location and the importance of the region, this part of the province has also been home to a long-standing political movement demanding a new province; dividing Punjab into two entities based solely on ethnic foundations. Whatever implicit political implications there may be to the movement, the

reason for this demand has always been cited as systemic deprivation and exclusion of ethnic Saraikis, the reason for the group’s consistent battle with poverty. Upon closer inspection it becomes evident that the claims are far from ill-founded. For instance, according to a recent report by UNDP, South Punjab is suffering from 2.1 times the multidimensional poverty of the rest of Punjab (Staff U. , 2022). Additionally, the region is also home to 2.2 times the Out of School Children and 16% lowers literacy levels than its neighboring districts constituting the rest of the province. The data provided below has been extracted from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2019-20) and takes a deep dive into the problem of education in three districts of South Punjab, namely Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur, and compares the statistics along a number of indicators with the overall statistics for Punjab and Pakistan;

**Table 03  
Multi-indicator analysis of education in South Punjab**

<b>Population that has ever attended school (Male to Female Ratio)</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Pakistan	60	73	58
Punjab	66	81	58
Muzaffargarh	44	57	31
Dera Ghazi Khan	46	60	31
Rajanpur	40	51	27
<b>Percentage Distribution of Population that has Completed Primary or Higher</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Pakistan	51	60	42
Punjab	56	62	50
Muzaffargarh	34	44	23
Dera Ghazi Khan	36	47	24
Rajanpur	30	39	21
<b>Gross Enrolment Ratio for Government Primary Schools Excluding Katchi (Age 5-9)</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	52	56	48
<b>Punjab</b>	53	54	53
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	43	49	35
<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	52	58	45
<b>Rajanpur</b>	47	53	40
<b>Gross Enrolment Ratio at Middle Level (Age 11-13)</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	63	68	57
<b>Punjab</b>	67	68	66
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	42	48	35
<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	44	53	32
<b>Rajanpur</b>	42	46	35
<b>Gross Enrolment Ratio at Matric Level (Age 14-15)</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	57	63	50
<b>Punjab</b>	65	68	62
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	35	46	22
<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	44	46	41
<b>Rajanpur</b>	41	47	34
<b>Literacy for Population 10 years and older</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	60	70	49
<b>Punjab</b>	64	72	57
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	46	60	32

<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	51	65	36
<b>Rajanpur</b>	42	56	28
<b>Adult Literacy for Population 15 years and older</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	57	68	46
<b>Punjab</b>	61	70	53
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	41	56	25
<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	46	62	32
<b>Rajanpur</b>	37	51	23
<b>Youth Literacy (Age 15-24)</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	72	79	65
<b>Punjab</b>	78	81	75
<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	57	69	44
<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>	61	72	50
<b>Rajanpur</b>	52	60	43

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20.

The table 3 provides a detailed look at the prevailing situation for education in South Punjab relative to the overall level of education in the Punjab province and the levels for Pakistan. The assessment for overall literacy and education at primary and secondary levels has been conducted by analyzing the following indicators;

1. Population that has ever attended school (Male to Female Ratio)
2. Percentage Distribution of Population that has Completed Primary or Higher
3. Gross Enrolment Ratio for Government Primary Schools Excluding Katchi (Age 5-9)
4. Gross Enrolment Ratio at Middle Level (Age 11-13)
5. Gross Enrolment Ratio at Matric Level (Age 14-15)
6. Literacy for Population 10 years and older
7. Adult Literacy for Population 15 years and older
8. Youth Literacy (Age 15-24)

The indicators were chosen because they represent a detailed insight into the levels of literacy as well as the situation for primary and secondary school enrollment. The survey conducted by the PBS took a sample of 37 districts (North and South) in Punjab and mapped out the indicators for education by taking the values for each district. The survey also considered the overall average value for the province and the value for Pakistan for each indicator for a more detailed and comprehensive insight. The data provided above shows that the province of Punjab not only has the highest number of population to have attended school in the country, it is also home to the highest number of people to have completed primary school in the country. The remarkable performance in education in Punjab continues through all the indicators; with performance values significantly higher than the national average. However, the disparities become evident with even a superficial look at the district-wise breakdown. Out of the 37 districts sampled for the survey, there is a clear and unfortunate divide in the prevailing situations for the Saraiki-majority districts of South Punjab and North Punjab. The seriousness of the problem becomes clear when out of 37 districts, districts Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur fare the worst in most indicators. The ranking for the three sample districts in terms of performance for each indicator is presented in the provided table;

**Table 04**  
**District-wise ranking of Education Indicators**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Muzaffargarh</b>	<b>Rajanpur</b>	<b>Dera Ghazi Khan</b>
Population to have ever attended school	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	35 <sup>th</sup>
Primary School Completion	35 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	36 <sup>th</sup>
Gross Enrolment at Primary School Level	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	33 <sup>rd</sup>
Gross Enrolment at Middle School Level	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	35 <sup>th</sup>
Gross Enrolment at Matric Level (Aged 14-15)	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	33 <sup>rd</sup>
Literacy of Children aged 10 and above	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	30 <sup>th</sup>
Adult Literacy	37 <sup>th</sup>	36 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup>
Youth Literacy	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	33 <sup>rd</sup>
Out-of-school Children	36 <sup>th</sup>	37 <sup>th</sup>	33 <sup>rd</sup>

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019-20.

The data presented above through a detailed breakdown of all indicators reiterates and highlights the appalling condition of education in the three ethnically Saraiki districts taken as a unit of analysis for this research. The data not only confirms the assumption that the ethnically Saraiki majority districts are suffering from an intense level of Horizontal Inequalities manifesting in every indicator for education, but also the inherent deprivation experienced relative to other districts in the Punjab province that are not ethnically Saraiki. Among the three chosen districts, district Rajanpur presents appallingly low performance in education faring the worst in all indicators but one. The district to fare the second worst is district Muzaffargarh whereas district Dera Ghazi Khan depicts statistics relatively better than the other two. The intensity of the problem becomes clear upon observing that district Rajanpur has the highest number of Out-of-school Children, Youth Literacy and Literacy of Children aged 10 and above. District Muzaffargarh on the other hand, has the second-highest Out-of-School children, worst levels of Adult Literacy and second worst levels of Literacy of Children aged 10 and above and Youth Literacy. In the midst of the global race for the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the accompanying adoption of Article 25(A) under the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the data makes it obvious that efforts to achieve the mammoth objectives have been ineffective to say the least. With over a decade having passed since the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the ground realities for education represent that efforts at both governmental and non-governmental levels, have failed to create the scale of results that are needed for sustainable education and development in Pakistan. With each passing year, efforts to provide free and universal education and provide equal education to both girls and boys becomes more of a utopian idea than a reality within our grasp, and Horizontal Inequalities continue to heighten further increasing the discrepancies in development experienced by ethnic Saraikis.

### **Thematic Analysis through In-depth Interviews**



Having established that discrepancies in education exist in ethnically Saraiki districts in Punjab owing to Horizontal Inequalities, and represent a clear anomaly existing in the heart of the region with the highest levels of literacy in the country overall, in-depth interviews were conducted to understand the peoples' perspective on the lack of attention to education. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 parents to explore the reasons why parents do not send their children to school. The following themes emerged by analyzing the results of the interviews;

### **Theme 1: Poverty and Lack of Resources**

The most poignant issue that emerged as the reason why parents do not send their children to school was poverty and a lack of resources. The respondents were of the view that despite the free education being provided at public schools, sending children to school is still associated with a large amount of expense ranging from buying uniforms, notebooks, stationery, and transportation to and from school. One of the respondents, a mother working as a domestic worker with three daughters, said;

*"I got married at 16 and became pregnant with my first daughter at 17. After my marriage I had to start working because my husband couldn't work due to his addictions. A lady-lawyer offered me a job. She is the kindest woman I know and my husband is afraid of her too, which is good, so he doesn't beat me. I look at her and wish my daughters would grow up to be like her. I would send my daughters to school if I could; even my husband isn't against it. Unfortunately, we barely have enough money to eat..."*

The respondents also mentioned that over the past few years the levels of poverty have increased substantially and it has become even harder to continue sending their children to school, to the extent that 6 of the 15 parents had to take their children out of school over the past two years. It was expressed by the respondents that their own fates had been much similar to their children. All 9 of the mothers had been denied the right to education with only two having completed primary school. With the option of marriage and the ability to earn through stitching and domestic work, the female respondents cited a lack of resources and acute poverty as their lack of education as well. On the other hand, out of the 6 fathers, three had completed graduation, two had completed intermediate schooling and one had completed middle school. The male fathers also expressed their disappointment at not having the means to afford schooling for their children and noted the irony of having experienced the same circumstances during their childhoods. All respondents expressed that instead of getting better across generations, poverty and the non-priority of education have become even bigger problems than before.

### **Theme 2: The Opportunity Cost of School vs. Work**

Another distinct theme that emerged from the in-depth interviews was that there is a large opportunity cost associated with sending children to school as opposed to sending them to work. The income brought in by a pair of extra hands working can make a substantial difference on a household. All fifteen of the respondents were of the view that as a matter of survival, sending children to work is a much more beneficial move for the family in the short and long term than it is to make a long-term investment of sending their children to school. One of the respondents, a single woman with two sons and a daughter mentioned;

*"My husband died five years ago when my eldest son was 9 and my eldest daughter was 7, and I had a pair of twin sons who were only 2. To make ends meet I got my son a job as a welder's apprentice and my daughter as a house-help for an affluent family. Alhamdulillah, my children bring in good money and my daughter got me a job washing dishes at her workplace too. We work to send the twins to school now. They are in class one..."*

Another respondent, a 27-year old woman with a six-year-old son said;

*"I am married to a very kind man; he works at a clerk with a Tehsil Daar. He wants our son to be educated and become a big officer. We began sending him to the local school earlier last year but my father-in-law got diagnosed with throat cancer. My mother-in-law also suffers*

*from Angina. Between Abba's treatment and Amma's medicines we are struggling to survive and had to move to a smaller house with just one bedroom. With all the expenses, we can't think of sending our child to school. I try to teach him how to read and write at home but I have too many chores."*

The respondents expressed their sincere wish to send their children to school without any discrimination in gender but also expressed that out of boys and girls, it is a better long-term investment to send a boy to school as with the impending option of eventual marriage for girls.

### **Conclusion**

This research offers a deep insight into the problem of education in three major ethnically Saraiki districts in South Punjab, Pakistan; Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur, and presents evidence regarding the appalling indicators for education. The evidence presented in this research makes it evident that Saraiki majority areas in Punjab exist as distinct anomalies in contrast to the rest of the province. While Punjab overall is home to some of the most prosperous socio-economic indicators in the country, even higher in the case of education than the national average, the Saraiki majority districts exist as a stark anomaly. The data exists as clear evidence of the Horizontal Inequalities experienced by ethnic Saraikis in South Punjab and their inherent deprivation. Despite the national commitment to raising levels of education and literacy which led to a revolutionary constitutional amendment in the form of Article 25(A), the three sample districts remain largely neglected and lag behind the rest of the province.

The analysis suggests that the implementation required for the perusal related to Article 25(A) remains inefficient and disproportionate in the case of Saraiki majority areas. Additionally, the qualitative analysis of the reasons behind the problem of illiteracy and lack of enrolment make it evident that poverty and the opportunity cost of sending children to school as opposed to earning are the dominant reasons for this issue. In light of the above, it is appropriate to conclude that the implementation of initiatives dedicated to education and literacy must factor in Horizontal Inequalities and the disparities between South Punjab and the rest of the province. Additionally, approaching the last few years for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Article 25(A), although a step in the right direction, has been insufficient in achieving the desired outcomes, particularly for already vulnerable groups experiencing Horizontal Inequalities, primarily due to the intense, absolute poverty they are exposed to. The state as a whole has to mobilize all available resources, create partnerships with civil society organizations and pursue the goal of education and the fulfillment of the Article 25(A) with the utmost urgency. Serving as the foundation of the overall wellbeing of people and the society itself, education must be guaranteed in practice, not just in theory, to reduce the rampant inequalities in Pakistan that prevail in the long-term and create perpetual social injustices. The state of Pakistan must focus on implementing practices to achieve the goals set out by the Article 25(A) at every level.

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