

NOTES ON ASER

Framing Note: ASER 2025 - Strengthening Methodology, Making Learning Visible

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This note provides context for ASER 2025, explaining the methodological evolution, key findings on access and learning, and the vision for future rounds. It highlights how the survey has transitioned to a nationally representative, census-based framework, the use of digital tools for data collection, and why the 2025 results should be treated as a new baseline for rigorous trend analysis in Pakistan's education sector.

For over a decade, ASER Pakistan has shaped the national conversation on education, highlighting a simple but powerful truth: schooling does not guarantee learning. ASER 2025 continues this legacy while also marking a significant turning point. This year's round introduced a major methodological shift, even as it reaffirmed a persistent challenge—access has improved, but learning, particularly in the early grades, remains alarmingly low.

The most important development in ASER 2025 is not just what the data shows, but how it has been generated. For the first time, ASER transitioned to a census-based, nationally representative sampling framework, drawing on Enumeration Blocks from the 2023 Population Census. Developed in collaboration with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and the Pakistan Institute of Education, this approach aligns ASER with national statistical systems through a stratified, two-stage sampling design with clearly defined probabilities and weights. This is not a routine technical adjustment; it represents a fundamental strengthening of ASER's methodological rigor and credibility. The survey now produces estimates that are representative not only at provincial but also at district and national levels within a unified framework.

Equally important, this shift reflects an evolution in how ASER collects and manages data. In 2025, 95 percent of all survey data were collected using a dedicated mobile application, which enabled real-time entry, automated consistency checks, and higher data quality. Only five percent of the data were collected using traditional pen-and-paper methods in areas where mobile connectivity was limited. This approach retains ASER's citizen-led, household-based ethos while introducing digital rigor, bridging community-based collection with the standards required for official statistical systems. The use of the app strengthens both the accuracy of the data and its potential for policy uptake.

The significance of this transition was reflected in the official launch of ASER 2025 on March 26, 2026, where senior leadership including Honorable Secretary Mr Nadeem Mehbod from the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Dr Shahid Soroya (Director General, The Pakistan Institute of Education, and Mr Naeem uz Zafar (Chief Statistician, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics) along with representatives from FCDO, UNICEF, World Bank and British Council came together to endorse the findings and the new approach. This level of engagement signals that ASER is increasingly recognized not only as an independent voice but also as a nationally relevant evidence platform, embedded within broader efforts to strengthen data-driven decision-making in education.



With this methodological strengthening comes an important caveat. ASER 2025 is not directly comparable with previous rounds. Earlier surveys relied on separate rural and urban sampling approaches, whereas ASER 2025 uses a unified national sampling frame. As a result, differences between this year's findings and past estimates may reflect changes in methodology rather than real changes in access or learning. This does not diminish the value of past ASER data. Earlier rounds remain essential for understanding long-term patterns, particularly in rural contexts. However, ASER 2025 should be treated as a new baseline, marking the beginning of a more statistically robust series that future rounds can build upon.

The findings on access are encouraging. Enrollment levels are high, with 92.2 percent of children aged 6–16 in school and only 7.7 percent out of school. Early childhood education is also expanding, with close to 60 percent of children aged 3–5 now enrolled. These gains reflect sustained efforts by governments, communities, and development partners over many years and represent real progress toward universal schooling.

Yet learning outcomes, particularly in the early grades, remain low. Only 12.4 percent of Grade 3 children can read a simple story, and just 9.1 percent can perform basic division. Even by Grade 5, only about half of children reach foundational competencies. This points to a systemic issue—a “Grade 3 crisis” in which children progress through the system without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. Classrooms are fuller, but foundational skills remain weak, reflecting deeper challenges in curriculum alignment, instructional support, and early grade pedagogy.

There are some positive signals. Girls are performing slightly better than boys across several indicators, suggesting progress toward gender parity in learning. Differences between public and private schools exist but are not large enough to indicate that either system is delivering consistently strong learning outcomes at scale.

Looking ahead, ASER 2025 should be understood as the beginning of a new, more rigorous phase. With a stronger methodological foundation, widespread use of digital tools, and closer alignment with national systems, ASER is now well-positioned to evolve from a diagnostic tool into a reliable national learning monitoring platform. Plans are underway to conduct future rounds in 2027 and 2029 using the same sampling design and scale. Maintaining this consistency will allow for credible trend analysis over time and provide policymakers with robust evidence to guide action.

Sustained support will be essential. A nationally representative, census-aligned survey of this scale requires investment not only in data collection but also in analysis, dissemination, and policy engagement. At its core, ASER has always been about making learning visible. ASER 2025 does this more rigorously than ever before, reinforcing a message that cannot be ignored: getting children into school is not enough. The real measure of success is whether children are learning, and on that front, the work is far from done.