

Learning Outcomes for Dropped-Out Children in Rural Pakistan and the Challenge of Mainstreaming

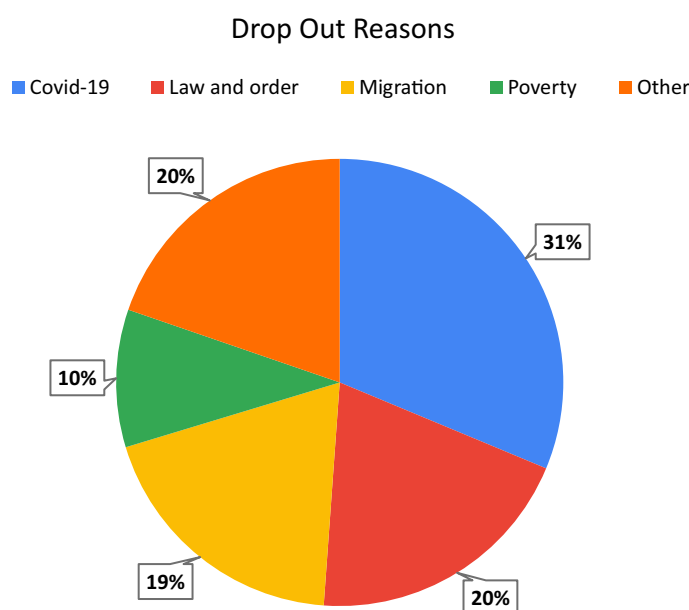
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With a growing young and an expanding population, Pakistan currently has over 63 million children between the ages of five and sixteen. Out of these, only 27 million (42%), are served by the public school system; over 20 million (32%), are not enrolled in school at all; and over 16 million (26%), are enrolled in private, nonprofit, or non-formal educational institutions¹. There have been efforts by the government and various national and international organizations to address the issue of out of school children and mainstreaming them into regular schools while also introducing alternative learning models. Still, Pakistan is miles away from meeting SDG indicator 4.1.4. (Out of school rate 1 year before primary, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education).

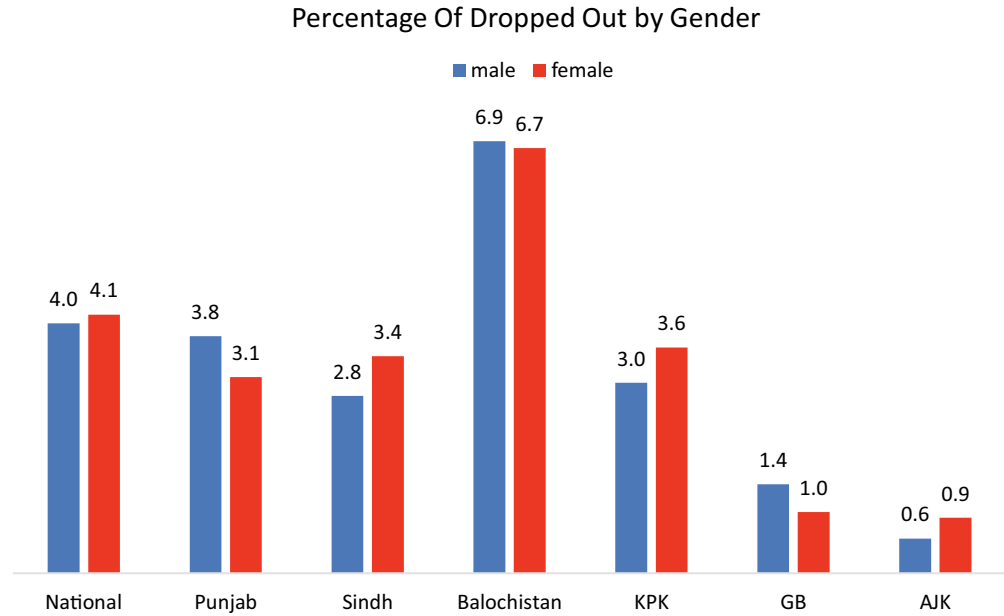
According to the recently released report of Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) in the Pakistan Education Statistics (PES) report, there are 26.2 million out-of-school children for the year 2021-2022. ASER 2023 survey shows that approximately 14% of children are out of schools in rural areas of Pakistan. Out of all those who are currently not in school, 5% have dropped out from schools. The trade-off between attending school and staying at home is greatly impacted by the nation's high rate of inflation and political unrest in addition to a host of other problems. As stated by the ASER 2023 findings, the main reasons for dropping out of school are Covid-19 (31%), Law and Order (20%), Migration (19%), Poverty (10%), and others (20%). Several other reasons for dropping out are clubbed in the "other" category that includes child labor, child marriage, academic difficulties, low returns to education etc. Individually the percentages for all the other 14 reasons for dropping out of schools are very low.

Figure 1: Main reasons for dropping out of school (Age 6-16)



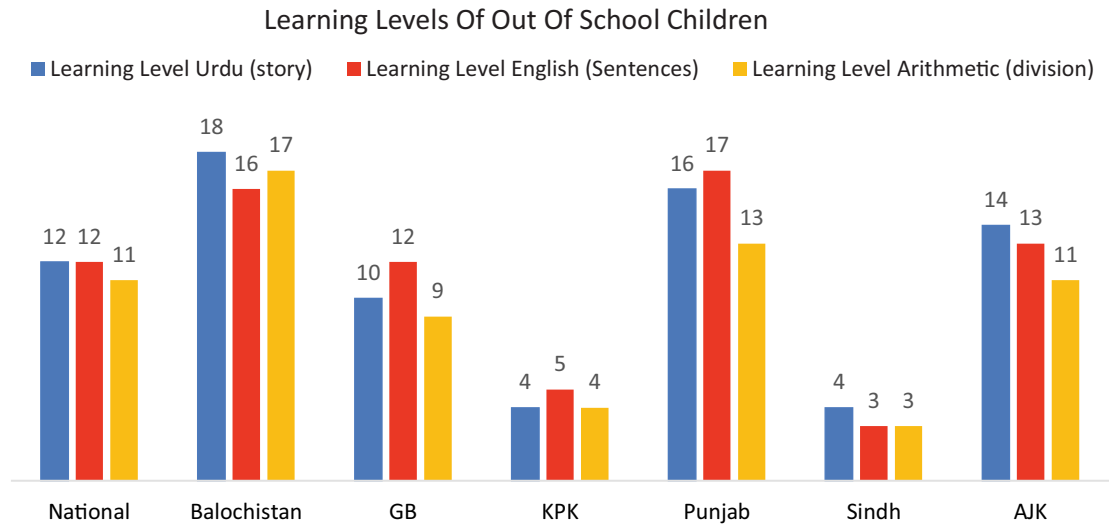
¹<https://mathsandscience.pk/publications/the-missing-third/>

Figure 2: Percentage of dropped out children (Age 5-16) by gender



Nationally it can be seen that more females are out of schools than males. 4% females and 4% males have dropped out as per the bar chart above. Balochistan has the highest percentage of dropped-out children. By gender more males in Balochistan as compared to females have dropped out. More females in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have dropped out than females in Sindh and Punjab who are of the ages between 5-16 years.

Figure 3: Learning level (%) of out of school children (Age 5-16)



The ASER 2023 data indicates prior learning of children. The highest level of learning for Urdu in the ASER survey is story reading. It can be seen from the bar chart above that 18% of children, who have dropped out of schools in Balochistan, can read stories in Urdu which is closely followed by Punjab and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Sentence reading is the highest competency for English Learning on the ASER English tool. 17% of students in Punjab and 16% children in Baluchistan stand at this level. Only a meager 3% of dropped-out children in Sindh can read sentences in English. Children who left schools but can read English sentences fluently in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are 5% as compared to 12% in Gilgit-Baltistan. Similarly, 17% of dropped-out children in Balochistan can do a

two-digit division and only 3% children in Sindh can solve a two-digit division question.

These are the children who can be provided with remedial learning programs and then mainstreamed back to the education stream. Government and private entities who are working for the provision of catchup/remedial learning programs for out-of-school children should start by identifying such children at the ground level.

Table 1: Learning level (%) of out of school children (Age 5-16) by gender & provinces

	Urdu (Story)		English (Sentence)		Math (Division)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
National	16	9	15	9	14	8
Punjab	14	18	16	17	13	14
Sindh	4	4	3	3	3	3
Baluchistan	25	12	22	12	21	11
KPK	6	3	7	4	5	3
GB	11	8	14	7	12	5
AJK	18	9	18	7	16	7

Out-of-school children (male) have higher competencies in Urdu, English, and Mathematics compared to female children aged 5 to 16. Nationally 16% male and 9% female dropped-out children can read a story in Urdu. 15% male and 9% females can read a set of two sentences in English fluently. 14% male and 8% females can solve a two-digit division question, which is the highest learning level in Numeracy/Mathematics.

25% male children in Balochistan can read a story in Urdu and that is followed by 18% males in AJK. 18% female children in Punjab can read an Urdu story which is the highest amongst all the provinces that is then followed by 12% females in Balochistan. It is interesting that children who have dropped out of school in Balochistan have better literacy skills than their counterparts in all the other provinces. These students can be identified in a timely manner and brought back to the schools. Around 22% males and 12% females in Balochistan can read sentences in English fluently which is highest among all the provinces. 18% males in AJK can read sentences which is second highest across all the provinces. 17% of female out-of-school children can read sentences in English. 21% males and 14% female dropped-out children can solve a two-digit division question in Mathematics.

Policy Recommendations

- All the stakeholders who are working in the area of remedial learning programs for out-of-school children should identify such children who have the learning competencies but are not enrolled in schools.
- Alternative learning models should be adopted and implemented to make them stay within the education system.
- International best practices should be adopted, and Article 25-A of the constitution should be implemented in letter and spirit.
- Resources and right interventions should be targeted in consultation with education champions and service providers.

- **Table 2: Reasons for dropping out of school for grades 2, 3, 5 & 8**

Top 4 Dropped-out Grades	Top 4 Dropped-Out Reasons			
	Law and Order	Poverty	Migration	Covid-19
2	14%	9%	27%	32%
3	10%	7%	25%	41%
5	12%	13%	11%	44%
8	23%	9%	12%	35%

- ASER 2023 shows that 31% of the children leave school after grade 5 which is the highest in any grade. Covid-19 accounts for 44% and poverty (13%) of the reasons for dropping out followed by law and order (12%) at this level. The government should incentivize and put a check at grade 5 where most of the children change schools, which at times are not available in the same village, therefore they are left with no choice but to leave schools.

