

URBANIZATION – VENTURING INTO THE UNKNOWN

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Pakistan faces a critical education access and learning challenge. Even after years of investments, reforms and promises, the education sector remains weak. Data from various Pakistan Education Statistics reports, Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER 20192019), Alif Ailaan's 2014 report¹ and various other sources identify key trends and challenges facing the sector. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by 193 member countries in September 2015 also represent a renewed focus for inclusive, lifelong and equitable education. In this context, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), provides a platform to assess where Pakistan's children lie on the basic learning levels' spectrum, not only across all rural districts of Pakistan, but also few key urban centers.

The ASER Pakistan survey has been conducted across 21 and 20 urban districts respectively along with 155 rural districts in 2018 and 2019. The objective is to provide data to be able to draw some meaningful reflections on educational outcomes between rural and urban areas. This is important because Pakistan reportedly has the highest rate of urbanization in South Asia². According to the 2017 Population Census, 36.4% of the population lives in urban areas. As per another report “The state of Pakistan Cities Report”, launched by the Ministry of Climate Change and UN Habitat on Urbanization (July, 2018), “10 major cities in Pakistan make up more than half – 54% – of the total national urban population”. The report further mentioned that the share of the services economy in cities is larger than in the national economy, and Pakistan generates 95% of its federal tax revenue from its 10 major cities where Karachi contributes 55%, Islamabad contributes 16% and Lahore contributes 15%. The UN Population Division estimates that, by 2025, nearly half the country's population will be living in cities.

Migration has also resulted in people shifting from rural areas to cities, leading to urban transformation that has brought about significant changes in socio-economic dynamics especially in the case of Pakistan. Major parts of the country are left with low urbanization while a handful of centers have to deal with extremely high influx of people resulting in the emergence of 'mega cities'. Unplanned and unmanaged urbanization has also led to the emergence of urban slums, environmental degradation, poverty and inequality. Migration has also resulted in huge pressure on existing facilities within urban centres as more individuals compete for limited resources. These pressures are especially apparent in the case of education. With such a host of urban challenges, there is a dire need to look into urban contexts with its own specifications and treat it as a separate category for solving problems particularly pertaining to the education sector.

ASER Pakistan, the largest citizen led survey, has been collecting primary data on key education outcomes since 2010 from across Pakistan including some major urban cities. The objective of conducting a separate survey for urban areas is twofold. Firstly, there is a clear recognition that urban areas in Pakistan (as in any other part of the world) operate as completely different entities as compared to rural areas. It is, therefore, important to understand educational outcomes of children living in urban areas. Another objective of surveying key urban centers through ASER has been to understand whether children living in select urban areas have an “urban advantage” in terms of better school facilities or better learning outcomes and whether growing urbanization has led to more problems including over-crowding within schools, insufficient infrastructure, fewer teachers for children and so on.

1. Titled 'Million Broken Promises'

2. https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/development_policy/dap-vol5-iss4-sustainable-urbanization.html

The sampling for the urban part of the survey is undertaken by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) who provide a sample list of primary sampling units (PSUs). PBS has developed its own sampling frame for urban domains where each city/town is divided into enumeration blocks. Each enumeration block is comprised of 200 to 250 households on the average with well-defined boundaries and maps. The frame used in the ASER urban survey (2019) is the most recent one, updated through the Population and Housing Census of 2017. A two stage, stratified sampling scheme is adopted for the survey. Enumeration blocks in urban areas are selected at first stage through probability proportional to size method while households within the sample enumeration blocks are selected at second stage through systematic random sampling.

ASER 2019 has been conducted across the following 20 urban districts: Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, Larkana, Sukkur, Hyderabad, Karachi South, Karachi East, Karachi Center, Korangi, Quetta, Khuzdar, Mardan, Peshawar, Swat, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. It provides us the opportunity to focus on the state of key education outcomes especially in major cities including Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta. Results for all 20 urban districts have also been collated to generate a National Urban Report Card in order to compare results with National Rural Report Card (having information from all 155 rural districts where rural survey has been conducted this year). This report card is available separately.

Table 1 below presents simple statistics reporting on educational access across the entire rural district sample and the urban district sample from the 2019 data.

Table 1: Schooling access, rural versus urban sample, ASER 2019

Table 1: Access	% of Out of School Children (age 6-16)	% of Enrolled Children (age 6-16)	% in Government Schools	% in Private Schools.
National Rural	17%	83%	77%	23%
'National' ³ Urban	6%	94%	38%	62%

Figures from Table 1 highlight that a large majority of children (94% of the children surveyed), were found to be going to schools across urban districts as compared to 83% enrolled children in rural. Not only do children in urban areas have substantially better enrollment rates, a large majority of children in urban areas attend private institutions (62%) as compared to their counterparts in rural areas where 77% of the children aged 5-16 years who are enrolled in schools are reportedly going to government institutions.

Figure 1: Out-of-school children by gender, urban sample (2015-2019)

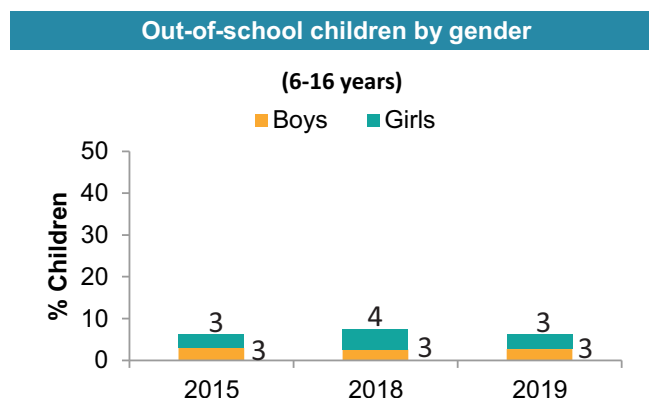
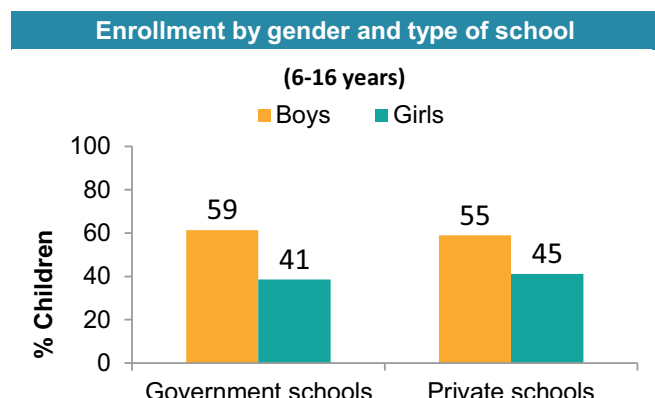


Figure 2: Enrolment by gender and type of school, urban sample (ASER 2019)



It is also worth noting that the urban sample is indicative of more gender equality in access to schooling (as compared to the rural sample where we report 9% girls to be out of school against 7% boys). Figure 1 reveals that roughly equal numbers of boy and girls (3%) are out-of-school in the urban sample over 2015-2019. However, interestingly, amongst those children who are enrolled in school, a larger percentage of boys report going to both government and private institutions as compared to girls.

Table 2: Learning Levels (Class 5), urban sample versus rural sample (2019)

Table 2: Learning Levels (Class 5)	Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto (Story)	English (Sentences)	Arithmetic (Division)
National Rural	59%	55%	57%
National Urban	70%	67%	66%

Table 2 presents some findings for the urban and rural samples in three basic competencies for grade 5 children (the end of the primary stage of education). Children residing in the urban sample appear to achieve more across all three competencies as compared to their rural counterparts. Overall, 70% of the children enrolled in grade 5 in all urban districts can read a story in the local language, 67% can read sentences in English while 66% can do division. Equivalently, only 59%, 55% and 57% of their counterparts in rural areas can do the same. However, as the tools are simple and designed as per grade 2 and 3 curriculum, there is still a room for improvement especially in English and Arithmetic.

Urbanization in Pakistan requires a tremendous focus on governance structures and policies, especially those that focus on equity, on the reduction of poverty, on providing education, housing, transportation, employment, public health and supplementary amenities to the large numbers of people who are now habitants of these large and ever-expanding urban centres. The data from ASER 2019 show-cases the need to focus also on the quality of education within urban centres in Pakistan. If the children are not learning despite being enrolled in schools, they will drop out sooner or later. Although learning of children in urban areas is higher when compared to children in rural areas; the overall urban learning levels still remain low. Whilst efforts have focused quite extensively on improving quality of government schools in rural areas of the country, there is a need for the government to reflect on the quality of education being provided in urban areas and to observe if it is getting comprised due to growing urbanization. The current education status of Pakistan as demonstrated by ASER 2019 clearly states that quality of education is at risk, and requires targeted action and a focus on access to equitable quality education and learning for all. The challenges need to be addressed by policy makers and governing body of the country with indigenous solutions in the form of sustainable policies, leading to their effective implementation and evaluation. If our objective is to educate all children, we need to challenge the existing differences and divisions in order to provide equal set of opportunities to all children of the society.