

**RESEARCH PAPER****Examining the Impact of NGOs on Education Promotion in Underprivileged Areas of Pakistan: A Case Study of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi****¹Fatima Zohra, Rana Tahir Rehman* and ³Tahir Muhammad**

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***Corresponding Author** but.fatima2@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This research article titled, Examining the Impact of NGOs on Education Promotion in Underprivileged Areas of Pakistan: A Case Study of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi highlights the crucial role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in advancing education in under developed regions of Pakistan, focusing on Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA). Using qualitative research methods, the study explores challenges faced by less developed areas, particularly in terms of education accessibility and quality. Through an analysis of ITA's initiatives, including community engagement and infrastructure development, the research emphasizes the transformative impact of the NGO on educational outcomes. Findings contribute recommendations to enhance NGO-led education initiatives, providing insights for policymakers addressing persistent challenges in less developed areas. This research underscores the vital role of NGOs like Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi in promoting education, advocating for strategic measures to empower communities through education in these regions.

Keywords: Education, Literacy, Projects, ITA, NGOs**Introduction**

Education is the pursuit of knowledge, the cultivation of reasoning skills, and the transmission of systematic information. According to Merriam-Webster, it involves acquiring knowledge, learning various skills, understanding values, beliefs, faiths, and habits. Islam underscores the importance of education, considering it crucial for societal well-being. Quaid-e-Azam asserted that citizens must receive education to contribute productively to society and realize their potential. Education is not only a basic right but also a responsibility of the state, as outlined in the United Nations Article-26(1), which states that everyone has the right to education, and it should be free, especially in the elementary stages (Muzaffar & Javaid, 2018). In accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), Article 37 mandates the state to promote the educational and economic interests of backward classes or areas, eradicate illiteracy, and provide free and compulsory secondary education. This underscores the state's obligation to offer primary and secondary education without discrimination (Muzaffar, et al. 2020).

Quaid-e-Azam emphasized the significance of the right type of education in the All-Pakistan Educational Conference in 1947, stressing its critical role in the progress of the newly-formed state. However, despite legislative efforts, Pakistan's literacy rate stands at 58%, ranking 173rd globally (Muzaffar, 2016). This low literacy rate is a concern for a developing country like Pakistan, where education could be a potent tool for addressing societal issues such as poverty, forced labor, child labor, and street crimes. Regrettably, despite the emphasis on education in religious texts, Quaid's vision, and international

experiences, Pakistan has historically allocated insufficient funds for education compared to other regional countries, resulting in one of the lowest literacy rates in Asia and lagging enrollment rates. Addressing this educational deficit is crucial for the countries overall progress and well-being.

According to the UNESCO literacy rate report (2019), Pakistan has the second-lowest literacy rate among SAARC countries, trailing only Afghanistan. Contrary to claims in government documents spanning six decades, Pakistan consistently maintains the lowest educational budget in the region (Muzaffar, et. al 2017). Alarming, the country's enrollment in primary education lags behind other SAARC nations.

Pakistan allocates 2.8% of its GDP to education, falling short of the more than 3% GDP spent by other countries in the region, with the exception of Bangladesh. Despite the involvement of the private sector and NGOs in establishing numerous schools and colleges, the impact on enrollment rates remains unclear. The persistent low percentage of GDP dedicated to education, even with private sector contributions, is a significant concern for Pakistan. Efforts to enhance educational spending and improve enrollment rates are crucial for addressing the country's educational challenges and fostering societal development.

Table 1
Literacy Rate of Asian Countries.

Sr. no	Name of the country	Literacy Rate of All Genders (%)	Literacy Rate (Female)	Literacy Rate (Male)	year
1	Russia	100	99.7	99.7	2020
2	China	97	95.2	98.5	2020
3	Indonesia	96	94.6	97.4	2020
4	Bangladesh	75	72	77.8	2020
5	India	74	65.8	82.4	2018
6	Ethiopia	52	44.4	57.2	2017
7	Afghanistan	37	22.6	52.1	2021
8	Pakistan	58	46.5	69.3	2019

UN-Data Record 2023

Currently, more than 25 million children in Pakistan remain out-of-school, highlighting significant challenges in achieving a 100% enrollment rate. Constraints such as low-income households contribute to high drop-out rates, with around 33% of the population living below the poverty line. Families in lower income quintiles face difficulties affording uniforms, books, and other educational expenses, leading to fewer children enrolled in schools compared to higher income quintiles.

Child labor further exacerbates the problem, as children often forego school to contribute to their low-income families' earnings. Despite the government's efforts, including strategies like stipends for students, free primary education, and collaboration with NGO schools for flexible time arrangements, the results have been less effective. This highlights the crucial role that NGOs can play in addressing these issues at the grassroots level, where their micro-initiatives have the potential to make a meaningful impact.

NGOs, or Non-Governmental Organizations, encompass both profit-making and non-profit entities working independently or collaboratively with governments. Originating from historical responsibilities of society, NGOs have been instrumental in promoting education, exemplified by pre-independence welfare societies like Anjuman-e-Himayat-Islam. The 1920s witnessed religious organizations and philanthropists actively supporting education for the underprivileged.

Post-independence, NGOs gained prominence in the late 1970s and 80s, evolving into a global movement rooted in sociocultural values. Despite governmental efforts to enhance education, including schemes like free book distribution and stipends, the education sector's overall performance has remained poor. Poverty often compels families to prioritize immediate needs over sending children to schools, making non-formal educational institutions established by NGOs more accessible, especially for labor children. In the past decade, the private and NGO sectors in Pakistan have experienced significant growth, actively participating in primary, secondary, and other levels of education. Public-private partnerships (PPP) are increasingly seen as a solution to the deficiencies in the public service delivery system, aiming to address issues related to equity, quality, and access in primary education.

Government schools face challenges such as low budgets, outdated curriculum, unfriendly environments, low retention and enrollment rates, poor monitoring, and maintenance issues, resulting in poor-quality education. Surveys conducted by the government acknowledge the subpar quality of education in public schools compared to private and NGO schools. Standardized tests and state examinations consistently reveal poorer performance by public sector students. Civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, have stepped in to fill the void left by government schools. Recognizing their potential contribution to improving education quality, NGOs operate through both service delivery and advocacy. They allocate significant resources to educational initiatives, thereby gaining trust in contrast to governmental organizations. NGOs also prioritize collaborations with communities, mobilizing social engagement, and addressing diverse service delivery elements. This involves the creation of formal and informal educational institutions, conducting training sessions for both teachers and students, and fostering community involvement. Their tactics improve the accessibility of formal and informal education in both urban and rural regions of Pakistan, with a central emphasis on delivering education tailored to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

Literature Review

"Fifty years of neglect," authored by Naushin Mahmood and Akhtar Hasan Khan (1997), provides a comprehensive analysis of the educational crisis in Pakistan. The research paper highlights the reasons behind the country's low literacy rate, with a particular focus on the challenges faced by women due to inadequate educational facilities. The paper contrasts Pakistan's subpar performance in education with other Asian countries, emphasizing the nation's low ranking even among SAARC countries. (Khan N. M., 1997)

The research contends that while Pakistan's constitution mandates compulsory education as a right, the state has failed to practically deliver primary education to its citizens. The writer critically examines five decades of educational policies and commissions, arguing that they were more rhetorical than practical. The paper reveals a stark divide in Pakistan's education system, with an elite class sending their children to expensive institutions for A/O levels and higher education abroad. In contrast, the poor send their kids to public schools with subpar education quality, perpetuating a significant societal gap. Despite the educational privileges for the wealthy, the underprivileged are left waiting for a transformative improvement in their access to better education.

Wardan Gul's research paper (2015), titled "Role of NGOs in Education from Pakistani Context," published in the Journal of Innovation and Stability, is a significant study addressing the role of NGOs in Pakistan, particularly in rural and less developed areas lacking adequate education and health facilities. The paper reviews the efforts of NGOs operating in these regions, emphasizing a qualitative analysis. (Gul, 2015)

Gul highlights the distinction between small NGOs, termed "New breed," which rely on donations and guidance, and stronger NGOs that actively seek partnerships with the

government for sustainability. The research findings reveal that the conditions of the poor and deprived populations, especially in rural areas, have not significantly improved in Pakistan. The study holds considerable value as it delves into the controversies among different stakeholders, with NGOs claiming success in their work, particularly in rural areas. This research serves as a valuable resource for further investigations, offering insights into assessing claims made by NGOs in their respective areas of operation.

The scholarly article titled "Cognitive and Life Skills Development in Public, Private, and NGO Schools in Pakistan," authored by G. M. Arif and Najam us Saqib (2003), delves into the changing landscape of education with a focus on the expanding role of the private sector. The paper underscores the creation of new educational institutions as a means to enhance the overall educational quality within the nation. The research sheds light on the growing impact of the private sector, both at local and national levels, and investigates individual factors that influence students' learning capabilities. (Saqib, 2003)

The research paper highlights the noteworthy expansion of engagement by NGOs and the private sector in primary education over the years, even as the public sector maintains its substantial role. The research assesses factors influencing the educational standards across public, private, and NGO schools, offering policy suggestions for enhancing primary education in Pakistan. The analysis indicates no significant disparity in student enrollment numbers between NGO and public schools. However, a considerable gap in test scores exists, attributed to school-related variables and family backgrounds, including student/teacher ratios and educators' qualifications.

While the research emphasizes variances in school performance among various districts in Punjab, it underscores the significance of enhancing educational standards in both public and private schools through the recruitment of qualified and experienced educators.

To scrutinize the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in education, the researcher examined a report titled "The Role of NGOs in Basic and Primary Education of Pakistan," authored by Gulzar H. Shah, Faisal Bari, Nadia Ejaz (2005). The report sheds light on persisting challenges related to gender discrimination in various regions of Pakistan. Notably, there are ongoing issues with high dropout rates, and the quality of primary education in government schools is considered insufficient, indicating a necessity for enhancements in the public sector education system. Contrary to common beliefs, the report suggests that the significance of the private sector has been exaggerated in the past decade. According to the report, the private sector remains relatively small, with a substantial portion driven by profit-making motives. (Gulzar H. Shah, 2005)

The report underscores the expanded role of NGOs in primary education, emphasizing their innovation in reaching and engaging with the public at the grassroots level. Noteworthy initiatives include collaborations with the government, providing education in slum areas, and demonstrating a commitment to delivering quality primary education. Despite these progressions, the report acknowledges the persistent requirement for continued collaboration, especially in advocating for education in less developed regions of Pakistan.

Both the state and society in Pakistan have recognized the value of seeking assistance from NGOs to enhance service delivery in education. The scope of NGOs' service delivery encompasses establishing non-formal and formal schools, conducting teacher and student training, mobilizing communities, ensuring community participation, and providing essential teaching and learning materials. According to the report, NGOs have notably improved access to both formal and non-formal education in urban and rural areas of Pakistan. Fundamentally, their efforts concentrate on delivering education tailored to the specific needs of underprivileged and marginalized communities. Many NGOs express the

belief that the government lacks effective planning and innovative learning ideas. NGOs, on the other hand, demonstrate the determination to conduct advanced social experiments and possess the capacity to expand education at the grassroots level.

Several researchers have explored the specific role of NGOs in the basic education system of Pakistan, with a notable contribution being Javed Iqbal's research paper titled "The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations for the Development of Basic Education in Punjab, Pakistan." This paper scrutinizes the functions of NGOs, not only within Punjab but also on a national scale, aiming to enhance education. According to the research, there are 112 educational NGOs operating in Punjab, with a primary emphasis on promoting primary education at the school level. The paper also underscores the substantial involvement of teachers, revealing that approximately 3982 teachers are employed by different NGOs to advance education in various schools across Punjab.

Faiza Shah's (2014) article, "The Rise of NGOs and their harmful impact on Pakistan," published in *The Herald* in April 2014, critically examines the power dynamics and negative impacts of NGOs in Pakistan. The article discusses concerns about NGOs implementing foreign agendas and highlights conflicting perspectives on their service delivery. While some criticize NGOs for aligning with international interests, others see them as crucial for providing services where the public sector falls short (Shah, 2014)

The article underscores the growing number of NGOs due to the inefficiency of the public sector, with NGOs filling the gaps and gaining influence at both the local and national levels. Despite their positive impact in areas like policymaking and service delivery during natural disasters, the article also acknowledges concerns about NGOs potentially compromising their autonomy when collaborating with the government. The writer emphasizes that NGOs, to be effective, need to navigate challenges such as registration processes, demonstrating expertise, avoiding foreign agendas, and building relationships with the government. The influence of NGOs has notably increased since 2001, especially during natural disasters when they stepped in to provide services that the government lacked the funds to deliver locally.

Izza Jabbar and Hira Shami's article, published in *The Nation* newspaper on March 9, 2013, explores "The Role of NGOs in Education" in Pakistan. The research highlights the challenges faced by the government in managing a large population and providing facilities in a timely manner, particularly in the education sector. Due to the complexities and burdens, including those related to education, NGOs employ various approaches such as public-private partnerships, establishing new schools, and implementing diverse measures to actively contribute to the education sector (Shami, 2013).

Table 2
Historical Review of educational policies:

Sr.no	Policies	Targets	Strategies
1	1947 Pakistan Education Conference	Achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) goals within two decades by 1967	Implementation of free and compulsory education, levying special taxes to finance primary education, and encouragement of the private sector to open primary schools
2	National Education Commission 1959	Achievement of UPE goals within 15 years by 1974	Enforcing free and mandatory education, mobilizing resources for supplementary funds, recruiting female teachers for primary schools, and mandating religious education in schools.

3	The New Education Policy 1970	Universal Primary Enrollment up to grade 5 within 10 years, till 1980s	Appointment of female teachers for the primary level and rehabilitation of school buildings to make them attractive for students
4	The Education Policy 1972	Universal Primary Enrollment for boys by the end of 1979 & for girls till 1984	Opening low-cost schools, implementing free and compulsory primary education, emphasizing on girl's education, and prioritizing the promotion of education in rural areas
5	National Education Policy 1979	UPE for boys by 1987 and for girls by 1992	Increasing female enrollment through home-based schools/Mohalla schools and opening mosques and Mohalla schools to reduce dropouts
6	National Education Policy 1992-2002	Restructuring the education system and achieving UPE through 100% community participation by 2002	Involving communities in UPE, providing special federal funds to primary schools, and recruiting and training new primary teachers
7	National Education Policy 1998-2010	Opening 45,000 new formal primary schools and increasing community participation from 71% to 90% by 2003 & 100% by 2010	Restructuring teaching methodologies through training, implementing a uniform curriculum for public and private schools, mobilizing resources for primary schools, revising the assessment and examination system, and enacting Free and Compulsory Education Act in different phases

Role of NGOs in education sector in Pakistan:

The involvement of NGOs in Pakistan's education sector is dynamic and varied. Some function as advocacy groups, urging the government to fulfill commitments like Education for All (EFA), while others collaborate to improve education quality through initiatives such as Adopt a School. Additionally, certain NGOs directly provide education by establishing both permanent and temporary schools, supplying educational materials, and offering opportunities to Out-of-School Children (OOSC) and those who have left government schooling. (Gulzar H. Shah, 2005)

NGOs play a crucial role in addressing educational exclusion, reaching out to diverse groups, including street children, rag-pickers, bereaved individuals, demobilized communities, indigenous groups, marginalized communities, religious and ethnic minorities, handicapped children, migrants, and child workers. In Pakistan, there are over 40 thousand NGOs (with the exact number fluctuating due to daily registrations and cancellations), with a significant focus on education.

NGOs play a vital role in delivering education, particularly in marginalized communities with notable vulnerabilities. Their efforts extend beyond aiding individuals in extreme poverty, emphasizing the importance of education to enhance livelihoods. Reports from NGOs emphasize that students enrolled in NGO schools receive a superior quality of education compared to their counterparts in public schools in Pakistan, attributed to the stringent monitoring and accountability within the NGO sector.

NGOs go beyond formal education, providing non-formal, technical, and vocational education. The term 'non-formal education' is commonly linked with NGOs, while 'formal education' pertains to government and private schooling in Pakistan.

In the province of Punjab, about 4,500 NGOs are actively engaged in various endeavors, spanning health, education, and cultural objectives, as reported by the Social Welfare Department of the Government of Punjab. The Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) estimates that there are approximately 100,000 to 150,000 registered and non-registered NGOs throughout Pakistan, signifying at least one NGO for every 2,000 people.

However, the functional number is likely fewer, with around 1367 NGOs reported to be active in Lahore by the Social Welfare Department. Determining the exact number working specifically in education is challenging due to the varying levels of effectiveness among NGOs. Despite the multitude of organizations, a few stand out as particularly effective and prominent in the education sector. For Instance, TCF-The citizens Foundation, Bunyad, Literate Pakistan Foundation, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi, Taleem for all Trust, CARE, Koshish Foundation, Iqra educational Trust, Zindagi trust, Taleem Foundation, Ujala Foundation, Sahil and several other educational organizations are working for promotion of education.

Bunyad Foundation

Established in 1992, Bunyad is an NGO dedicated to advancing education and gender rights, with a specific focus on young girls and boys in rural areas. The organization is firmly aligned with the goals of Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of its mission to combat poverty. Since its establishment, Bunyad has provided education to nearly one million individuals by 2019 through diverse programs such as Non-Formal Education, Formal Education, Catchup classes, and other technical and vocational initiatives. Operating in twenty-two districts across Pakistan, including Sialkot, Sahiwal, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Hafizabad, Bunyad is dedicated to eliminating child labor, with a particular focus on women and children. (Centre, 1994)

Over the years, Bunyad has established 5,527 non-formal education centers, covering approximately 1,800 villages in 22 districts of Punjab. The organization has directly benefited 354,000 individuals, with children comprising 64% and women 36%. Among the children beneficiaries, 37% were male, and 63% were female students. Impressively, 77% of the total direct beneficiaries were female, highlighting Bunyad's strong commitment to ensuring educational rights for female children in remote areas of Pakistan.

Care Foundation

CARE Foundation, a pivotal force in Pakistani education since 1988, focuses on underprivileged communities, managing schools up to matriculation. Engaging in public-private partnerships, CARE adopts and transforms non-functional government schools, addressing infrastructure, enrollment, and teacher quality issues. The adoption results in a 400% enrollment increase, a 10% dropout reduction, and the introduction of double shifts in 100 schools. CARE supports infrastructure development, adopting 34 purpose-built and 684 public schools, operating 175+ schools with 840 teachers and 87,000 students by 2020. The foundation extends its impact through scholarships, covering college expenses for deserving students, and charges a nominal monthly fee to instill a sense of responsibility in students, contributing significantly to education in less developed areas. (Foundation C. , 1998)

The Citizen's Foundation (TCF)

The Citizen's Foundation (TCF), a non-profit organization founded in 1995, is dedicated to providing education to underprivileged children in Pakistan. With 1,567 schools, 252,000 students, and a workforce of over 17,400, TCF focuses on primary and secondary education, significantly impacting the country's educational landscape. In urban slums, scholarships cover 95% of expenses, while in rural areas, affordable education is provided. Financed by donations, zakat, and sadqat, 80% of funds come from individuals and local corporations. TCF allocates 94% of funds to education-related purposes, including school operations, uniforms, books, and science laboratories. KPMG audits financial accounts, ensuring transparency. Internationally supported by entities like The Citizens Foundation, USA; The Citizens Foundation (UK); The Citizens Foundation, Canada; and TCF Educating Children Australia, TCF-USA has played a pivotal role in establishing and supporting over 249 schools, enrolling 65,000+ children in Pakistan. (Foundation T. C., 1995)

Zindagi Trust

Founded in 2002 by renowned singer Shehzad Roy, Zindagi Trust is committed to transforming the lives of underprivileged children through education. The trust focuses on reforming existing government schools by implementing School Reform projects. These initiatives encompass infrastructural development, advocacy, management, legislative policies, capacity building for teachers, professional development, academic innovation through training, and reforms in governance and administration. Zindagi Trust utilizes School Reform pilot projects to advocate for changes in provincial and national policies, engaging with key education decision-makers, policymakers, bureaucrats, and the media. The trust has successfully influenced legislation to improve government schools, with a notable impact on child protection policies at the school level. (Roy, 2002)

The 'Paid to Learn Program' is active in the slums of Lahore and Rawalpindi, expediting primary school initiatives in non-formal educational settings. Graduates who excel in the program are integrated into mainstream private schools and receive sponsorship from the Trust until they complete their matriculation. In Karachi, the 'School Reform Program' has successfully revamped two government schools by implementing interventions in governance, administration, infrastructure enhancements, professional development for teachers, training programs, academic innovations, fostering parental engagement in studies, and encouraging participation in extracurricular activities.

In 2019, Zindagi Trust facilitated the free matriculation of approximately 220 girls and 750 labor children through its schools, showcasing the impactful outcomes of its educational initiatives. (Roy, 2002)

Citizen's Education Development Foundation (CEDF)

Founded in 1986, the Citizen's Education Development Foundation (CEDF) is a non-governmental organization committed to providing education to children from impoverished and marginalized communities, particularly those residing in "Kachi Abadies" or less developed areas. CEDF has undertaken diverse projects, encompassing home-based schools, mobile schools, student sponsorship programs, and internship initiatives.

In home-based schools, young girls aged 16-24, with a matriculation qualification, are trained to teach other students. CEDF provides these young teachers with instruction on teaching methodologies, curriculum, and specific goals outlined by the foundation. According to the annual achievement report of 2016, CEDF operates over 17 home schools, educating 640 children, and mobile schools with four shifts that cater to more than 500 children.

The foundation ensures that students enrolled receive free education, books, uniforms, and other essential educational facilities. Despite the absence of a formal office and staff, CEDF relies on the dedication of volunteers. Gender discrimination is actively avoided, with 50% of students being girls. Currently, more than 3,500 students benefit from education through CEDF. The organization maintains meticulous documentation and accounting practices for all its expenses, which undergo auditing by Chartered Accountants and Co. Chartered Accountant to ensure transparency and accountability.

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi (ITA)

Founded in June 2000, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi, translated as the 'Centre of Education and Consciousness,' is a Public Trust dedicated to tackling the educational challenges in Pakistan. Originally initiated in Lahore, ITA has broadened its programs to a national scale and has obtained certifications from the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP). It is registered under the Registration Act of 1860, the Government of Punjab, Pakistan, and the Trust Act (June 2006, Lahore). Acknowledged by the PCP and conferred with tax-exempt status on September 16, 2006, ITA collaborates with and operates in conjunction with organizations throughout all four provinces of Pakistan, including FATA (now merged with KPK), AJK, and the Capital city, Islamabad. Numerous NGOs, INGOs, and CSOs can be categorized based on their specific roles, including direct fundraising, offering services like book distribution, providing education to underprivileged communities, supporting ITA in constructing school buildings, and participating in policy research and advocacy efforts. ((ITA), 2000)

In its quest to eliminate illiteracy, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi has launched a multitude of educational projects across Pakistan. These endeavors include formal and non-formal education, vocational and technical training, as well as life skills-based education. Additionally, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi is actively involved in various educational movements, project-based primary and secondary education, and catch-up and remedial education initiatives. The organization also provides school improvement programs for underperforming schools and conducts assessments to bolster ongoing efforts in enhancing school improvement. Some of the projects of Idara e Taleem-o-Agahi are as follows:

ASER (Annual Status of Education Report)

ASER, spearheaded by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), is a pivotal initiative combating the challenges of inadequate education access and poor learning outcomes in Pakistan. Surveying over 22.5 million out-of-school children and those with learning gaps, ASER conducts the largest citizen-led household-based assessment, evaluating basic learning levels of 5-16-year-olds. Through collaboration with partners and 11,000 volunteers, it covers 146 rural districts, emphasizing gender-disaggregated data. Expanding since 2010, ASER's inclusive approach introduces a segment on children with disabilities and reaches both rural and urban districts. Globally, it contributes to the People's Action for Learning (PAL) network, conducting assessments in 14 countries. Recognized nationally and provincially, ASER's impact extends to policymaking and sector plans, influencing initiatives like Chalo Parho Barho, Syani Saheliyan, and Right to Education. Serving as a crucial data source, ASER facilitates evidence-based planning, aiding governments, private entities, NGOs, and educational institutions to enhance Pakistan's educational landscape. In essence, ASER plays a vital role in pinpointing educational challenges, targeting underprivileged areas, and fostering positive outcomes for child, youth, and adolescent education in Pakistan.

Chalo Parho Barho (CPB)

CPB is an accelerated learning program initiated by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) to address the educational challenges faced by out-of-school children (OOSC) aged 6-12.

Launched in 2011 in response to the findings from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan, which indicated poor results in reading and mathematics competencies among rural children, CPB aims to improve language (Urdu, English, Pashto) and mathematics skills. (ITA, 2000)

Targeting OOSC who have never been enrolled or are at risk of dropping out, CPB operates for a duration of 45-60 days. ITA collaborates with the government to identify and select low-performing districts and tehsils for program implementation. The identification of OOSC involves conducting household surveys in villages and towns with government schools. Community meetings or 'Baithaks' are organized to disseminate the survey results and encourage parents to enroll their children in the catch-up program.

Conceptualized based on the 'Read India Campaign' by Pratham in India, CPB focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy skills. The program, launched initially in southern Punjab, has expanded to various districts, aiming to equip students with the ability to read alphabets, letters, words, sentences, and stories in Urdu and English. Additionally, it targets enhancing understanding of basic subtraction and addition problems in mathematics. The overarching goal is to prepare OOSC for successful integration into formal schools in grades 3-5 and to prevent further dropouts.

Life Skills for Kids

The Life Skills for Kids (LSK) schools, a collaborative project of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and Stora Enso; Bulleh Shah Packaging (BSP), addresses the challenges of child labor by providing basic life skills education to children from the ragpicker community. Established in 2012, the ten-year initiative aims to educate 650 ragpickers by 2022, with six schools in different Lahore areas targeting children aged 5 to 14. Offering free education, books, uniforms, and more, LSK actively engages parents through meetings, awareness sessions, and special events. The curriculum includes diverse activities like Mother's Day, Independence Day, and Science Melas to improve academic performance and unlock hidden talents. TVET centers impart technical skills like stitching, fostering a respectable means of earning for students and their mothers. Sponsored by Allied Bank, British Council, CPB, Bulleh Shah Packages, UK Aid, and local donations, LSK contributes to the holistic development and education of marginalized children in Lahore.

Syani Saheliyan (A3G)

Syani Saheliyan, led by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and sponsored by UK-Aid, targets adolescent girls aged 9-19 in marginalized communities to enhance learning, life skills, and capacity. Launched in 2018 in three South Punjab districts, the project expanded to enroll over 4000 girls in each district through 120 partner schools. Offering various school types, it caters to girls who have never been enrolled, those who dropped out in different grades, and even provides matric completion. Covering the entire districts, schools provide toolkits and intensive teacher training. Beyond basic education, the project offers courses like Beautician, Tailoring, and Cooking. With 12,000 beneficiaries, including minority girls, A3G has over 130 partner schools and 14 seed partners. Emphasizing sustainability, ITA focuses on capacity building, forming strategic partnerships, and aligning with policies, ensuring long-lasting benefits beyond the proposed timeframe.

The Whole School Improvement Program (WSIP)

The WSIP, launched by ITA in 2000, aimed to elevate the standard of education in public schools and create an environment where underperforming and low-cost schools could transform into high-quality sustainable institutions. The primary objective of WSIP was to meet the expectations of both parents, ensuring they receive value for their investment, and students, guaranteeing a high-quality education.

In partnership with the School Education Department, ITA selected and confirmed the participation of over a hundred schools in the program. Comprehensive baseline surveys and school needs assessments were carried out, involving consultations with schoolteachers, community members, and sessions addressing the aspirations and concerns of students. ITA took proactive measures in community mobilization, organizing school body meetings, providing teacher training, activating school councils, and facilitating the development of School Development Plans (SDPs). The program encompassed the execution and oversight of annual school development initiatives, teacher training sessions, and enrichment activities.

ITA not only conducted teacher training but also provided essential learning materials and back-to-school kits, which included uniforms, bags, stationery, sweaters, books, science kits, reading kits, health kits, and more. Additionally, the physical rehabilitation of schools was a crucial component of WSIP. Starting at Allama Iqbal High School in Garhi Shaho Lahore, the program expanded to 36 districts by 2019, positively impacting 400,000 students, involving 6,000 teachers, and revitalizing over 100 government schools.

A formal 5-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was established with provincial governments to initiate WSIP in government schools. The project, guided by the vision of "Regenerating schools - Regenerating communities," has successfully revitalized underperforming public schools. It has also fostered vital linkages between the public and private sectors through a tripartite relationship that involves NGOs, school councils/communities, and provincial governments.

The School Assessment for School Improvement Program (SASI)

SASI by Idara-e-taleem-o-agahi (ITA) is an innovative initiative aimed at enhancing education quality in Pakistan. It caters to low-income families, addressing the unique challenges of low-cost schools. SASI's goal is to transform underperforming schools into top academic institutions. The comprehensive assessment framework covers core challenges, governance, leadership, future strategies, classroom observations, teacher and student tests, external exam results, facilities, and sustainability. The assessments generate baseline data for a school rating system, fostering transparency and aiding parents in informed school choices. The report-sharing process includes a Comprehensive Analysis Report, Educational Quality Analysis Report, Financial Analysis Report, and a Recommendations Sheet. Parents receive academic performance results, ensuring satisfaction with the education quality. SASI contributes to internal and external improvements, providing support, knowledge tools, classroom development kits, marketing assistance, and teacher training. External improvements include e-learning, capacity building, health initiatives, learning materials, additional teacher training, and financial support. SASI benefits parents, teachers, students, and schools, fostering a holistic approach to education enhancement in Pakistan.

Analysis and Conclusion

The literacy rate in Pakistan, stands at 58% in 2024, reflects the government's historical efforts and policies to improve education, starting with the National Educational Conference in 1947 and subsequent policies. Despite initiatives like the 1979 National Educational Policy, government targets fell short, prompting a focus on NGOs in less developed areas. NGOs, distinct from government roles, contribute to education by addressing accessibility, affordability, quality, and equity issues. Their roles span capacity building, service delivery, advocacy, community mobilization, monitoring, and research. A notable example is ITA, impacting over 13 million beneficiaries through various educational programs and advocating for improved literacy levels. NGOs demonstrate strengths in social mobilization, community involvement, and innovation, addressing gaps in government

efforts. However, the study emphasizes the need for coordinated efforts, recognizing NGOs' limitations and emphasizing the government's pivotal role in ensuring primary education. While NGOs play a crucial part, societal views on education must evolve beyond economic perspectives. Acknowledging education as a fundamental right, reforms in the education system and curriculum are imperative, requiring broader considerations beyond this research's scope.

Recommendations

- Address the urgent need for constructing new schools, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan, to enhance access to education.
- Improve existing government schools by providing essential facilities such as school walls, toilets, and well-furnished classrooms to create a conducive learning environment.
- Implement targeted measures to ensure education is accessible in less developed and slum areas of Pakistan, recognizing the specific challenges faced by these communities.
- Incorporate non-formal education programs, especially in less developed areas, within the curriculum of government schools to cater to diverse learning needs.
- Emphasize the importance of teacher training in government schools, covering aspects such as lesson planning, assessments, evaluations, and non-formal teaching methods, to elevate the overall quality of education.

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