

The Structure of Disparities in Education

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INTRODUCTION:

In the current rapidly globalizing environment, economic activity is becoming increasingly knowledge-based. Currently, governments and international agencies are working on constructing and developing educational frameworks to address post-2015 conditions beyond. However, the vital significance of education is largely ignored in Pakistan and the education system remains ineffective and unproductive. In addition, educational opportunities are unfortunately determined based on regional disparities, rural-urban location, gender, types of schools, and parents' income levels. The UNDP's 2010 HDI reveals that, when adjusted for inequality, the values calculated for education in Pakistan would slip by 46.4 percent. There are only five countries (four sub-Saharan states and Yemen) which have education sectors that are more unequal than Pakistan's.

Pakistani society has become largely fragmented and segregated on various socio-economic lines since the last couple of years. The inequality in income and wealth not only continues to grow with every passing year but also has triggered disparities in education. Although the real national income of Pakistan, on an average, is revealed to be increasing each year from the past 25 years, the concentration of income in the hands of a few has also taken a

leap. According to figures revealed by the Federal Bureau of Statistics, the reported income of the richest 20 percent of households has been almost 7 percent higher than the poorest 20 percent households over the last 25 years.

Educational disparities have further intensified because of the growth of the private schooling system, polarizing education along socio-economic lines. People in the lower-middle income group are unable to afford private education due to the exorbitant fees charged by such schools. At the same time, government schools fail to compete with private schools in terms of education quality. ASER (the Annual Status of Education Report) data clearly reflects such inequalities. A comparison of the performance of government and private schools in language and arithmetic assessments reveals the dismal performance of the government sector.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT:

Concerns with equity and income inequality are similar in other parts of the world as well. In most countries and regions, income inequality has grown, leading to a striking increase in the income share of the wealthiest groups for instance in much of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, China, India and South

¹ Jamal, H and Khan, A. 2005. "The Knowledge Divide: Education Inequality in Pakistan". *The Lahore Journal of Economics*.

² UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report. 2012.

³ A Study of Education, Inequality and Polarization in Pakistan. Tariq Rehman. Oxford University Press.

Africa. The UNDP's 2011 HDI reveals that the income inequality of countries on average has risen to 20% over 1990-2005, narrowing the gaps in health and education achievement.

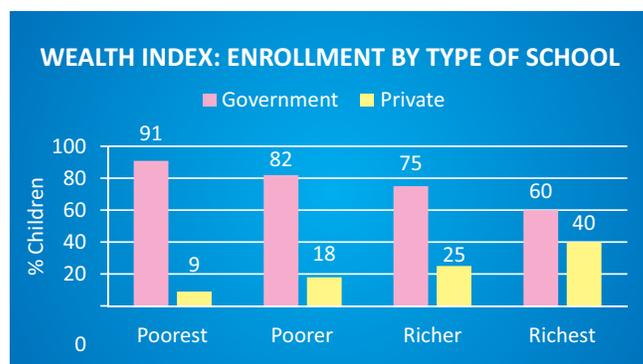
Facilitating society's disadvantaged groups is a central focus of human development and the biggest challenge lying ahead specifically for Pakistan. Equitable access and learning is the key to "sustained development". With the help of ASER national data (2012) covering 136 rural districts in Pakistan, this research discusses education inequalities in the country through identifying a relationship between students' performance and the disadvantages they face because of their family background. It will investigate if children from lower income groups are worse off than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

ASER has created a composite wealth index by integrating all the household indicators mentioned on the survey form. These indicators measure the economic potential and achieved levels of income and wealth of a household. The table representing the variables used to create the wealth index is given below:

Variables	Description
Type of house	Type of house is a categorical variable with kutcha given the value 1, semi-pucca equals 2, and pucca equals 3.
House owned	Dummy equaling 1 if the house is owned, 0 otherwise.
Electricity connection	Dummy equaling 1 if the house had electricity (visible wires and fittings), 0 otherwise.
Toilet	Dummy equaling 1 if the household had a toilet, 0 otherwise.
Mobile	Dummy equaling 1 if anyone in the house has a mobile, 0 otherwise.
Television	Dummy equaling 1 if the household has a television, 0 otherwise.

Construction of ASER wealth index:

ASER wealth index has been developed by using principle component factor analysis procedure in the STATA software. Using the above mentioned method of creating quintiles, ASER 2012 data has been divided into four categories/quintiles (i.e. poorest, poorer, richer, and richest) which represent Pakistan's entire population in a socio-economic context.



ASER 2012 data reveals that the poorest quintile has the highest level of children enrolled in government schools (91%) whereas the remaining 9% of the children are enrolled in private sector schools. The second quintile, which is poorer, has 82% of children enrolled in government schools and 18% of children enrolled in private schools. The third quintile, richer, has 75% of children enrolled in government schools and 25% in private schools. The richest quintile has the highest number of children enrolled in private schools (40%) and the lowest percentage of children in government schools (60%). It is evident from these figures that as we move along the wealth index towards the richest, enrollment in government schools falls while that of private schools increases. A strong correlation is established between wealth and enrollment in

⁴ It factorizes variables in a way such that it creates weighted combination of the input variables in the following manner e.g.

$$F_1 = a_{11}X_1 + a_{12}X_2 + \dots$$

In order to select factors, eigen values from a principal component analysis are used and the factor coefficient scores are created. Further, the indicator values are multiplied by the coefficient scores and added to come up with the wealth index. The index is then divided into groups/quintiles to categorize the population according to their wealth status.

private schools. Though a number of low fee private schools exist in the country, they are still more expensive than their public counterparts and thus are not affordable for all income quintiles.

Given the bleak picture portrayed by the disparities in enrollment according to types of schools, a similar image comes to light when the “learning levels” according to wealth status and with respect to gender are taken into account. Table 1 illustrates the differences in learning levels for males and females in different quintiles. In order to further strengthen the stance of inequality in education with respect to gender, access and wealth, a comprehensive analysis was conducted taking students enrolled in grade 4 and 5, and children of age 10 years (median age of children in grade 4) and 11 years (median age of children in grade 5). Column 1 of Table 1 provides learning levels of students enrolled in schools whereas Column 2 provides learning levels of children of that particular age who should be in class 4 or 5 accordingly whether enrolled or never enrolled.

leads to even lower learning levels for females at all age levels (shown for age 10 & 11). As shown in the table above, the poorest females are the most disadvantaged as only 15.7% can read Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto story whereas 19.3% of the poorest males can do the same. This pattern continues for the arithmetic subtraction and division sums as well. Learning levels improve as we move along the wealth index towards the richest, but they continue to remain low for females. 40.8% of richest females can do division (age 10) whereas 42.1% of richest males can do the same. Similar pattern follows for children aged 11 and so on. On the other hand, if we take a look at the 'students' enrolled in class 4, the wealth dilemma continues. Highest learning levels are of the richest students in both the subjects whereas the students belonging to poorest households, exhibit the lowest learning levels.

ASER 2012 clearly illustrates the appalling access and gender disparities created by differences in wealth status. A class driven educational system can never lead to economic development.

Table 1:	Percentage of students able to (column 1)						Percentage of children able to (whether in school or not) (column 2)					
	Students in Grade 4			Students in Grade 5			Children of median age for Grade 4 (10 years)			Children of median age for Grade 5 (11 years)		
Pakistan – National	Read Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto text	Do two digit subtraction	Do division	Read Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto text	Do two digit subtraction	Do division	Read Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto text	Do two digit subtraction	Do division	Read Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto text	Do two digit subtraction	Do division
Poorest Females	30.2	52.8	21.8	43.9	68.7	39.3	15.7	26.5	11.3	18.7	32.4	16.9
Poorer Females	37.1	58.8	29.2	50.9	71.8	39.9	27.2	42.3	20.9	34.9	50.4	27.8
Richer Females	39.6	63.5	31.7	56.1	75.6	46.8	36.6	52.7	30.2	48.3	63.1	40.0
Richest Females	50.1	71.4	39.2	61.9	81.2	53.5	49.0	67.3	40.8	61.6	76.2	55.2
Poorest Males	26.2	52.9	23.0	39.6	66.0	35.1	19.3	35.6	17.0	24.9	43.9	21.5
Poorer Males	32.7	60.1	28.2	46.1	71.8	40.7	29.5	49.8	25.2	40.2	63.1	37.4
Richer Males	35.5	60.4	28.3	51.9	75.3	45.0	35.9	56.0	30.9	49.6	68.3	44.4
Richest Males	46.2	71.4	37.0	61.4	80.1	53.3	49.1	68.6	42.1	61.1	76.7	55.0

The results clearly indicate that females are at a disadvantage due to the issue of access in Pakistan. The low rate of enrollment for females

Existing inequalities can only be broken down and development goals—including those to be set post-2015—can only be achieved through

⁵ Bari, F and Sultana, N. 2011. “Inequality in Education”. ASER 2011.

targeted interventions and progressive investment. A systemic change in the education system coupled with large-scale holistic interventions that address multiple barriers to schooling simultaneously is vital. At a time when the international community begins to plan post-2015 education goals and framework, it is vital to ensure that equity based targets are included and high priority is given to measuring marginalization in education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Quality based education and learning and goals that link education targets to skills, youth employment and economic growth should receive more attention.
- Initiatives such as improvement of public sector schools to cut the power base of elitist private schools, establishment of affordable schools in remote areas, change in obsolete teaching methods, income support programs for specific provinces (e.g. Benazir income support program), stipends for poor children who are not able to go to school, provision of facilities in public schools etc will not only remove the flaws present in our education system but also will turn Pakistan into a true democratic, egalitarian, tolerant and liberal society in the coming years.
- The socio-economic gaps in Pakistan affecting education can be reduced with the help of implementation of the Article 25-A, which states that *“The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law.”* If the Article 25-A is implemented in all provinces of the country, not only the enrollment rates will improve but it will also increase the overall literacy rate of the country. This will enable children to learn by ensuring that schools are inclusive spaces where there is no discrimination of any kind (based on sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, language spoken, ability-disability, health status), that teachers and the education system welcome diversity and treat all children with respect and dignity, and that there is no corporal punishment.
- Government of Pakistan should prioritize the learning gaps in children from early grades through high school. Frequent assessments should be conducted at the international, national, provincial, district, and school level in order to gauge the problems children are facing in terms of learning (despite being enrolled in government or private schools).
- Furthermore, in order to improve the quality of education within the country, not only should assessments be regularly conducted but its results should be shared with the public for an understanding of the value added by schooling as well as the sources of variation in learning outcomes across schools and socioeconomic groups.

⁶ Elaine Unterhalter, Education targets, indicators and a post-2015 development agenda: Education for All, the MDGs, and human development, 2013.

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