



RESEARCH PAPER

Shrinking Possibilities to Educate Youth with Compromised Socioeconomic Background: Uncertain Economic Shift of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

People with compromised socioeconomic backgrounds throughout the world are struggling to get their children educated but the situation is getting worse in poorer nations such as Pakistan due to never ending crises. The main objective of the study was to investigate problems faced by low-income families to educate their children. The QUAN-qual study design was used and 120 dropped-off students were selected as a sample of the study from 8 universities in Pakistan. The student's family socioeconomic framework (SFSF) questionnaire was used to collect data. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the students left the University before completion of their degree, due to financial crises. The increase in overall expenses of the family did not allow them to get a portion of finance from their family income to continue their study instead of contributing to family income by getting involved in some kind of job.

KEYWORDS Economic Crises of Pakistan, Socioeconomic Background, Youth Education,

Introduction:

The pursuit of education is a fundamental human right, yet for many students hailing from impoverished families, this right remains elusive. It is a global issue, with far-reaching implications for society, economy, and global development. In Pakistan, where economic disparities are stark, the challenge is particularly acute. The barriers to education for the underprivileged are numerous and complex, ranging from financial constraints to systemic issues within the educational infrastructure.

Financial hardship is the most immediate and apparent obstacle. The cost of university education in Pakistan is non-affording for lower-middle-class families, with expenses such as tuition fees, books, and transportation often beyond the reach of parents. The situation is compounded by the lack of sufficient scholarships and financial aid programs, which could otherwise provide a lifeline to capable and deserving students so that such students may be able to complete their education to become effective contributors to society as a whole. The societal impact of this educational divide is profound. Education is a powerful tool for social mobility, but when access to it is restricted due to lack of funds, it perpetuates cycles of poverty. Without the opportunity for higher education, students from compromised socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to secure well-paying jobs, leading to a continuation of the socio-economic status quo. This not only affects the individuals and their families but also hampers national development.

In conclusion, the shrinking possibilities for educating students from compromised socio-economic backgrounds is an issue that demands urgent attention and action from the Government of Pakistan. It is a matter of justice and equity, with the

potential to transform lives and society as a whole. By ensuring that all students, regardless of their economic background, have access to quality education, the country can pave the way for a more prosperous and equitable future for young manpower. The hyperinflation in Pakistan made the situation tough for students who do not belong to well-off families such students might not be able to focus on their studies instead of worrying about the arrangement of semester fees and other associated expenses. This study particularly focuses on investigating problems faced by students of compromised socio-economic backgrounds and how such students struggle to complete their degrees in the current tough economic situation of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Education is one of the most important factors that contribute to human progress and it is considered to be a fundamental right for every human being, regardless of their gender, race, nationality, etc. It is one of the most important factors that contribute to the economic development of any country. The goal of sustainable development in any country cannot be attained without substantial investment in human capital. The literacy rate is one of the contributing indicators that denote the preference of any nation to educate its masses which ultimately leads the country to prosperity and well-being of citizens. Educating people helps them to distinguish between right and wrong, stay responsible for their actions, support justice, discourage corruption, and make sensible decisions for the progress of the country. History shows that incompetence and inability in the field of education are one of the main reasons for the destruction of nations.

UNICEF (2022) survey revealed that 22.8 million children in Pakistan (aged between 5 to 16 years old) are out of school which represents 44% of the total population of the same age. One of the factors is poverty and the compromised socioeconomic status of people. Educating the masses has not been a priority of Pakistan since its independence, followed by the lowest budget allocation to the education sector which led the country to become a destructive economy of the Asian region (Memon et al, 2021).

Currently, Pakistan is in its worst economic condition for the last several years and the recent shift made it even worse for everyone in the country because inflation increased to more than double as compared to the last few years (Singh, 2022). The rate of inflation reached 38 percent in June 2023, which is considered to be the record highest in the last 60 years and prices of food items sores the most. The country has been in economic turmoil for months with an acute balance of payments crisis and has one month to satisfy the International Monetary Funds (IMF) before its halted support program ends, which increases the risk of a sovereign default. Meanwhile, costs also accelerated for housing & utilities (21%), clothing & footwear (23%), recreation & culture (72%), restaurants & hotels (42.3%), and furnishings (44%). Every month, consumer prices surged 1.6%, easing from 2.4% in the previous month (Singh, 2022). Additionally, the core inflation rate, which excludes volatile items, went up by 20% in May 2023 from 19.5% in April 2023.

In contrast the increase in sudden inflation and shrinkage of GDP spending on Education, it is making the situation difficult for parents to cover the educational costs of their children. Several students were reported to drop off from University rolls who are not able to pay their fees and expenditures associated with higher education because funds for scholarships were taken back by the Government (Singh, 2022). Institutions are pushing students to clear their dues otherwise they may be able to not continue their studies, except very institutions that are still offering dues clearance in the form of installments but it should be paid by the end of the semester. In addition to this, faculty

as well as administrative staff of the Universities are in financial crisis, and several Universities are unable to pay monthly salaries to their employees due to the non-availability of funds. The situation is getting worse not only for parents but also for teachers who are dedicated to educating children. It is a fundamental truth that has to be released that nothing could happen without having the proper release of funds to continue operations (Singh, 2022).

Every walk of life is disturbed in Pakistan but the education sector looks suffering most as compared to any other sector. Parents have started to take their children as a source of income instead of spending money on their education. Parents may get temporary relief but it is not something that can stay beneficial in the long run. It could easily destroy their families as well as the whole generation due to the unbearable rate of inflation and disturbance in the balance of payments that every individual family is suffering from (Noor, 2021).

People with a compromised socioeconomic status of the family suffer more than anyone else in the country and the majority of Pakistan families/ individuals fall under this category. The Government of Pakistan set the minimum wage for a worker to 25000 (\$124) with monthly average spending almost double to above said wage. Therefore, it is not easy for any of the poor families in Pakistan to even dream about a University education due to hyperinflation, low salaries, higher spending on household stuff, and the highest tuition fee set by the educational institutions with a lack of scholarships (Noor, 2021).

One of the reports published by UNESCO revealed that Pakistani families spend more than 57 percent of their income on the education of their children ranking Pakistan 2nd highest in the South Asian region. This spending is only possible once, the family has enough savings or a portion of the income that can serve the need to get their children educated. Right now Pakistani people are suffering due to the sudden price hikes for everyday products and services, one needs to buy for the survival of a family. These hikes have made the situation worse for majority of the families to extend educational facilities to their children because it has a significant effect on their overall family expenses (The Express Tribune, 2021). On the other hand, politicians are playing the blame game on each other and do not consider education as their priority at all. Therefore, spending on other heads is significantly higher in the recent budget (Federal Budget of Pakistan 2023-24) as compared to the allocation made to the education sector as well as health.

Pakistan became the fifth largest country by population in the world (249.566 million people), according to the first digital census of 2023. According to a report published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the percentage of youth in Pakistan is twenty-nine percent (29%) between 15 to 29 years old (Sultan, 2022). The people of this age are considered to be the asset of any country who can play a pivotal role in the development of the country if they get educated according to the needs of the country. Unfortunately, Pakistan is not one of the countries that have education as its priority. This can be seen clearly when it comes to budget allocation for the education sector in Pakistan, The Government of Pakistan allocated 53 billion rupees (1.7% of the GDP) to the Education sector as compared to the 1.804 trillion rupees budget allocated to defense. This figure is the lowest among the South Asian countries and it keeps Pakistan in 155th number country when it comes to allocation of budget to the Education sector and keeps Pakistan far behind several African countries such as Morocco (36 million population), Ghana (30 million population), and so on. If a country is not taking education as its top priority how any such country could ever imagine becoming a developed country? According to the World Bank, in the year 2023, Pakistan is going to

reach 37.2 percent of people live under the poverty line and they will be forced to earn less than \$1.9 a day with an inflation rate of 38% (the highest observed since the independence of Pakistan) as compared to 21% inflation rate observed in June 2022 (World Bank, 2023).

People with tough socioeconomic conditions cannot afford to educate their children and this practice is very common when it comes to the region of Balochistan province (the biggest province in the country by area), Sindh province, and the region of upper Punjab. Since independence, there have been several types of scholarships. Such scholarships were offered to people of poor regions to allow their children to get educated but the recent economic shutdown of Pakistan and fear to get defaulting to its debt repayments made the situation pretty tight for the country. As a result of the economic shutdown and unstable political conditions of the country, almost all the subsidies are taken back by the Government and let the institutions survive on their own. Several Universities in Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab province do not have enough money to pay salaries to their faculty members and administrative staff (Shoib, 2022; Nadir, 2022; Achakzai, 2023; ANI, 2023).

This situation of uncertainty pushes people not to send their children to universities because they are not financially stable enough to feed their children twice a day so how can they pay several thousand rupees in account of tuition fees of university and other expenses associated with children's education? This shrinkage of financial resources and unstable conditions of Pakistan pave the path to conduct this research so that people in financial trouble and their children could be studied so that necessary action may kindly be taken by Government officials as well as international organizations so that our youth may not stay deprived of their fundamental right to get educated.

Material and Methods

A research methodology is the solution of any research problem in systematic order (Kothari, 2004). The research methodology was divided into two: qualitative and quantitative methods. There is no specific or accurate methodology in the literature, no matter what are the interests of the researcher and what is the nature of the research problem. Researchers can follow either method depending on the nature of the research problem. Some of the researchers conduct mixed method studies i.e. conducting both types of research in a single study (Kothari, 2004).

To keep the objectives and nature of this study, the researcher used QUAN-Qual, as described by Creswell (2009), as a preferable way of research methodology. The researcher has two sets of participants: students and their parents. Quantitative response-based questionnaires were used for the collection of data from students and open-ended questionnaires were used to interview parents of the respective students.

Population

A population is a complete set of elements (persons or objects) that possess some common characteristic defined by the sampling criteria established by the researcher (Kyriakides, 2007). All the researches are conducted on a specific portion of the population but the study results may be generalized to the whole population. The population of the study were all undergraduate students (including their parents), who belong to compromised socioeconomic classes, and enrolled in 4 years Bachelor's Degrees programs offered throughout the four provinces of Pakistan.

Sample

The sample is a combination of objects or people selected in a particular study; people are referred to as subjects or participants of the study and sampling is the process of selecting a group of people, events, behaviors, or other elements with which to conduct a study (Kyriakides, 2007).

The sample-taking process was executed in three phases, details are given hereunder:

1. In the first phase, a total of eight (08) public sector universities were selected from all four provinces of Pakistan randomly, two universities from each province.
2. In the second phase, data was collected regarding the socioeconomic status of families from all the available undergraduate students enrolled in eight universities, through purposive sampling techniques.
3. In the third phase, a representative sample (120 students) was taken who were able to meet the criteria for the compromised socioeconomic status of their family. In this phase, a simple random sampling technique was used to reach a representative sample of the study.

Instrumentation

According to the design of the study, a questionnaire was developed, based on a student's family socioeconomic framework (SFSF) backed by the financial crises of Pakistan. This framework included family income reduction and its impact on parents' financial position to bear costs associated with children's education (semester fees, stationary, textbooks, transportation, and so on). Another Questionnaire was developed based on open-ended questions to interview parents of the respective students.

Validation

Content validity

Content validity is the degree to which questions including the scores of an instrument represent all the possible responses that can be asked in a particular content or skill (Creswell, 2005). This study focused on content validity to investigate the relevance of content, difficulty level, clarity of responses, representative of the original construct, appropriateness of the content, and so on. An instrument can yield consistent, reliable results, but might be measuring the wrong construct, making it invalid. The content validity of the tool was measured by the panel of experts who assessed the questionnaires before distribution to the targeted audience.

This study focused solely on testing the convergent validity of the SFSF. The researcher used the percentage agreement tool to assess content validity levels across all items. For this purpose, the researcher involved three experts, more likely to involve highly experienced teachers, having teaching experience of more than 10 years not less than the designation of Assistant Professor. The logic to use a percentage agreement tool for the assessment of content validity can easily be analyzed and explained with the help of statistical tools (Stemler, 2004). A sample of a percentage-agreement tool in split form with sample responses is given below.

Table 1
Sample Percentage-Agreement Content Validity Tool

Items	Constructs	Expert 1 Expert 2 Expert 3									Percentage Agreement (%)
		Scale									
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
10	Category I			✓		✓				✓	89
10	Category II		✓		✓					✓	78
20	Category III		✓		✓					✓	70

It is necessary to consider an item valid if 2/3 of responses were in favor, it means that while assessment of content validity if an item were able to get a response equal or more than equal to 67% in favor, it was considered valid otherwise item was removed or modified as per instructions of the experts.

Reliability of the Instrument

The concept of reliability of the instrument is referred to as how consistent and the stable responses of the research instrument are (Creswell, 2005). In this study, the internal consistency of items is included with the help of coefficient Alpha formally called Cronbach alpha (α). Fraenkel&Wallen (1996) proposed that reliability among items can be considered acceptable if the value of Cronbach alpha (α) falls within the range of 0.70-99. As stated by Taber, K. S. (2018) the value of Cronbach alpha is acceptable if the value falls from 0.80 to 0.90. As for social sciences research, the value of Cronbach alpha (α) can be accepted even when it's as low as 0.60 as stated by Ghazali (2008). The below sample reliability table was considered as an evaluation measure and if the value of an item was more than equal to 0.70, it was considered to be part of the instrument otherwise the item was removed or modified. Table 3 indicates an acceptable range of reliability values for the person and the reliability of any item. This table is a necessary part of the instrument that was developed by Fisher (2007) which was based on Rasch's literature and his real-time experiences while conducting Rasch analysis in several different settings. The reliability of the instrument was 0.87 which was considered good according to table 2.

Table 2
Rating Scale Instrument Quality Criteria

Person & Item Measurement	Reliability
Poor	<0.67
Fair	0.67-80
Good	0.81-90
Very Good	0.91-0.94
Excellent	>0.94

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a preliminary small-scale research executed to ensure feasibility, time, cost, adverse events, and effect size of statistical variability to predict suitable sample size and improve upon the research design before the start of the full-scale research project (Hulley, 2007).

The researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure the reliability of instruments by selecting random 6 students (having compromised socioeconomic family background) by ensuring respondents included in the pilot study have the same level of educational background. Students selected in the pilot study were not included in a full-scale study to ensure the quality of the research. Based on the results of the pilot study, few items were refined or removed.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this study were collected in different phases. In the first phase, socioeconomic background-based data were collected from students, especially from those who were willing to participate in this study voluntarily. Once the socioeconomic compromised group is recognized the second phase of data collection was started. In the second phase, data was collected from students and their parents or guardians by using already developed questionnaires.

Results and Discussion

After the collection of data, necessary coding was done before entering in SPSS. Data was analyzed by using cross-tabulation, Pearson correlation coefficient and other statistical tools.

Table 3
Socioeconomic status participants

Sr. #	Annual Family Income (In Pakistani Rupees)	Socioeconomic Class	No. of Participants	Percentage
1	3,000,000+	Upper Class	08	06.67
2	1,000,000 to 3,000,000	Upper Middle Class	34	28.33
3	400,000 to 1,000,000	Middle Class	50	41.67
4	150,000 to 400,000	Lower Middle Class	24	20.00
5	Less than 150,000	Lower Class	04	03.33
Total			120	100

Table 3 shows that there were a total of 120 participants who participated in this study those were further divided into different socioeconomic classes according to their level of annual family income. Out of these 120 participants, 8 (6.67%) participants of the students belonged upper class, 34 (28.33%) participants belonged to upper middle class, 50 (41.67%) participants belonged to middle class, 24 (20%) participants belonged to lower middle class, and remaining 04 (3.33%) participants belonged to lower class.

Conclusions

The results of the study show that the majority of the students who left the university before the completion of study were facing financial crises. Such students were able to secure admission in the academic programs offered by the universities with the hope of getting facilitated by financial aid by the concerned universities, The non-availability of such financial support made the situation worse for the students to pay their educational expenses. The recent hyperinflation in the country also creates trouble for their parents to keep affording educational expenses from their own pockets without any financial assistance from the Government as well as University authorities. Several students found they were not able to pay the complete fee even for their first semester instead of seeking installments to secure admission. Such students had strong motives to continue their studies. Such students were highly reliant on financial assistance programs offered by institutions. Once they realized no such financial assistance available they made them fee defaulters and left the universities before completing the degree. The majority of such students belong to Baluchistan as well as Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa Provinces of Pakistan. It was further found that the majority of students belonged to lower-middle-class families that were highly vulnerable to any sudden change in inflation and recent hyperinflation made the situation unmanageable for such families. The financial position of such families forced them not to afford the educational expenses of their children such as semester fees, stationary expenses, transportation expenses, pocket money, and several other associated expenses. Therefore such families were

forced to push their children to find a job instead of continuing to study at the university level.

In conclusion, the difficulties faced by families in Pakistan to afford university education are multifaceted and deeply rooted in the socio-economic fabric of society. The rising costs of higher education, coupled with the limited financial resources of many families, create a significant barrier to accessing university education. This challenge is further exacerbated by the disparities in access and quality of education, which disproportionately affect girls, especially from low-income families. The situation calls for concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and civil society, to address these challenges and ensure that higher education becomes more accessible and equitable for all segments of the Pakistani population. Strategies such as the implementation of social protection schemes, increased funding for education, and the establishment of more affordable public universities, by setting a cap on their fee structure, could play a crucial role in alleviating the financial burden on families and fostering a more inclusive educational environment so that such dropout rate may be decreased accordingly.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made.

- The higher education institutions may offer financial support to needy students from their resources as well as by coordinating bodies who may contribute financially to support students' education
- The provincial higher education commissions may extend the number of seats in different scholarship programs so it can be extended to the majority of needy students.
- The Provincial Governments may need to ensure the availability of funds to educational institutions especially universities so that such institutions may bear their financial obligations along with provision of financial support to concerned students.

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