

Learning Levels Under Stress (2019-2021)

The urgency for action to address Learning Losses

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Educating a child during COVID-19 has found to be a monumental challenge. COVID-19 is wreaking havoc on the lives of school-going children. The abrupt school closures caused by the pandemic are aggravating the pre-existing global education crisis and are impacting education in unprecedented ways. Even before COVID-19 hit, the world was experiencing a learning crisis. 258 million children of primary and secondary school age were out of school, and the Learning Poverty rate in low and middle-income countries was 53% – meaning that over half of all 10-year-old children could not read and understand a simple text. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure was closer to 90%. At the peak of school closures in April 2020, 94% of students or 1.6 billion children were out of school worldwide¹. This implies the children are at a greater risk of learning crisis that they are coping in the current pandemic situation.

The ASER Pakistan 2021 (Rural) sheds light on the current situation of learning outcomes of children aged 5-16 years. It is the first largest citizen-led National Education Survey during pandemic since March 2020, conducted in 154 districts of Pakistan. The learning levels of children are assessed through specific language and arithmetic tools². The same approach is used for all children between the ages of 5 to 16. The literacy and numeracy assessments cover up to Class 2 level competencies mapped to the Single National Curriculum³.

Learning Crisis in Pakistan

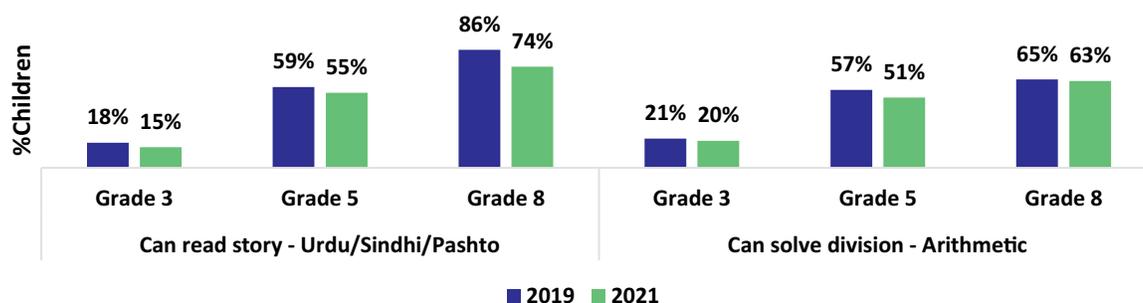
Class-wise Learning Levels: 2020 was the year of learning losses where learning levels of children in literacy (Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto) and numeracy have declined as compared to 2019. The learning outcomes for higher grade levels highlights learning bottlenecks that persist when not supported at foundational levels in grade 3. In ASER 2021, 15% of grade 3 children could read story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto compared to 18% in 2019. For grade 5, 55% of children could read a grade 2 level story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto compared to 59% in 2019. Similarly, in ASER 2021, 74% of grade 8 children could read story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto while 86% of the children were able to do the same in 2019. Moreover, for Arithmetic learning, the learning losses were exhibited by the children in grade 3, grade 5 and grade 8. In ASER 2021, 20% of grade 3 children were able to solve grade 2 level division as compared to 21% in 2019. Moreover, in 2021, 51% of grade 5 children were proficient enough to solve division whilst it is 57% in 2019. Similarly in 2021, 63% of grade 8 children were able to solve division as compared to 65% in 2019. Thus, the learning crisis during COVID-19 is discernable evidence that a Lost Generations are in making and urgent actions are required at scale covering lower primary levels to bridge the gaps for learning.

1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2021/01/22/urgent-effective-action-required-to-quell-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-worldwide>

2. ITA has detailed documents on the tools development process. Tools are developed after analyzing national textbooks and in consultation with expert groups at the provincial and national level. They are then piloted intensively before use to ensure comparability, consistency and reliability across provinces and over time.

3. <https://snc.gov.pk/>

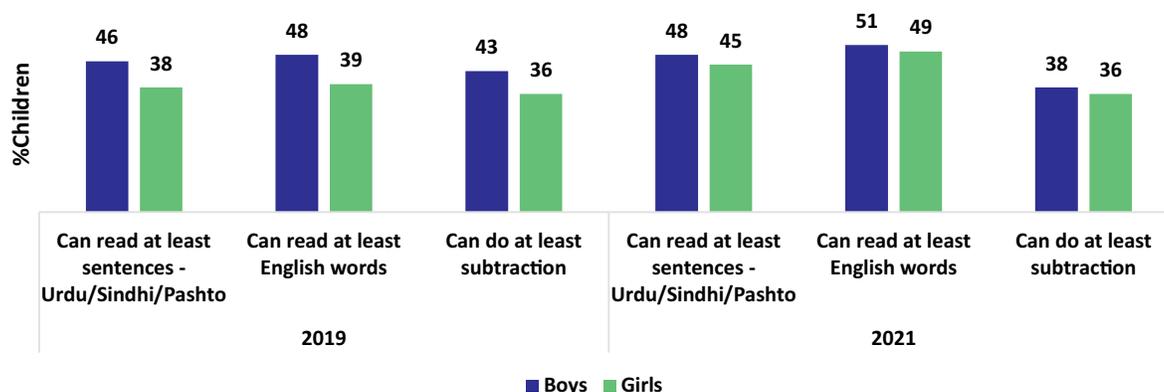
Learning Comparisons - Literacy & Numeracy



Gender Gap in Learning Persists:

The gender comparison reveals that boys outperform girls (age 5-16 overall) in literacy and numeracy skills. In ASER 2019 (Rural), 46% boys and 38% girls were able to read at least sentences in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 48% boys and 39% girls could read at least English words and 43% of boys were proficient to do at least subtraction whilst it is 36% for girls. However, the findings from ASER 2021 (Rural) show that 48% of boys and 45% of girls could read at least sentences in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto. Moreover, 51% of boys could read at least English words while 49% of girls can do the same. Correspondingly, 38% of boys were able to do at least subtraction compared to 36% of girls. Therefore, policies and programmes must be devised to support the learning of all children especially focusing on young children and girls for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN).

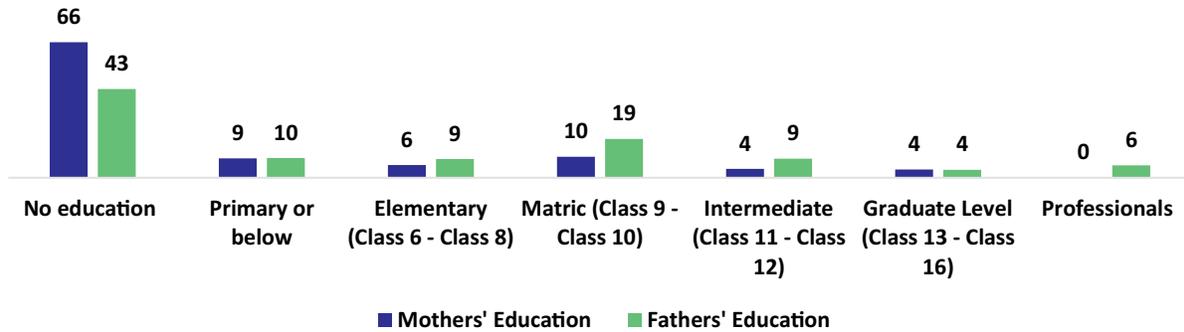
Learning by Gender (5 - 16) years



Parental Education:

Parents are active stakeholders in children's education and households demonstrate resilience. In ASER 2021 (Rural) study, 66% of the mothers and 43% of the fathers were found to be illiterate; only 8% of mothers and 19% of fathers had education above matric levels, whilst 25% of mothers and 38% of fathers had education up to matriculation levels including, primary education (1 to 5): 9% mothers, 10% fathers; elementary education (6 to 8): 6% mothers and 9% fathers; and matriculation (9 to 10): 10% mothers and 19% fathers. Educated mothers, at each level of completion, be it primary, middle, secondary and post-secondary play a positive role in children's learning outcomes.

% Parents Education



Impact of COVID-19 on Income AND Psychological Well-Being

The COVID-19 pandemic has created both financial and psychological stresses for caregivers. Financial stress on vulnerable households causes parents more likely to take children out of education, whether to reduce expenditures or to contribute financially to household incomes. Psychological stress renders parents less able to support their children's education. The ASER 2021 (Rural) study shows that 16% of households reported that their earnings during COVID-19 have been affected by more than 50%, while 30% reported that their psychological wellbeing has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In ASER 2021 (Rural), 16% of the households stated that they have received support from social safety nets (Ehsaas, BISP, PSPA, Akhuwat, etc.) compared to 10% of households receiving social protection grants in rural areas (ASER 2019). This is a positive finding for vulnerable households who have been affected by COVID-19. Thus, education inequities must be tackled on a fast track through targeted social protection programmes (Ehsaas) for all children – the poorest and poor, especially girls.



