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Reflection of the Iceberg: Key Issues and Challenges of Education in Balochistan

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ABSTRACT

Education is widely recognized as a key driver of social and economic development. However, in Pakistan's Balochistan province, the education sector faces numerous challenges and issues that hinder its progress and development. This paper aims to identify and analyze the key issues and challenges facing the education sector in Balochistan. The research is based on a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, policy documents, and reports. The study identifies several key challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and facilities, inadequate funding, low teacher qualifications and training, high dropout rates, gender disparity, and limited access to education. Moreover, political instability, security concerns, and cultural barriers further exacerbate these challenges. The study proposes several recommendations to address these challenges, including increasing funding and investment in the education sector, improving teacher training and professional development programs, enhancing governance and management of schools, implementing targeted interventions to address gender and social disparities, and participation in education reform initiatives.

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Introduction

While school systems may exhibit differences across countries, they display commonalities in their fundamental features as well (Heyneman, 2001). Education plays a multi-faceted role in society, extending beyond its function of placing young people in various occupational positions. It also has significant cultural dimensions that influence socialization and citizenship. These dimensions, in turn, create boundaries that impact opportunities and life chances based on factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, and disability (Brock & Alexiadou, 2013). Higher education institutions have traditionally played a crucial role in bringing about positive change and development in societies. Even today, these institutions are recognized as important entities in shaping and equipping future generations with the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to contribute effectively to their respective communities and society as a whole (Deniz, 2022). Moreover, education has certain rules and issues which are related to certain details such as equality,

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finance, etc. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), around 20% of students across OECD countries do not attain the essential skills necessary to function effectively in modern societies (OECD, 2012).

In recent years, educational managers worldwide have prioritized addressing several common issues, such as school-based management, teacher incentives, multicultural education, civic responsibilities, tracking, curriculum depth, individualized instruction, fair testing and assessment, special learning needs, and effective communication with the public. By focusing on these key areas, educational leaders hope to promote greater equity, access, and quality in education, while also meeting the diverse needs of their communities (Heyneman, 2001). Governance in education involves the decentralization of decision-making, the degree of choice and competition in school markets, and the regulatory framework for private schools. It is essential for ensuring that education systems operate effectively and meet the needs of students and communities (Damon et al., 2016). Although the problems associated with education vary from country to country, these problems may be more serious in underdeveloped and developing countries. One of those countries is Pakistan, where there are different ethnic elements and cultural diversity.

Pakistan's education system shows numerous drawbacks related to gender disparities, equal access to education, shortage of teachers, unit curriculum, etc. In Pakistan's education system, it is generally accepted that one of the most crucial problems is children who cannot find education opportunities and have to work for various reasons (Government of Pakistan, 2017). According to official sources, there are 51.53 million children between the ages of 5 and 16 in Pakistan. Within this group, 28.68 million children attended school in both the public and private sectors, while 22.84 million children had to leave school. When children were examined on a gender-based basis, 49% of girls and 40% of boys could not benefit from educational opportunities and were excluded from the education system (Government of Pakistan, 2017). There is a shortage of teachers, poor laboratory facilities, and an outdated curriculum in education. The root causes include flawed curriculum, dual medium of instruction, poor teacher quality, and overcrowding. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving education quality (Memon et al., 2010).

The Province of Balochistan is deprived of these kinds of educational opportunities because of natural, local, and political reasons. The literacy ratio in Balochistan, a province in Pakistan, is reported to be 43.58%, which is lower than the national average of 58.92%. The gender disparity in literacy rates is significant, with males having a higher literacy ratio of 54.15% compared to females (31.89%) (Provincial Census Report Balochistan, 2017). The Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013-2018 (BESP) identifies Balochistan as the province in Pakistan with the lowest literacy rate, widest gender gaps, and weakest access indicators, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these challenges (BESP, 2013). This study aims to shed light on the prevailing challenges within the education system of Balochistan Province, a subject that has received limited attention in Pakistan's educational discourse. By critically examining the relevant literature, this research endeavors to uncover the primary issues that hinder educational progress in the region. The findings derived from this study hold significant potential in guiding policymakers, education administrators, and practitioners in devising effective strategies to enhance the schooling system. Moreover, it is anticipated that this research will make valuable contributions to the body of knowledge in the field of education, serving as a valuable resource for researchers and educators engaged in similar endeavors.

Review of Pakistan's Education System

The founders of Pakistan saw the educational system as the driving force for achieving national goals. At the first national education conference in 1974, it was decided that the education system should align with Pakistan's national aspirations and be linked to the needs of the people. This reflects the belief that education is crucial for national development and progress, equipping individuals with skills and knowledge to contribute to society and achieve national objectives (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Pakistan has a distinctive educational system because it makes use of different methods in many ways. It is stated that while the country would maintain its educational system, it also had a British system of education. For this reason, this type of uncertainty occurs with negative results related to direct education. The curriculum in Pakistan is not uniform and has resulted in the emergence of different schools of thought. As a result, there are notable differences in the attitudes of students who have completed their education in public educational institutions (Ahmad et al., 2014).

The 'National Education Policy' prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education of Pakistan in 2009 (p. 18) covers the following items:

- To play a fundamental role in the preservation of the ideals that led to the creation of Pakistan and strengthen the concept of the basic ideology within Islamic morality contained in the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
- Develop a confident individual who is analytically and authentically minded, a responsible member of society, and a global citizen.

The Global Competitiveness Index report prepared by the World Economic Forum in 2017-2018 has an important role in shaping the education policies of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the last quarter century. In this report, Pakistan ranked 129th out of 137 countries in the field of education and ranked last among the countries in the region, such as China, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Malaysia (Küçükali & Coşkun, 2020). The government of Pakistan acknowledges that education is a basic human right, and access to education for every citizen is essential for economic development and poverty reduction. The present government has recognized the critical role of education in the country's progress and has placed significant importance on the education sector. The government aims not only to increase the current literacy rate but also to improve the quality of education, acknowledging that education quality is a crucial factor in achieving sustainable development (Shah, 2003). When the "National Education Policy" prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education of Pakistan in 2009 is examined, the following issues are addressed:

- To provide equal educational opportunities to all Pakistani citizens, to provide adequate opportunities for the cultural and religious development of minorities, and to ensure the effective participation of minorities in general national efforts,
- Equalize access to education by providing special opportunities for privileged/non-marginal groups and disabled children and adults.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is governed by a parliamentary democratic system and has a federal structure consisting of a federal capital and four provinces. These provinces are Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. In addition, outside these provinces is Islamabad, which is the federal capital. In Pakistan, while the Federal Ministry of Education and provincial governments oversee education, the federal government mainly provides financial assistance for curriculum development, accreditation, research, and development. This reflects the decentralized nature of Pakistan's education system, with provincial governments having significant autonomy in shaping education policy and programs (Küçükali & Coşkun, 2020). To fully comprehend the issue of an outdated curriculum in undergraduate and postgraduate programs of law, it is firstly necessary to understand the context in which these programs are delivered to students (Reayat et al., 2020). Pakistan's current educational curriculum does not meet contemporary standards of education and research, as it prioritizes rote memorization and theoretical learning over practical work, research, scientific knowledge, and reflective observation. As a result, students have limited opportunities to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. To better prepare students for success in higher education and the workforce, Pakistan must revise its curriculum to promote a more practical, research-oriented approach that fosters innovation and lifelong learning (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Demographic structure of Balochistan Province

Balochistan, literally means “land of the Balochs,” which is situated on the south-western part of the country. It is the largest province in Pakistan with an area-wise spread over 347,190 square km, but is the most sparsely populated region with 5.94% share of the total country population according to Census-2017 (Provincial Census Report, 2017). Balochistan is a rural, impoverished area in Pakistan. Quetta is the capital city and the economic hub of Balochistan. Besides Quetta, Gwadar Port is also emerging as an important area of trade and economic activity connecting the province to the other parts of the country (Provincial Census Report, 2017).

Balochistan has various languages, cultures, and ethnicities. Just as the province naturally divides into certain areas, it is also separated by the main ethnic groups. While Baloch people live in the province, Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Emigrants from Afghanistan are settled there as well. Simultaneously, these ethnic groups have different tribes. The population of Balochistan Province is predominantly Muslim with a Sunni majority. The Baloch, Brahvi, and Pashtuns are the three main ethnic groups in Balochistan, with Baloch being the majority (Provincial Census Report, 2017). The region in question was predominantly inhabited by three major tribes, namely the Baloch (comprising Baloch and Brahvi speakers) and Pashtuns. The Balochi-speaking tribes in the region included Rind, Lashar, Marri, Jamot, Ahmedzai, Bugti Domki, Magsi, Kenazai, Khosa, Rakhshani, Dashti, Umrani, Noshervani, Gichki, Buledi, Notazai, Sanjarani, Meerwani, Zahrozai, Langove, Kenazai, Khidai, and Sirmastani.

Method

In the study, the document review method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Document review involves the analysis of written materials containing information

about the case or facts that are intended to be investigated. In qualitative research, document review can be a stand-alone data collection method, or it can be used in combination with other data collection methods (Creswell & Poth 2016). Data for this study was collected from both printed and internet sources, including scholarly journals, articles, official documents, and reports related to the Pakistani education system. Some of the sources consulted include the Balochistan Education Statistics (Government of Balochistan, 2021), as well as the Education for All (EFA) initiative (UNESCO, 2015). It was decided to evaluate the information about the Pakistani education system separately under the relevant headings as a result of the data obtained from the Ministry of National Education of Pakistan (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Results

Key issues of education in Balochistan

Balochistan, one of the provinces of Pakistan, is characterized by a low literacy rate, high gender gaps, and weak access indicators compared to other regions in the country. The quality of education in the province is also deemed inadequate, and the growing number of private schools operating in the region suggests that public sector schooling is viewed with skepticism (BESP, 2013). The causes of low-quality education in Balochistan are also derived from several inadequate schools and teachers. The lack of teachers, schools, and colleges has had serious negative effects on education in Balochistan. According to official records, there are 9.894 male and 5.313 female teaching staff members in primary public schools. While the number of the male teaching staff was 9.161 and female teaching staff was 6.231 in the middle section, there were 15.324 male teaching staff and 8.115 female staff in high schools in the public sector (number of primary, middle, and high schools covered by teaching staff in Balochistan (Balochistan Development Statistics, n.d.). The Table 1 below shows the number of government schools in Balochistan.

Table 1. Total Number of government primary, middle and high schools by gender

Number of Public Schools in Balochistan	2016-2017	2018-2019
Boys	9.761	10.055
Girls	3.984	4.238

Source: Balochistan Development Statistics.

Table 1 presents the significant disparities in the number of public schools for boys and girls in Balochistan from 2016 to 2019. Despite an increase in the number of public schools for girls, the number of boys' schools remained significantly higher than that of girls'. This disparity in school access and enrollment opportunities between genders can have long-lasting implications for gender equality and development (Chaudhury et al., 2009). It is imperative for the government to prioritize equal access to education for all children, irrespective of gender, to ensure a more inclusive and equitable education system. Education plays a pivotal role in addressing the issues of income distribution and poverty, as well as aspects of demographic, political, and social development. Human capital is relatively more critical in developing countries as compared to developed countries, because educa-

tion is a fundamental requirement for the political, social, and economic transformation of institutions (Rasheed et al., 2021). The provision of quality education is vital for reducing poverty and promoting social development. A weak education system may be a significant barrier to economic growth in impoverished countries (Memon et al., 2020).

Despite notable advancements in the education sector, certain provinces of the country still confront issues related to enhancing access and quality of education for all students. To address these challenges, policymakers must adopt a dual approach, emphasizing on both access and quality objectives. The relative emphasis placed on each objective is subject to vary across provinces, contingent upon the level of educational facilities available. In regions where schools are absent, prioritizing access is of utmost importance, whereas in other areas, policymakers must prioritize improving the quality of education beyond the previous standards (BESP, 2013). These rural villages have been largely neglected by the central authorities, leading to a lack of resources and access to education. As a result, education in these areas is severely underfunded, and women and girls are the most adversely affected group (Naz, 2013).

Literacy

Pakistan has experienced minimal improvements in its literacy rate between 1990-1991 and 2004-2005, with an increase from 35% to 53% for individuals aged 10 years and above. However, progress has slowed down significantly since then, with the literacy rate reaching only 58% by 2011-2012 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). Pakistan exhibits significant gender-based inequalities in literacy rates, with 70% of males and 47% of females being literate in 2011-2012, in comparison to 48% of males and 21% of females in 1990-1991 (Azeem & Ismat, 2016). The education sector in Pakistan confronts a range of daunting obstacles, including inadequate financial resources, low levels of program implementation efficiency, and suboptimal management, monitoring, supervision, and teaching quality. These issues underscore the need for targeted interventions aimed at improving education governance, teacher training, and infrastructure development to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the sector (Memon et al., 2010). The literacy rate in Pakistan is one of the lowest in the world, and it is even lower when compared to countries with similar resources and social and economic conditions (Memon et al., 2010).

In Pakistan, the literacy rates among youth (aged 15-24) have experienced only a slight increase over the past decade, largely due to limited budgetary allocations for youth education and lack of effective strategies to reach vulnerable groups. From 2001/02 to 2012/13, the youth literacy rate rose from 63% to 72%, resulting in an average annual increase of less than 1% (Ministry of Education). The educational situation was even worse in the province of Balochistan, which is located in the southwestern part of Pakistan (BESP, 2013).

Literacy is generally accepted to be a serious issue in education. Even though awareness related to literacy is widespread across the world, there are still significant figures in Balochistan. The Table 2 below illustrates the literacy rates of the youth population in Balochistan between 2001 and 2013. Literacy rates are essential indicators of the education system's performance and impact on the younger generation's educational attainment.

Table 2. Youth Literacy Rate from 2001-02 to 2012-13 by Province.

Province	2001-02	2005-6	2009-10	2012-13
Balochistan	39.8%	48.1%	60.6%	55.9%

Source: Ministry of Education, 2014.

The data provided in Table 2 can serve as a useful reference for educational policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to assess progress made in the province's education system. Furthermore, the data can also be used to identify areas that require further attention and investment to improve the literacy rates of the youth population in Balochistan.

In Pakistan, there is a notable disparity between male and female literacy rates in all provinces. In Balochistan, where tribal culture and lack of social mobility prevail, the female adult literacy rate is shockingly low at only 19%. The situation highlights the need for innovative and targeted strategies to reach poor and illiterate women across the country, particularly in marginalized areas where educational resources are limited (UNESCO, 2015). According to the table, the literacy rate of adults reached significant figures over the years 2001 and 2013 in Balochistan. Similar to other indicators, Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate in the country (BESP, n.d.). The Table 3 below demonstrates the rate of adult literacy in Balochistan between 2001 and 2013.

Table 3. Adult Literacy Rate from 2001-02 to 2012-13 by Province.

Province	2001-02	2005-6	2009-10	2012-13
Balochistan	26.9%	32.4%	43.4%	43.6%

Source: Ministry of Education, 2014.

Table 3 illustrates the literacy rate of youth in Balochistan between 2001 and 2013, indicating a high level of illiteracy in the region. In 2001-02, the literacy rate was only 26.9%, which increased significantly to 43.6% in 2012-13. These figures highlight the pressing need to address the issue of illiteracy in Balochistan and to implement effective measures to improve the education system in the region. The province of Balochistan exhibits a high rate of multidimensional poverty, lowest coverage of immunization for children, highest prevalence of nutritional deficiencies, and lowest literacy rates. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey, the literacy rate of the population aged 10 years and above in Balochistan is merely 44%, which is the lowest among all provinces in the country. Additionally, the female literacy rate in rural areas is particularly abysmal, with a mere 17% literacy rate. These statistics underscore the dire need for the government to allocate more resources to address the education crisis in the province (BESP, n.d.). Based on official reports and available resources, Balochistan has faced a decline in its literacy rate in recent years. In response, education authorities have implemented strategies to address this issue. However, at the current rate of improvement, it is projected that achieving a literacy rate of 100% in the province will only be possible by the year 2095. If the rate of improvement doubles, the target could be achieved by 2055, and with three times the current rate of improvement, the target could be achieved as early as 2042 (BESP, n.d.).

Problem of qualified teaching staff

Effective educators are those who are committed to lifelong learning in their respective fields, demonstrate excellence in teaching, and engage in reflective practices to refine their instructional approaches. They possess the ability to convey their subject matter knowledge and understanding of the learning process through clear communication, sound diagnostic skills, and sensitivity to diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds. In addition, they possess knowledge of child development and the ability to utilize a wide range of instructional techniques to meet the unique needs of each student. They set high expectations and provide support to help students achieve them, foster an environment conducive to learning, and effectively utilize available resources both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, well-trained, efficient, and ethical teachers represent the greatest asset of any education system and are vital to the success of any nation. The importance of teacher training and quality is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of high-quality education in general, and specifically for improving student learning outcomes. Additionally, teacher training centers can be established to provide ongoing support for teachers and ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver quality education to their students. It is also essential to attract and retain qualified and competent teachers by providing them with fair compensation and working conditions, which can positively impact the quality of education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Low-income countries, such as India and Pakistan, encounter various challenges in their pursuit of quality education. Among the most significant obstacles is the task of developing or recruiting quality teachers. The complexity of this challenge stems from several factors, including but not limited to limited financial resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of effective teacher training programs. These factors together contribute to a shortage of skilled and knowledgeable teachers, resulting in subpar educational outcomes for students (Khan et al., 2016).

Efforts to improve the quality of education in Pakistan require addressing a range of pressing issues. The challenges are particularly acute in remote areas of Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan, where a lack of teachers in schools exacerbates existing issues. Research indicates that many teachers in Pakistan do not employ innovative methods or strategies for teaching and learning, and lack fundamental knowledge about lesson planning, hindering their ability to address the various challenges that arise in the classroom. Resolving these issues is crucial to achieving significant progress towards enhancing the quality of education across the country (Ahmad et al., 2014). Teachers play a crucial role in the success of an educational system, and their effectiveness is influenced by numerous factors, such as motivation, qualifications, experience, training, aptitude, and the educational environment and management structures in which they operate (Memon et al., 2010). It is widely recognized that the quality of teachers is a crucial component of any education system. In Pakistan, however, the quality of teachers is generally perceived to be low (Memon et al., 2010). In the realm of education, the teacher serves as a beacon of enlightenment, responsible for disseminating knowledge far and wide. As such, teacher training and effectiveness represent critical and arguably the most pivotal elements within the educational system. A common tenet regarding the function of quality teacher training asserts that it represents one of the most significant and vital requisites for fostering, augmenting, and advancing education (Siddiqui et al., 2021). Insufficient resources in teacher training institutions and universities present a significant challenge in developing quality teachers.

Teacher training institutions frequently lack resources such as well-equipped laboratories, libraries, up-to-date reading materials, adequate building infrastructure, and information and communication technology facilities. These deficiencies have a negative impact on the professional development of teachers (Khan et al., 2016). Teaching is a complex and challenging profession that requires extensive training to develop and maintain the necessary skills and knowledge. In Pakistan, however, the availability of high-quality teacher training opportunities is limited, which has a detrimental impact on the quality of education in the country. Although there are numerous teacher training institutions in Pakistan, many of them are under-resourced and poorly managed, resulting in inadequate training for teachers. A lack of funding and trained human resources such as trainers and administrators exacerbates this issue. As a result, the professional development of teachers is hindered, and their ability to provide high-quality education is compromised (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Educational environments and lack of materials

One of the major issues affecting the quality of education in Pakistan is a lack of adequate educational environments and materials. Research has shown that the physical environment of schools can significantly affect learning outcomes (Barrett et al., 2015). In Pakistan, many schools lack basic facilities such as electricity, clean water, and proper sanitation (UNESCO, 2019).

The scarcity of teaching and learning resources in schools presents significant challenges for the teaching and learning process in Pakistan. Many schools lack even the most basic resources such as blackboards, attendance registers, offices, libraries, laboratories, and up-to-date books, which hinders the ability of teachers to provide quality education. Furthermore, inadequate physical infrastructure, such as insufficient classrooms and playgrounds, has a detrimental effect on the overall learning environment and hinders the physical development of both students and teachers. The absence of such basic facilities contributes to the larger issue of poor-quality education in Pakistan (Qureshi, 2002). This has led to poor learning outcomes and high dropout rates, especially among girls (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Knowledge production is often the result of inquiry and experimentation and is not limited to teacher-dominated learning environments. In these settings, individuals are responsible for their own learning, and teachers are expected to have the necessary competence and confidence to effectively facilitate this process (Kolb & Fry, 1975). The educational environment, physical conditions of schools, and educational materials are inadequate in Pakistan. Teachers' attendance, physical facilities, and multigrade classes are other aspects where secondary-level private schools struggled more than public schools (ASER, 2015). This situation is not good in Balochistan. Most schools in rural areas do not have sufficient physical facilities. At the provincial level, 88% of schools have a designated building, 11% are shelters, and no information is provided about 1% of schools. At the provincial level, 89% of boys and 84% of girls' schools have buildings. Districts Dera Bug, Harnai, Kalat, Quetta, and Sherani provide school buildings for 71% to 80% of schools (Government of Balochistan, 2021). Table 4 provides information on the learning space and physical facilities of the four schools, including student classroom ratio, classroom school ratio, and the percentage of schools with various physical facilities such as buildings, drinking water, toilets, boundary walls, electricity, and computer labs.

Table 4. Physical facilities in Balochistan between 2019-20.

Learning Space		Averages		
Student Classroom Ratio	23.3	22.1	26.3	25.5
Classroom School Ratio	2.9	2.81	1.57	3.16
Physical Facilities				
Schools with Buildings	88.0%	89.1%	95.8%	84.0%
Schools with Drinking Water	30.9%	30.4%	21.1%	33.8%
Schools with Toilets	36.3%	30.9%	59.3%	45.3%
Schools with Boundary Walls	45.8%	38.7%	79.4%	59.2%
Schools with Electricity	21.9%	19.9%	16.4%	27.7%
Schools with Computer Lab	6.4%	6.4%	25.0%	6.4%

Source: Government of Balochistan, 2021.

According to Table 4, current physical facilities are not appropriate for an educational environment in Balochistan. Excluding educational materials, the vital prerequisites were not satisfied. The provided data indicates that the physical facilities in educational institutions in Balochistan, such as classroom ratios, access to basic amenities, and availability of essential resources, fall below desirable standards. These inadequacies pose significant challenges to creating an optimal learning environment. Addressing these shortcomings is crucial to ensure a conducive educational setting that promotes effective teaching and learning outcomes in Balochistan.

Gender discrimination

Balochistan is considered the least literate province in Pakistan, with an estimated 60-70% of children not attending school, according to UNICEF. This low rate of attendance can be attributed to various factors, including poor infrastructure and connectivity within the province, security concerns, and a lack of political motivation to improve the educational conditions of the region (Pakistan Coalition for Education, 2021). Despite having a considerable number of school-aged children out of school in Balochistan, the province has enrolled a total of 884405 students. However, the current enrollment rate in Balochistan is imbalanced across different educational levels, with the primary section having the highest percentage of enrolment, comprising 79% of the total enrolment. In contrast, there is a sharp decline in enrolment rates in the middle section, with only 14% of children being enrolled in this level. Furthermore, the higher secondary section has the lowest enrolment rate of only 7%. This imbalance in enrolment rates across different educational levels highlights the need for policy interventions to promote enrolment and retention in middle and higher secondary education in Balochistan (Pakistan Coalition for Education, 2021). The importance of education for women cannot be overstated as it serves as a crucial means of empowerment. Education not only provides knowledge and values for social advancement but also cultivates skills such as logical and analytical thinking, organizational, administrative, and management skills. In addition to enhancing self-esteem, education leads to improved financial and social status within the community. Hence, it is imperative that education is made accessible to all individuals regardless of gender (Memon et al., 2010).

The situation of female education in rural Balochistan is concerning, with the literacy rate among rural women lower than the overall illiteracy rate in Pakistan, which is 80% and growing. According to estimates, less than 2% of rural females in Balochistan are literate. Traditional gender roles assign women domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, which may hinder their access to education and contribute to the low literacy rate (Naz, 2003). Girls' attendance at school in rural areas decreases during harvest season as they contribute significantly to their families' agricultural labor as unpaid workers (Tusinska, 2020). The issue of restricted access to education, early and coerced marriages, acid attacks, domestic violence, and honor killings are significant challenges faced by women in Pakistan. These societal problems have long-standing roots and are particularly severe in the country, contributing to the marginalization and oppression of women (Mustafa et al., 2016). Table 5 presents enrollment data in Balochistan for the years 2016-2017 and 2018-2019, showing the number of boys and girls enrolled in educational institutions.

Table 5. The enrollment figures for boys and girls in Balochistan between 2016 and 2019.

Enrollments in Balochistan	Boys	Girls
2016-2017	442,579	229,960
2018-2019	768,246	554,175

Source: Government of Balochistan, 2021.

According to Table 5, the number of enrollments in Balochistan between 2016 and 2019 varied significantly between boys and girls. In 2016-2017, the number of enrolled boys was 442,579 while the number of enrolled girls was 229,960. By 2018-2019, the number of enrollments have increased for both genders, with 768, 246 boys and 554, 175 girls. Access to education in Balochistan is impeded not only by the imbalance between primary and post-primary government schools, but also by the severe lack of adequate school infrastructure, particularly for girls. The number of children enrolled in primary schools in Balochistan is almost 2.5 times higher than the number of children enrolled in middle and high schools. Moreover, only one-third of all children enrolled in government schools in Balochistan are girls, which further exacerbates the gender disparity in education (Government of Balochistan, 2018). In certain conservative Pakistani communities, there exists a belief that girls are incapable of receiving education. This attitude is influenced by the low social status of women, and the cultural expectation that they prioritize domestic duties over academic pursuits, resulting in the exclusion of girls from the educational process (Tusinska, 2020).

The status of women in rural areas of Pakistan is particularly concerning, with slightly better conditions found in urban areas. While women in urban areas may have greater access to education and employment opportunities, women in rural areas face significant challenges in accessing education and improving their economic status. As a result, they often face difficult living conditions and limited opportunities for personal and professional growth (Mustafa et al., 2016). In rural areas of Pakistan, government schools for girls typically provide education up to the elementary level. However, only a small number of girls with exceptional academic potential progress beyond this level. Most parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to pursue higher education outside of the village, as they believe that education can be obtained within the village for those who are interested. Conversely,

parents are more willing to allow their sons to leave the village to pursue higher education (Mohyuddin & Ambreen, 2012). In Pakistan, gender discrimination has long been a pervasive issue and has contributed to the lack of education for females. This bias towards sons over daughters is prevalent across all socio-economic statuses and education levels, but is particularly prevalent in less-educated families (Atif et al., 2016). The population of Pakistan is comprised of more females than males. However, the case in Pakistan shows that the women are not preferred for receiving education and illiterate women would obviously find it difficult to build the society (Mustafa et al., 2016).

Issues and challenges of public and private schools

In Pakistan, both public and private schools and educational institutions play significant roles in the education system. However, it is important to maintain a reasonable balance between the two, as over-reliance on one can adversely affect the quality of education. In Balochistan, there is a higher than average number of private schools, as the facilities and quality of education provided by government schools are often inadequate. Consequently, parents tend to prefer private schools to government schools. As of 2011, there were 12,293 schools, 10,668 of which were primary schools, 961 were middle schools, and 664 were high schools (Government of Balochistan, 2014). In 2008, a significant initiative was launched with the aim of increasing access to education in Pakistan. Since then, a total of 421,735 educational institutions have been established. Furthermore, 1,271,606 children have been evaluated, 29,168 school profiles comprising 70% government and 30% private schools have been compiled, and 42,874 volunteers (primarily young individuals) have been enlisted to participate in this crucial social movement that aims to transform the educational landscape of the country (ASER, 2015). Private schools have a significant enrollment of school-aged children, with non-state schools in urban areas accounting for 63% of all students attending school (ASER, 2015). The province of Balochistan has the same figure for private schools and institutions. The province is also home to a large number of Madrassahs and private schools (BESP, n.d.).

The Balochistan Education Foundation (BEF) functions as an independent entity to provide support to the Secondary Education Department. Previously, it has collaborated with private entities to improve access to education, and at present, it is responsible for regulating and registering private schools (BESP, n.d.). Since 2015, BEF has also been entrusted with the role of private educational institutions, Registration, and Regulatory Authority under the Act passed by the Provincial Assembly. BEF has been very effective in performing its role, and around 1,230 private educational institutions with more than 327,000 students have been registered with BEF under the Balochistan Private Educational Institutions Registration and Regulation Authority (BPEIRRA). The private sector has become a major player in the educational landscape of Pakistan. This phenomenon can be attributed, in part, to low public confidence in government schools and the lack of availability of public schools, particularly in urban and rural areas (BESP, n.d.). Table 6 below highlights the number of private schools operating in Balochistan between 2018 and 2019.

Table 6. Number of private schools in Balochistan 2018-19.

Section	Number of Private Schools
Primary School	276
Middle School	236
High School	317

Source: Balochistan Education Foundation, 2019.

According to Table 6, there were 276 private primary schools, 236 middle schools, and 317 high schools operating in the province. This growth in private schools is driven, in part, by low public confidence in government schools and the limited availability of public schools, particularly in urban and rural centers. Given the critical importance of education in developing cognitive skills and promoting social mobility, ensuring that all children have access to quality education and the opportunity to thrive academically must be a top priority in Balochistan (Government of Balochistan, 2018). The second component of the Balochistan Education Support Program supports and facilitates private-sector education through low-fee schools. Numerous large schools and school systems have developed and implemented their own teacher training programs, while others provide access to specialized courses through secondary schools, commonly known as normal private institutions (Memon et al., 2010). The quality of education dispensed by the majority of private schools in Pakistan is subpar due to a significant scarcity of adequately trained and qualified educators and a lack of supportive mechanisms for these instructors (Memon et al., 2010).

Discussion

Articles 37 (b) and (c) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) guarantee its citizens the right to free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period, as well as access to technical and professional education and higher education based on merit (UNESCO, 2015). In March 1998, the Government of Pakistan announced its education policy for the period 1998-2010, which included several initiatives to increase literacy rates. One of the key steps announced in the policy was the launch of a national literacy movement on an emergency basis in every village and district, as stated in an article (Masood & Ambreen, 2016). Despite the government's attempt to launch a national literacy movement in 1998, Pakistan still faces a significant literacy problem today for various local reasons. Pakistan's progress in improving its literacy rate has been slow in the recent years. Despite a moderate increase in the literacy rate for the population aged 10 years and above, from 35% to 53% between 1990-1991 and 2004-2005, progress has stagnated. By 2011-2012, the literacy rate had increased to 58%, indicating that significant challenges persisted. With 42% of the population remaining illiterate, the situation is a cause of concern, particularly in the context of the demands of the modern world (Azeem & Ismat, 2016). Specifically, rural areas have higher literacy rates than urban areas. This is due to the limited number of educational institutions in rural areas. However, Balochistan has different numbers that are linked to literacy rates. It has the lowest level of literacy compared to other provinces. Similar to other indicators, Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate in the country (BESP, n.d.). According to data provided by UNICEF, Balochistan is the least literate province of Pakistan, with an estimated 60-70% of children out of school. The province faces a range of challenges that contribute to this situation, including a lack of connectivity within the province, security concerns, and insufficient political will and

motivation to improve educational conditions in the region. These factors have combined to create a significant obstacle to the development of a robust educational infrastructure, leaving many children in the province without access to the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive world (Pakistan Coalition for Education, 2021).

There is lack of training opportunities for teachers in Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2014). Only four institutions offered in-service teachers (Shah, 20013). The lack of an adequate number of teachers and their unsatisfactory qualifications and training made it difficult for primary schools to qualify students for admissions in good secondary schools or jobs (Azeem & Ismat, 2016). Recent studies have indicated that teachers in Balochistan do not actively utilize new methods or strategies for teaching and learning. Additionally, the majority of teachers are not familiar with lesson planning, which limits their ability to effectively address various challenges that may arise in the classroom. This lack of professional development and training for teachers can negatively impact the quality of education being delivered to students in the province (Ahmad et al., 2014). The other educational problem in Balochistan is empty schools. In Balochistan, the issue of “ghost schools and teachers” refers to government-established school buildings without teachers or students. This problem has emerged due to local authorities’ desire to obtain public funding from international foundations.

Physical infrastructure and educational resources are crucial for shaping the learning environment and determining students’ academic achievement and learning outcomes. Inadequate educational facilities can result in student disengagement and lower academic performance, leading to a range of social problems, such as unemployment and crime. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to address these issues and provide sufficient educational and social facilities to promote inclusive and equitable access to education. Educational institutions do not receive the necessary attention to ensure the production of a high standard of education. UNESCO has also highlighted the need for adequate educational resources, such as textbooks and teaching materials, to promote quality education (UNESCO, 2015).

While boys’ schools are generally sufficient, girls’ schools are inadequate in many districts. Sociocultural attitudes and religious beliefs often result in limited availability of educational opportunities for women and girls, resulting in low enrollment numbers for females at all educational levels. Statistical data provided in the tables demonstrate that although there has been a slight increase in female enrollment in recent years, the current situation remains unsatisfactory. Gender disparities in literacy rates in Pakistan are significant, with a notable difference between males and females. The percentage of males who were literate was 48% in 1990-1991, while only 21% of females were literate during the same period. By 2011-2012, the percentage of literate males had increased to 70%, while the percentage of literate females had risen to 47%, indicating that gender disparities persisted over the two decades (Azeem & Ismat, 2016). In Pakistan, every family must have witnessed various degrees of gender bias (Atif et al., 2016). The education of boys is preferred over that of girls (Rasheed et al., 2021). These inclinations are available in certain provinces that have a more conservative population. Balochistan is a conservative province in the country. In a gender-wise comparison, 39% of males and 69% of females in the 6-15 age group are out of school (Pakistan Coalition for Education, 2021).

Excluding this unique issue, there is another serious problem in Pakistan’s educational environment. It is related to private education and a lack of public facilities. Most parents

would opt for private institutions because of their opportunities. The private education sector in Pakistan has experienced significant growth in the past 20 years, with private schools now accounting for approximately 40% of all educational institutions in the country. At the primary level, 34% of children aged 5-9 years old were enrolled in private schools, with 34% of them being boys and 33% being girls, according to the data on net enrollment rates. The popularity of private schools can be attributed to their reputation for providing better quality education compared to public schools. This trend towards private education is expected to continue in the future (Azeem & Ismat, 2016). Private schools are perceived to provide better quality education than public schools by parents in Pakistan, leading to an increasing trend of sending children to private schools. As a result, private schools have grown rapidly and account for approximately 40% of all institutions in the country. At the primary level, about 34% of children in the age group of 5-9 years were enrolled in private schools, with roughly equal representation of boys and girls (Shah, 20013). Private sector enrollment in primary schools constitutes a substantial portion, estimated at nearly 40%, of the total enrollment in primary education across many regions. This trend can be attributed to the insufficient number of public sector primary schools, which often remain non-functional due to inadequate teacher availability and funding constraints. Consequently, parents are compelled to send their children to private schools for primary education (Azeem & Ismat, 2016).

Conclusion and Implications

This research holds significant value as it sheds light on various issues prevalent in Pakistan's education system, particularly focusing on the Balochistan Province. This serves as a crucial first step in identifying problems related to literacy rates, gender disparity, curriculum, teacher qualifications, and physical infrastructure. The findings of this study are instrumental in uncovering the major challenges faced by both the education system of Pakistan and Balochistan. This study highlights the need for improvement in various areas of Pakistan's educational system. However, the situation in Balochistan is even dire, as the education system lacks many essential resources compared to the rest of the country. Therefore, this research suggests that a complete rebuilding of the education system in Balochistan is necessary to address the challenges faced by the region.

To effectively address these issues in Pakistan's education system, it is crucial for authorities to implement serious strategies. Firstly, they must establish a peaceful environment across the country and promote unity in education. It is important to create a peaceful environment for education and providing equal access to education for all students, especially those from marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2014). Additionally, literacy courses should be established throughout the country to reduce literacy rates. The government must ensure equal access to education for all students in every province. It is essential to improve the quality of teachers by providing appropriate training and training centers. Teacher training can significantly improve education quality. The physical environment of schools should be improved and educational materials should be provided on an uninterrupted basis. The importance of physical environments in education suggests that their development can positively impact learning outcomes (Barrett et al., 2015).

This study contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the often overlooked subject of education in Balochistan Province within Pakistan's educational system. By examining the main problems faced in the region, the research provides valuable insights

for policymakers, higher education administrators, and practitioners seeking to improve the schooling system. The findings add to the body of knowledge in the field and serve as a valuable resource for future research and scholarly endeavors focused on addressing the educational challenges in Balochistan and similar contexts. Future research can focus on conducting qualitative studies to understand specific barriers, longitudinal studies to assess intervention effectiveness, and comparative studies to identify potential solutions for enhancing education in Balochistan.

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