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RESEARCH PAPER

Gender Issues in Education: A Sociological Study on Pakistan's Reform Policy

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to investigate gender-related issues in literature that have been published, with a particular focus on education in Pakistan. Many studies have highlighted that the education system in Pakistan has numerous challenges, such as inadequate policy implementation based on international standards, curriculum standards, and a lack of technology integration in education. Despite significant progress made in advancing women's educational rights, the pace of growth has slowed down in recent times. The current lack of progress in education is adding to the growing list of challenges that Pakistan may face in the future. With a rising young population in other developing countries that are also focusing on education, Pakistan faces increasing competitive pressures to keep up. Pakistan has been working on reforming its education agenda and has given significant importance to equity and equality in education. This has highlighted the potential of all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and donors, to bring about positive changes in the education sector. This study has utilized various sources, including Google Scholar, Research Gate, and an Elsevier journal. After analyzing and discussing previously published literature, this study has presented significant findings and drawn valid conclusions.

| **KEYWORDS:** | Administration, Equity Issue in Education, Gender Discrimination, Reform Policy |

Introduction

There are two main principles for ensuring education for everyone. The first principle is to make education fundamental, accessible, and engaging for all. The second principle is equality, which means that social factors such as gender, financial background, cultural affiliation, and others should not be barriers that prevent people from achieving their educational goals(Simon, Małgorzata, & Beatriz, 2007). Gender equality is a complex and crucial issue in every society, just like education. It means that men and women are treated the same way in terms of their rights, duties, opportunities, and liabilities based on their individual needs and abilities. The concept of gender equality is crucial to building a fair and just society (Klugman, Kolb, & MoRToN, 2014). The traditional philosophy of educational equality places a strong emphasis on "educational justice," which involves regulating the interactions between different social groups. Gender equality is the process of fairly allocating resources to different genders through social justice(Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987).

Gender Equity in Education

Education equity is crucial because it eliminates the issues faced by people belonging to limited socioeconomic settings, ethnic groups, and at-risk groups. It fosters a social structure and belief system that allows people to develop their abilities and contribute to society, providing them with the fundamental human rights they deserve

(Simon et al., 2007). Pakistan is a Southeast Asian country located between China and India. It boasts a diverse geography, a rich culture, and a long history. Despite progress in the private education sector, infrastructure, and transportation, Pakistan still faces significant challenges in achieving educational equality, particularly in terms of gender. These challenges are a major obstacle to the country's socio-economic development and productivity. The educational disparities between genders are a cause for concern and require urgent attention (Bennett & Chanfreau, 2005). This study has shown that there is a significant gap in admission rates for girls, with most girls having low participation in education. Pakistan has a decentralized government structure where education policy decisions are made at the sub-national level. Each province has different planning practices, which can either encourage or discourage girls' access to education, resulting in significant disparities between one province and another. However, there are also differences in gender-related educational challenges within each province. According to a recent study, there is a significant disparity in admission rates for girls in Pakistan, with a majority of them having low participation in education. Pakistan's government has a decentralized structure, with education policies being decided at the sub-national level. Because of this, each province has different planning schedules to encourage girls' access to education, resulting in significant differences between one province and another. However, despite these efforts, there remains a serious gender gap with a high number of girls outside of school, indicating that the government's education policies need to be improved. The complex reasons behind the barriers to educational reform, which include social, economic, structural, psychological, and individual factors, require in-depth research at the governmental and official levels. The purpose of this research is to inform the development of reform policies that can be effectively implemented. Additionally, the study aims to analyze and discuss existing reform policies within the education system.

The Education Scenario of Pakistan

Pakistan's history of education spans 64 years, during which numerous efforts have been made to promote gender equity in higher education. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have not been successful. The political system has remained unstable, with military coups and takeovers preventing democratic regimes from lasting more than 35 years. From 1948 to 1985, significant steps were taken towards reform, including the enactment of three full constitutions in 1956, 1962, and 1973. However, military rulers also played a significant role in shaping the country's educational policies during this time (Government, 1956, 62, 73). Four super-constitutional frameworks were established in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999 (Government, 1958, 69, 77, 99). During various discussions on administrative reform in 1953, 1958, 1959, 1962, 1962, 1969, 1972, 1972, 1973 and 2000, only agricultural and agrarian reforms were deemed coherent with the mutually accepted constitution. Although industrial and financial sector reforms were also discussed, no desired goals were achieved in these areas (Parveen, Rashid, Iqbal, & Khan, 2011). The failure of these efforts may stem from insufficient understanding and implementation of the relevant concepts. Therefore, the reforms should prioritize the necessary changes. The government's frequent alterations to new reforms and its tolerance of political interference undermine political will and expertise, allowing vested interests to prevent the achievement of aligned objectives (Muzaffar, et. al. 2020; Malik & Courtney, 2011). Every year, the Pakistani Government releases reports on education. However, if a certain report is not published, it creates a gap in the data. Despite this, there have been commendable efforts to achieve ambitious goals such as a 100% literacy rate(Muzaffar, 2016). Education is the key to achieving these objectives, and Pakistan's position in South Asia can be improved by focusing on improving education(Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985). Promoting gender equality and equity in higher education through women's empowerment, remained virtually unchanged for a decade (Memon, 2007). As mentioned earlier, there exists a disparity in the enrollment of girls. The Planning Commission has observed that promoting education among women has led to an increase in employment opportunities for them. Women are now entering

various fields, including electronics, textiles, medicine, banking, nursing, teaching, and the police service, primarily due to their enhanced educational qualifications (Choudhry, , Muzaffar, & Javaid, 2016; Kazmi & Quran, 2005).In Pakistan, women are often at a disadvantage when it comes to education, particularly in rural and suburban areas. Traditionally, women have been expected to stay within their families, while men are seen as the primary breadwinners. This has led to women being placed at the bottom of the education system compared to men (Memon, 2007). Without educated women, no society can achieve economic, political or social liberation. However, education alone is not sufficient for women's empowerment. It is an important factor that enables women to unlock their potential and earn an income. For society to play its fullest role, all members must be treated equally. Educated mothers can inspire the educational growth of their offspring, which fathers may find more challenging (Asrar-ul-Haq, 2015).

Literature Review

This literature review provides an overview of how gender roles in educational policy impact female education. It's not surprising that there are gender disparities in most disciplines. However, focusing on "gender relations" can offer a better understanding of how the entire economic and social system operates. High levels of gender discrimination or physical separation are not limited to disadvantages faced by women alone. Further education, unemployment, and social isolation are all connected to the same conditions that perpetuate gender discrimination. Female disadvantage is a constant feature of the almost ubiquitous nature of all ways of walking life. (Kabeer, 1994). It is difficult to pinpoint the direct causes of females that are close to the ground. Conversely, development is seen as a way to improve both gender-neutral and gender-inclusive survival possibilities and living situations for women and girls(Centre, Pakistan), & Centre, 2000). Male domination over females, as well as gender inequalities in mortality and literacy rates, are just a few ways that firmly defined patriarchy emphasizes the issue. Women's access to public places and capacity to engage in public life is restricted in Pakistan. It demonstrates examples of gender segregation outside of the workplace, such as women's participation in the official labour force and education(Niaz, 2003). As a result, the establishment of discrete "public spaces" by various families or groups with equal degrees of kinship is the last major factor contributing to Pakistan's geographical separation of men and women. In this sense, Pakistani patriarchy takes on a form that is very close to the term's unusual meaning: "father-to-family rules" that favour boys over daughters when it comes to acquiring an education (Weiss, 2012). The worrying situation of gender space is inextricably linked to the survival of patriarchal family structures as arenas for collective activity. "Father's reign" continues in a variety of ways, including moral vows to cousin marriages that affect daughters' subsequent schooling. One significant reason for the legitimacy and power of "father rule" is that there are other useful strategies for providing public benefits that are not weak. As a result, the power of "father rule" might be linked to the flaws of the modern state(Niaz, 2003). Here are orthodox neoliberal programmers who want a world free of state intervention and regard the state as a hindrance to economic growth and individual freedom. Stronger patriarchal authority has significant political or ideological ramifications for Pakistani officials who promote the neoliberal agenda based on economic efficiency but fail to examine the larger effect on social development(Plehwe, 2009). While the country may observe a period of economic progress, there were essential factors related to "paternity" that hindered making deeper marketplaces and economies of scale. In this case, no real growth event can turn the economy towards a higher long-term progression route. Of course, there is no argument that education growth should be the cause of the fight against patriarchy, and that, if justified, concerns such as women's physical and social existence offer a strong justification (Bauer, 1958). Other reformers who favor decentralization have also neglected the likelihood that the voids left by receding formal institutions must be filled

by robust castes, kinship, and family setups that thrive under "father's rule" and build a copy of "father's rule" (Mitchell, Mirowski, & Plehwe, 2008).

The issue of Women's Education

A special mentality has frequently been labelled (usually an imam with superficial religious knowledge in mosques) who compete against women's learning education, and traditional stereotypes favor the imposition of such restrictions, which in many cases prevent female students from gaining access to knowledge. This is mostly owing to the ingrained male dominance in Asian society, particularly in South Asia(Weiss, 1985).

Given the data and the current situation, there are many challenges and obstacles to Pakistan's education system(Jones, 2007). Women, certain social groups, and ethnic elements have limited access to higher education as well as quality teachers; curriculum set-up quality is low, lack of training and guidance to improve the quality of teachers.

Equity and Inclusion

Certain populations are stigmatized as a result of social, cultural, and structural constraints. Despite increased access to all levels of education, income, gender, and social group participation rates remain unequal, and the benefits of governmental subsidies are unevenly distributed.

Policies and Administrative

Policies and programmers to promote quality and fairness in education are inadequate. A political and social environment lacks adequate, supporting, and instructional power. Leadership: Most leaders are lacking in professionalism, insight, and dedication. The school system's administration was given over to a decentralized structure. There is a significant disparity between private and governmental institutions. Other than poor literacy and education, there are social inequalities due to linguistic limitations. There is a high incidence of reappearance and dropout, which poses obstacles to the examination system. Opportunities for research and development are limited for students and instructors.

Material and Methods

The primary objective of the research is to establish a starting point for the technique. To achieve this goal, the study's aims and all literature related to the issue were thoroughly examined using internet databases, including Google Scholar, over the past 10 years. The selected material was assessed based on its quality, significance, and practical contributions to Pakistan. The main limitation of the paper was the issue of gender equality in educational institutions.

Results and Discussion

In the report of 2016, Pakistan saw an increase of 0.550 in small social development, ranking 147th out of 188 countries and regions. The country's HDI growth rate also increased significantly from 0.359 to 0.538, which is a 43.0 per cent increase or an annual growth rate of 1.3 per cent. The gender gap in Pakistan's education sector is a widespread issue that requires urgent attention. Fair access to opportunities is one of the fundamental principles of a just society, and education is no exception. While it can be challenging to achieve equality in education, it is generally accepted that access to education is a constitutional right for everyone. However, it is evident that many countries, including Pakistan, have not yet achieved universal access to basic education,

and educational achievements vary widely both within and between countries (Mundial, 2016). By 2014, the female enrollment rate in higher education had increased to 47%, up from 36.8% in 2012. However, despite this improvement, gender parity has yet to be achieved(Amin, Islam, & Amin, 2020). It is recognized worldwide that higher education for females is crucial in building human capital and promoting economic development in a country. Qualified women can become leaders in society and contribute to family and public life, making it an essential aspect of progress(Shaukat & Pell, 2015).

Coeducation Enrollment in Education

According to the research, parents of female students often believe that their daughter's education in both male and female institutions poses a threat to the family's honor. This belief results in opposition to women's access to education. This opposition affects girls' education negatively, particularly their comfort in coeducational environments. The research shows that girls have the ability and self-discipline to adapt to the same education system as boys. However, two main issues affect girls' education - the relationship between parents and their daughters and the minimum degree of autonomy that girls have to make self-determining decisions. Parents believe that coeducation can have a direct impact on their daughter's socialization, and they fear that their daughter may not find a suitable partner after receiving a peer education. These beliefs contribute to the opposition to educating girls alongside boys(Maqsood, Maqsood, & Raza, 2012). Most institutions of education have coeducational restrictions, which is the main hindrance for women to enroll in higher education based on literature.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors

Socio-cultural and economic factors refer to the various elements of society and the economy that influence people's beliefs, values, behaviours, and financial decisions. These factors can include things like education, income level, religion, ethnicity, social norms, and cultural traditions. Understanding how these factors interact can help us better understand individual decision-making and broader societal trends. The survey results have revealed some serious issues in Pakistan's education system. These issues are primarily due to societal and cultural factors, such as limited access to schooling, illiteracy, school dropouts, and discrimination against girls and women. Stereotypical thinking about gender roles and identities is also creating significant barriers for female students and teachers in educational institutions. Moreover, patriarchal social norms have led to widespread inequalities in legal outcomes, employment, and education (Sandhu, Chaudhry, Akbar, & Ahmad, 2005). Girls and women encounter several obstacles in their daily lives, with the crucial task of managing their workload and time being one of them. In many households, girls are assigned household chores and are also subjected to social limitations, which further leads to them dropping out of school or university (Faridi, Chaudhry, & Anwar, 2009). The current social structure assigns domestic tasks to women based on gender and limits their social interaction and economic supervision (Younas, Asghar, Qayyum, & Khan, 2016). Barriers to education can vary depending on social group, geographical region, and ethnicity. For example, women living in rural areas belonging to ethnic minorities are often underprivileged in terms of educational opportunities. Moreover, cultural biases and beliefs that prioritize a woman's role in taking care of her family and husband over pursuing higher education can also act as significant barriers (Shaukat & Pell, 2015). Despite early marriage being illegal, it is still a common practice among many ethnic groups. Societal expectations dictate that girls must marry by a certain age, typically between 16-18 years old, and they are often coerced into domestic roles. As a result, many young girls are unable to pursue higher education, leading to a low enrolment rate (Nasrullah, Muazzam, Bhutta, & Raj, 2014). In certain areas of Pakistani society, insufficient sanitation facilities, particularly during menstruation, are among the primary reasons why many girls are unable to pursue higher education. Early pregnancy is another significant factor that hinders the

education of girls. Additionally, two universities exhibit discriminatory sexual behaviour (Bhanji & Punjani, 2014).In this regard, sons are expected to become the breadwinners and take care of their parents in the future. On the other hand, daughters are expected to become a part of their husband's family (Qadir, Khan, Medhin, & Prince, 2011). Girls' education is often considered a financial burden due to cultural norms that prioritize the expenses of marriage over education. This results in parents being less motivated to invest in their daughters' education compared to their sons'. These barriers are more prevalent in rural areas (Ali & Gavino, 2008).

Institutional Factors

Gender issues continue to be a significant barrier to achieving gender equality in education. Many teachers tend to have a bias towards male students, and textbooks can also be male-centered. Traditionally, curriculums reinforce traditional gender roles and encourage obedience, which limits girls' access to higher education. Unfortunately, female teachers and faculties are often perceived as less competent than their male counterparts, despite having the same qualifications (Muzaffar, & Javaid, 2018; Butt & ur Rehman, 2010). It is necessary to consider the Ministry of Education's efforts towards education reform in Pakistan. They have implemented the Education for All initiative and the School Sector Reform Plan. These initiatives aim to enable girls to participate equally in all levels of education, which should increase net enrolment rates similar to the past. However, despite these efforts, the participation rate of girls in private and higher education remains low (Siddiqui & Tagar, 2018). Pakistan aimed to provide standardized education reform services through the school system to ensure that all children have equal access to economic and social opportunities. This involves standardizing curricula and textbooks, establishing common teaching and learning standards, promoting multilingual proficiency, and conducting periodic assessments of learning outcomes. This will help achieve uniformity in learning outcomes across the public, private, and Islamic education systems (Shahab & Sherani, 2015). Pakistan has made a formal commitment to improving education by ensuring Article 25-A is implemented, which guarantees free basic compulsory education (Kalsoom, Khanam, & Quraishi, 2017). The Federal Ministry of Education aims to increase gender equity in the selection of officials for educational reform and restructuring of the Ministries of Education, which has yielded positive results (Siddiqui, 2007).

Conclusion

Gender equity in education is a significant issue worldwide, and studies have revealed that there are several challenges to achieving it. To address these challenges, different reform policies have been introduced. Recognizing the importance of gender equality in education, this research paper aims to review various literature and identify the obstacles that educational institutions in Pakistan face in achieving gender equality.

After analyzing various literature on gender equality and equity in education, it was found that these issues have not been addressed in the Pakistani education system. The lack of adequate evidence and data has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to the issue. Studies have shown that gender equality issues have multiple dimensions and that a review of the literature alone captures only a small part of the problem. The article also helps classify the different reform policies that were implemented to overcome these challenges and offers one of the most standard forms of reform policy. Due to the insufficient research on gender equality and equity in higher education in Pakistan, it is important to measure these issues adequately. This would involve focusing on implementing institutional reforms that can help educational institutions overcome obstacles faced by female students. Pakistan's education system could benefit from learning from a system that has successfully adapted to change and achieved positive results for female students. It is important to establish clear standards and criteria for

measuring the effectiveness of reform policies. The literature highlights several significant social barriers that require attention, with changing stereotypes being one of the most crucial yet challenging methods for addressing these challenges. To achieve this, there needs to be a shift in perceptions of "gender equality," "gender equity," and "gender roles" from social, cultural, and organizational perspectives. This is necessary to tackle the bigger issues and eliminate the invisible attitudes that create psychological barriers leading to inequality.

It is unlikely that stereotypes will change dramatically. While specific improvements are important, they do not guarantee equity in the higher education of girls and women across Pakistan. The country's regions remain critical and policies alone may not provide optimist change. Due to the misbalance of culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standards in Pakistan, gender equality must take a close look at the specific cultural context. For example, some barriers are more social in rural areas, and changes in institutional policies may not solve all of these problems, which require changes based on cultural and social norms. Similarly, organizational structures that differ from the structure of academic institutions and corporate or political structures must be considered. While cross-agency research can draw inferences, specific research by educational institutions can better capture issues in this area and help develop appropriate policy interventions. An important issue in achieving gender equality in education is the excessive focus on external factors. This ignores the internal factors that also contribute to the problem and which require further research. However, as the awareness of gender issues grows and women become more prominent in society, it is important to address these internal factors as well. Future research should focus on new challenges and factors related to gender equality. This means that policies need to encourage female students and teachers to participate in higher education and understand their needs and opinions.

Recommendations

According to the research, there are various methods to enhance gender balance in the country. It has been observed that different studies' results emphasized that gender inequality can be eradicated through collective efforts by the government, taking actions against harassers, and parents giving equal importance to both their sons and daughters. Provide equal opportunity to both men and women.

- ➢ Encourage and support education and professional development opportunities for women.
- ➢ Provide equal rights for women in the workplace.
- ➢ Protection against domestic violence and abuse.

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