

EDUCATING THE MARGINALIZED: INSIGHTS FROM ASER PAKISTAN 2018

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The introduction of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and a subsequent increased political will has led to an ever increasing focus on the education sector of the country in general and on every child's right to get quality education in particular. Consequently, serious steps have been taken by both the public and private entities to facilitate the learning of children. Some of these steps include rigorous enrollment drives, awareness campaigns, meritocracy in recruitment processes and provision of free education and textbooks, among others. However, there is still much left to be done in this regard. Education has always been thought of as an equalizing force which has the potential to blur economic inequalities. However, the correlation between economic well-being and educational attainment (and learning outcomes) means that it is a two-way traffic: where education has the potential to reduce inequalities, economic inequalities can also prove to be a hurdle in the attainment of education. According to the economic theory, all else being constant, an increase in economic inequality will lead to an increase in inequality of educational attainment. The aforementioned proposition is clearly manifested in the widening educational achievement gap between the children of the wealthiest and the children of the rest of the population with the continuous growth of economic inequality in Pakistan, as documented in ASER 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

With SDG 4 highlighting the importance of education for sustainable development and Pakistan's Right to Education Act (Article 25A) in place, the stage is set for all of the stakeholders to work collectively towards the provision of this fundamental right. While frameworks and sector plans are important components of the overall policy making process, a data-driven approach in policy formulation is essential for impactful, relevant and long-lasting strategies catering to the needs of the marginalized communities. Understanding the need to fill the existing gaps in data, ASER Pakistan provides us with the much-needed statistics and information on several indicators which are relevant to marginalized communities.

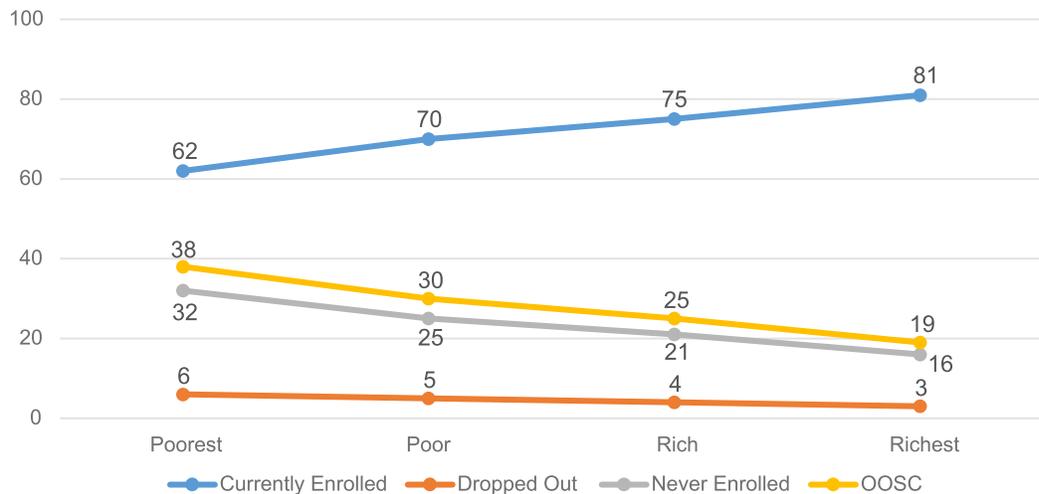
To understand the variation in learning levels arising due to economic inequalities, an assets-based ASER composite wealth index has been constructed by integrating multiple household indicators. These indicators measure the assets possession and wealth status of a household.

Table 1: Household Indicators

Sr. No.	Variable Name	Type	Description
1	House Type	Categorical	Kutcha (Mud) = 1 Semi-Pucca (Partially Cemented/Bricked) = 2 Pucca (Cemented/Bricked) = 3
2	House Owned	Binary	1 if the house is owned, 0 otherwise
3	Electricity	Binary	1 if the household has electricity connection, 0 otherwise
4	Television	Binary	1 if household has a television, 0 otherwise
5	Mobile Phone	Binary	1 if household has a mobile phone, 0 otherwise
6	Computer	Binary	1 if household has a computer/laptop/tablet, 0 otherwise
7	Motor Vehicle	Binary	1 if household owns at least 1 motor vehicle (car/motorcycle), 0 otherwise

ASER wealth index has been developed by using Factor Analysis method. Through this methodology, ASER 2018 national level data (154 rural districts of Pakistan) has been divided into 4 quartiles (poorest, poor, rich and richest, thereby representing the entire population of Pakistan in a socio-economic context.

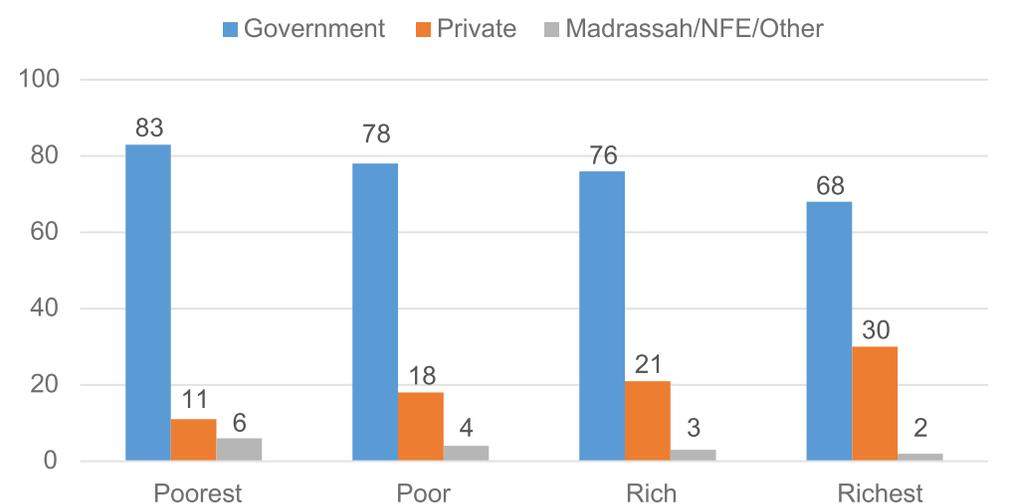
Figure 1: Enrollment Status (%)



The results depicted in Figure 1 show that the richest quartile has the highest percentage of children enrolled (81%) whereas the poorest quartile has the lowest enrollment rate (62%). A strong correlation between wealth and enrollment is established as we move along the wealth index. Similarly, the percentage of out-of-school children (OOSC), which is the sum of dropped out and never enrolled children, also decreases as we move from the lower end of the wealth index to the higher one. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is further strengthened.

Moreover, the findings from national data also highlight the difference in the types of institute which the children from the four quartiles are currently attending.

Figure 2: Enrollment by Institute Type (%)

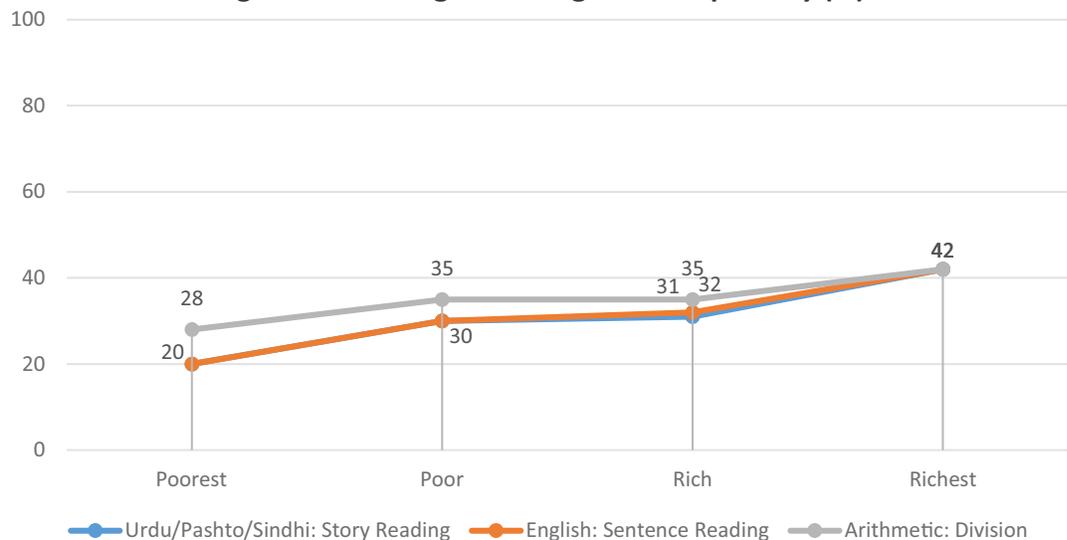


Majority of children (83%) from the poorest quartile are enrolled in the government

schools while the remaining are divided between private, madrassah, non-formal education (NFE) and other types of schools. There is a gradual decrease in the percentage of children who go to government schools as we move from the lowest quartile to the highest quartile. This decrease accommodates for an increase in the share of private school, thus implying that wealthier parents prefer to send their children to private schools rather than government ones or of any other type.

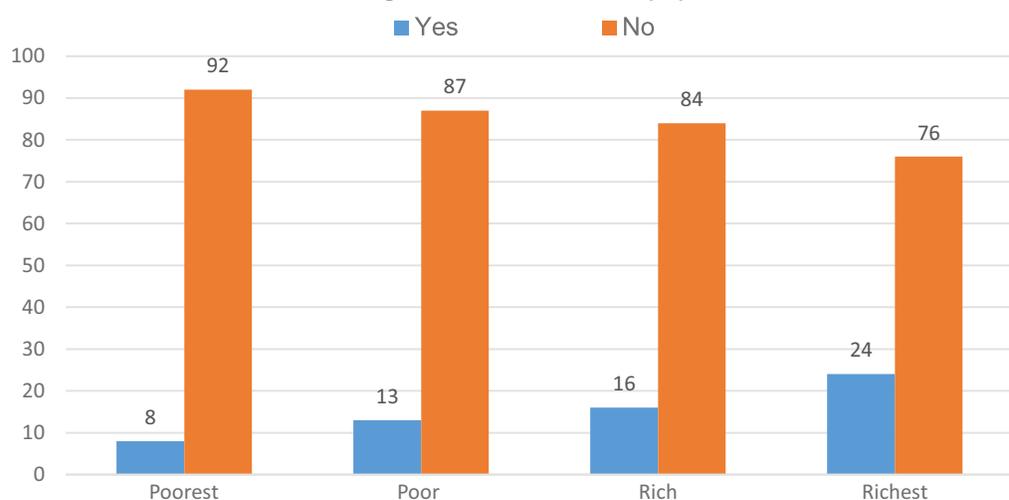
The economic disparities also influence the learning outcomes of children as shown in the following figure. There is almost a perfect overlap between the percentage of children whose learning levels are at the highest competency level in Urdu and English within each of the quartile. More children have achieved the highest competency level in all three subject areas in the richest quartile when compared with children from any other quartile. Similarly, the percentage of children who have the highest learning levels in the richest quartile is almost the same across the three subjects.

Figure 3: Learning Levels Highest Competency (%)



While the relationship between enrollment rates/learning levels and wealth status has always been of interest to the researchers and policy makers, it is also important to explore other potential factors that contribute to the education differentials.

Figure 4: Paid Tuition (%)



Parents/Primary Caregivers of those children who were currently enrolled in a school were asked if their child was taking any paid tuition in addition to the school. The responses to the question have been captured in Figure 4. As expected, children in the fourth quartile (richest) tend to opt more for paid tuition than other children. This also partially explains why the educational achievement of the affluent children is greater than those from relatively less affluent families since the wealthier children have additional resources such as paid tuition at their disposal which they can use to enhance their learning skills. Likewise, other factors such as parents' education, age and number of siblings may also influence whether a child is going to get an education or not. Table 2 shows that, everything else held constant, parents who have attended school tend to enroll their children into school more than those who have not. This highlights the trickle-down effect that parents' education can possibly have on the educational attainment of younger generations.

Table 2: Parents' Schooling vs. Child's Enrollment Status

Parents School	Ever Attended	Enrollment Status of Children			
			Never Enrolled (%)	Dropped Out (%)	Currently Enrolled (%)
Both Parents Attended School	Never	28	7	65	
Either Father or Mother Attended School		22	5	73	
Both Parents Attended School		17	2	81	

Furthermore, parents' age also plays a role in the decision on the enrollment of their children. It appears that younger parents (aged 35 years or less) tend to enroll their children lesser (66%) than those who are above 35 years of age (74%). When looking at the impact of number of siblings on the enrollment status of children, we found that there is a fluctuation in the enrollment status across the number of siblings. Therefore, the evidence that we have in this regard is inconclusive.

In conclusion, ASER 2018 provides us with pertinent insights regarding the negative impact that socio-economic disparities can have on the educational achievement of children and how there is a need for focused policy-making which is targeted not only at improving enrollment rates and learning levels but also at minimizing the economic inequalities which are prevalent in the society.