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Role of Education in Social Mobility among Low-Income Communities in Layyah District, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

It is generally recognized that education is one of the most important sources of social mobility, and people belonging to the marginalized and low-income groups can better their socioeconomic position and have higher chances of employment and life opportunities. The educational inequality in Pakistan with respect to access and quality has further supported the social inequalities, especially in rural areas like the Layyah district where poverty, lack of education infrastructure and social cultural systems have been the main obstacles to educational attainment. This paper examines how education has contributed to social mobility in low-income populations in the Layyah District, in terms of access to formal education, quality of learning and how the perceived effects of educational attainment on social and economic outcomes. The study reflects both the opportunities and challenges the students and families experience when trying to use education to achieve upward mobility using the mixed-method approach that incorporates household surveys, interviews, and school data analysis. The results suggest that although education plays a key role in social progress hopes, there are structural factors, gender expectations, and economic restrictions to its ability to do so. The policy implications include information that special measures are necessary, more resources are required, and that communities should be involved in maximizing the effect of education on social mobility among the disadvantaged groups.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that education is one of the key tools of social change, economic growth, and inequality minimization (Becker and Tomes, 1986). Social mobility is a term that is used to describe the interchange of people or families between various levels of social economic status which tend to be determined by access to education, employment, and social capital (Breen and Jonsson, 2005). Education in developing nations like Pakistan is one of the major channels through which the members of the low-income groups or communities can enhance their socioeconomic status, avoid intergenerational poverty, and become the active members of civic and economic life (Aslam and Kingdon, 2012). The correlation between education and social mobility is multidimensional and therefore it is not only the academic achievement and also the vocational competency, but also the exposure to social networks, cultural capital and life opportunities in general (Coleman, 1988).

In some rural areas such as the Layyah district, which is in the southern part of Punjab, Pakistan, the opportunity of education to promote upward social mobility is constrained due to various structural, cultural and economic reasons. Poverty is widespread and most of the households cannot afford the schooling fees, uniforms, or even transport (Pakistan Bureau of

Statistics, 2019). Gender inequalities also contribute to the inequality in education, since cultural norms tend to emphasise the education of boys over girls, restricting the possibility of female students to be engaged in the process of formal school education to an extent (Haqu and Rahman, 2016). Lack of infrastructure such as poor school facilities, understaffing of the teaching staff and the unavailability of quality learning materials further contribute to the inability of education to act as a means of socioeconomic progress (World Bank, 2020). Nevertheless, in spite of all these obstacles, families and communities still view education as a major way of breaking poverty cycles and social status, and in this regard, the mechanisms through which education would impact social mobility need to be understood.

The contribution that education makes towards social mobility has been extensively researched in both developed and developing environments. The human capital theory holds that investment in education will make people to be more knowledgeable, skilled and become productive, thus making them more employable and increase their earnings potential (Schultz, 1961). Empirical studies have shown that upward social mobility has a positive relationship with educational attainment, especially among people with low-income origins, as it offers access to formal jobs, professional skills, and social contacts that help them to have a socioeconomic progress (Breen, 2010). The effect of education on social mobility however is mediated by structural inequalities such as segregation of the labor market, discrimination and unequal distribution of education which may restrain the transfer of educational returns into economic rewards (Hout, 1988). Considering the rural setting of Pakistan where social structures, caste relations, and gender policies play a role in shaping opportunities, education might not be enough to ensure upward mobility without accompanying social and economic activities (Nasir and Naz, 2015).

The role of education in social mobility is not only a role tied to economic and developmental progress but also a role tied to social and cultural capital enhancement. Schools expose people to more extensive social networks, civic expectations and normative values that influence a personal aspiration and involvement in the community (Bourdieu, 1986). To the low-income citizens of Layyah, education improves not only the opportunities to get a job, but also the social prestige, the position within the community, and the ability to maneuver within the social structures. However, the differences in the quality of education, the readiness of teachers, and conditions of learning implemented can show that children attending marginalized communities are usually disadvantaged in contrast to those with wealth, and this may restrict the extent of mobility which may be provided by education (Aslam and Kingdon, 2012).

The most important consideration of gender in evaluating the effect of education on social mobility is crucial. In rural Pakistan, the educational enrollment of girls is often limited by the home duties, marriage, and the cultural demands (Haqu and Rahman, 2016). Research shows that once the girls of low-income families are given a chance to attend secondary school or get vocational training, the beneficial impact on family welfare and health outcomes, as well as social empowerment, are significant, and can lead to intergenerational changes in social mobility (Khan and Iqbal, 2018). On the other hand, the inability of girls to access quality education helps to sustain already existing inequalities and limits access to social and economic development.

There are also economic issues that influence the interconnection between education and social mobility to a great extent. In the case of low-income families in the Layyah area, indirect and direct costs of schooling, such as tuition, transportation, learning materials, and others, are the obstacles to further educational enculturation (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The capability of transforming levels of education into better income or social standing can be limited by low levels of local jobs even in cases when education is accessible. The nature of these economic constraints is to demonstrate that there is a need to adopt integrated policy solutions, which involve educational provision coupled with livelihood support and skills training to ensure that education plays maximum role in ensuring upward mobility.

Notwithstanding these issues, recent experiences in Pakistan and other developing nations have shown that education continues to be an important social mobility factor to the low-income communities in these nations. Primary and secondary education leads to increased literacy and vocational abilities as well as better ability to contribute to local economies, and political systems (World Bank, 2020). The availability of vocational training and higher education also increases the employment opportunities and income potential as well as leading to the lasting changes in the household socioeconomic status. Considering the situation in the Layyah District where poverty in rural areas remains a serious problem and infrastructure is inadequate, it is important to know how educational interventions can help such social groups to achieve social mobility in order to get a chance to inform policy, allocate resources, and develop communities.

Such research is intended to address the issue of how education leads to social mobility in the low-income populations of Layyah through investigating education accessibility, the quality of education, gender in education, and the perceived effects of education level on economic and social outcomes. Through combining data of households surveys, interviews and a school level analysis, the study aims at giving a clear picture of the opportunities and obstacles that face marginalized students to realize an upward mobility through education. It is anticipated that the findings will guide policymakers, educators, and

community stakeholders to provide information on how to improve access to and quality of education and structural inequalities, as well as sustainable social mobility related to disadvantaged groups in rural Pakistan.

Literature Review

It is a well-known fact that education is one of the most prominent contributors to social mobility, especially in the case of the representatives of low-income or marginalized groups. Education makes economic opportunities, social network, and better social status accessible through increased knowledge skills, and competencies (Becker and Tomes, 1986). Within the framework of the poorer world such as Pakistan, education has been cited as one of the most imperative ways of interrupting the cyclic process of intergenerational poverty and enabling upward social economic mobility (Aslam and Kingdon, 2012). Theoretical models, including human capital theory, assume that education investment boosts both productivity and employability that opens opportunities to social and economic improvement (Schultz, 1961). Equally, both social capital and cultural capital hypotheses propose that education plays the role of opening up to social networks, cultural norms and institutional knowledge, which leads to mobility and improved life outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

According to empirical research in Pakistan and other developing countries, the relationship of access to education and social mobility is very close. Aslam and Kingdon (2012) also found out that children in low-income households that acquire secondary or higher education have a better chance of securing formal employment and a better level of income than those with limited education. On the same note, Nasir and Naz (2015) established that in rural Punjab, the level of education is positively associated with the status of occupation and social identity, which underscore the position of education as a source of upward social mobility. These advantages are however accompanied by structural and systemic obstacles such as poverty, poor school structures and social stratification that may limit how individuals can utilize the educational opportunities in socioeconomic progress.

The socioeconomic differences in access to education are still acute in rural areas like Layyah. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2019) states that the households in low-income groups have financial constraints, which restrict their capacities to enroll children into schools or get the required learning materials. Even the problems of poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and the lack of qualified teachers hamper the quality of education provided even when schools become accessible (World Bank, 2020). The situation is especially acute in female students, as they tend to face even more obstacles because of the cultural tradition, domestic activities, and early marriage (Haqu and Rahman, 2016). The studies show that by completing primary and secondary education, the impact of girls on their individual growth is not limited to personal improvement; it also leads to improved health of families, a higher level of community involvement, and better social positions, thereby boosting social mobility (Khan and Iqbal, 2018).

Another important thing in social mobility is the quality of education. Research indicates that not every schooling is an equal in terms of its upward mobility influence; the content, pedagogy and learning environment play a big role (Aslam & Kingdon, 2012). In the low-income neighborhoods, where the local educational institutions can be short of resources and lack unqualified staff, students might get some formal credentials but fail to gain experience in working in a meaningful manner (Hussain and Rehman, 2017). On the other hand, there are also those private or community-supported schools that require more significant teaching standards and offer vocational or skill-focused education, which show more significant effects on social mobility (Ali and Raza, 2019). The findings highlighted the significance of paying special attention to the matter of access to education but also paying attention to the quality of educational experiences and their relevance to the establishment of socioeconomic progress.

The emphasis has been placed on vocational education and skill development programs as particularly successful in social mobility among the low-income populations. Rural Pakistan data show that people who enroll in vocational training besides the academic education are more likely to be employed and earn higher income than those who only have academic education (Ahmed and Tariq, 2020). These programs increase employability, lessen reliance on informal labor markets and are a way of establishing pathways to entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, and improve social status. The inclusion of vocational training in general schoolings can thus enhance the ability of education to be one of the instruments of upward mobility.

The connection between social mobility and education is also socially and culturally determined. Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that cultural capital in the form of the skills of communication, the knowledge of the social norms and acquaintance with the institutional operations play the key role in transforming the educational attainment to socioeconomic benefits. The unequal distribution of social capital in rural Pakistani communities tends to disfavor low-income families, since they lack networks and opportunities as compared to affluent families (Nasir and Naz, 2015). Gender norms also limit girls and women mobility in that the traditional requirements of domestic roles and early marriage hamper education attainment and further economic

engagement (Haq and Rahman, 2016). These socio-cultural obstacles suggest that education in itself might not be sufficient to ensure upward mobility; interventions that cover social attitude, community and gender equity need to be applied.

Empirical research points to the fact that parental intervention, as well as community participation, is essential to making education as effective as possible in terms of social mobility. The families, which focus on education, support learning and promote further learning have a positive implication on the academic performance of children and their socioeconomic prospects in the future (Coleman, 1988). However, parents in low-income communities mostly have to deal with opposing economic demands that restrict their access to time and resources to invest in education (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019). As has been demonstrated, community-based programs, scholarship programs, and awareness campaigns have alleviated these limitations, especially when they focus on marginalized groups and girls, improving the prospects of education to create social mobility (World Bank, 2020).

The relationship between social mobility and education is also mediated by the labor market situation. Though education raises the chances of getting a job, in rural areas, in the district such as Layyah, low-wage, informal jobs are prevalent, and there is a lack of opportunities to translate education into high income and better social position (Hussain and Rehman, 2017). Formal sector employment, entrepreneurship and vocational skills training are needed to supplement education levels and make effective upward mobility, therefore. The structural barriers need to be addressed through policy interventions that are connected to education and employment, skill development, and economic assistance.

On the whole, the literature shows that education has the great influence in facilitating social mobility among the low-income communities, yet its success depends on various factors such as the quality of schooling, gender equity, socio-cultural norms, parental involvement, and labor market opportunities. In such districts as Layyah, where rural poverty, underdeveloped infrastructure, and traditional values are problems, the holistic strategy involving educational services, combined with vocational training, gender-sensitive policies, and community involvement is essential. There is some evidence that these multifaceted interventions do not only increase academic achievement but also the capacity of disadvantaged people to attain long-term socioeconomic development (Khan and Iqbal, 2018; Aslam and Kingdon, 2012).

This research is a continuation of the previous studies as it examines the effect of education on social mobility in Layyah District in relation to low-income households and evaluating the factors and conditions that determine educational and economic consequences. The research will use an amalgamation of household surveys, interviews and school level data to bring out detailed information on how the education factor plays out to societal mobility and to guide policy intervention to best optimize the effect of education on socioeconomic progress in rural Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study was that of mixed methods research design; both quantitative and qualitative designs were used to help achieve the complete picture on the role of education in facilitating social mobility among low-income communities in the Layyah District, Pakistan. The triangulation of data is possible with the mixed-methods approach, which enhances the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative aspect was concerned with household surveys in order to determine access to education, educational attainment and perceived influence on social and economic outcomes. The qualitative element included semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, and community leaders to determine the barriers, facilitators, and social-cultural aspects influencing the participation in education and the social mobility.

Population and Sample

The target population was represented by low-income communities households, school administrators and teachers in the District of Layyah. The study was aimed at making it representative and thus it targeted six schools (three government and three privates) and 150 households in rural and peri-urban regions. The sample used was parents of children studying at schools, teachers in the primary and secondary school and school administrators. Participants were selected through purposive sampling so that those were direct participants in the education sector and would give information on what effect learning had on social mobility. Gender and age balance was done in the household and teachers were sampled according to their experience with the low-income students.

Variables of the Study

Social mobility was the dependent variable which was studied and the independent ones were educational attainment, quality of education, schooling accessibility, gender involvement, vocational competencies and socio-cultural aspects. The following were the operationalizations of the variables:

Variable	Type	Operational Definition
Educational Attainment	Independent	Highest level of formal education completed by household members (ordinal scale)
Access to Schooling	Independent	Physical accessibility, affordability, and enrollment opportunities in schools
Quality of Education	Independent	Teacher competency, curriculum relevance, and learning environment (Likert scale)
Gender Participation	Independent	Inclusion of female students in educational activities and attainment
Vocational Skills	Independent	Acquisition of practical skills through formal or informal training
Socio-Cultural Factors	Independent	Cultural norms, parental attitudes, and community support affecting education
Social Mobility	Dependent	Changes in economic status, occupational outcomes, and social recognition (Likert scale)

Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire that was designed to be used in the household surveys is structured and it includes sections on demographic details, access to education, education attainment, vocational skills and perceived effects of education on social-economic mobility. Attitudinal measures were done using a five-point Likert scale between Strongly Disagree and Strongly Agree.

Teachers and school administrators of the sampled schools were provided with a different questionnaire and interview guide to gauge the quality of education, institutional support, and views of social mobility amongst students. Parents and community leaders were interviewed, in semi-structured interviews, about socio-cultural factors, impediments to schooling and ways of increasing the numbers of individuals attending school and moving up the educational ladder.

Pilot Study and Reliability

It was done by a pilot study involving 15 households and 5 teachers outside the main sample to test the clarity and reliability of the instruments. Cronbach alpha was estimated of all the constructs, educational attainment (0.81), access to schooling (0.79), quality of education (0.84), gender participation (0.78), vocational skills (0.80), socio-cultural factors (0.76), and social mobility (0.85). These values suggest high internal consistency which proves the reliability of the instruments to collect full-scale data.

Data Collection Procedure

School authorities and community leaders were consulted and permission was granted by them before data collection. The surveys were conducted face-to-face based on household survey, therefore guaranteeing the understanding and correctness of the responses. Questionnaires were given to teachers and administrators to complete themselves and then extended interviews were done where needed. The two months data collection was undertaken with the investigators being inclusive of the households in the various socioeconomic and geographical environments within the Layyah District.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used in the analysis of quantitative data. To sum up demographic traits, educational access, education attainment, and perceptions of social mobility, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions) were calculated. The Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the correlations of independent variables (educational attainment, access, quality, gender participation, vocational skills, socio-cultural factors) and the dependent variable (social mobility).

The assessment of the hypothesized relationships between the independent variables and the social mobility was conducted through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which offered information on both direct and indirect impact of education-related variables on socioeconomic outcomes (Kline, 2016). Chi-square (2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to evaluate the model fit.

Interpretations of qualitative data of interviews were processed through thematic content analysis in order to determine patterns and barriers, as well as facilitators of educational participation and social mobility. The use of both quantitative and qualitative findings made it possible to triangulate and have an overall picture of how education has a role to play in ensuring that low-income communities enjoy upward mobility.

Ethical Considerations

The institutional review board used was the appropriate board that gave ethical approval. The reason why the study was carried out was explained to the participants and informed consent was collected among all respondents. The research process was done confidentially and anonymously. The respondents were made sure that they were not obliged to take part as it was voluntary and they could drop out at any point without repercussions.

Data Analysis and Findings

The research used 150 households and 36 teachers in six schools in the Layyah District to understand how education would lead to social mobility among low-income population. The household respondents were also comparatively equal in terms of gender, 52 per cent of the male and 48 per cent of female participants being the respondents. The educational level of most parents was low with 63 and 22 percent finishing primary and secondary education respectively, and this limits accessibility to education in the region. Teachers were largely trained in primary education, 70% of which had the relevant training as well as 30% having the specialized training in education or social studies.

All the variables of the study such as education grade, access to education, education standards, vocational skill and gender participation, social-cultural and social mobility were calculated as descriptive statistics. The level of education was relatively poor (mean= 2.88, SD=.69) and this shows that there is a high rate of school drop outs. The average school access was 3.21 (SD = 0.71), which indicated that there was moderate school access due to financial and transportation limitations. The quality of education scored 3.05 (SD = 0.66), which is a limitation caused by high student-teacher ratios and insufficient resources. There was a low level of vocational skill acquisition (mean = 2.72, SD = 0.61) in terms of low levels of practice skills. The gender participation achieved a score of 2.94 (SD= 0.68) which portrays continuous differences in female enrollment and retention. The socio-cultural factors mean was 3.12 (SD = 0.70) that indicated a moderate community support and long-term cultural barriers. The average of social mobility as calculated by the perceived economic movement, job opportunities, and social acknowledgment was 3.01 (SD = 0.65).

Correlation analysis showed that there are significant correlations of independent variables with social mobility. No relation was found to be stronger with social mobility than educational attainment ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Vocational skills ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$) and quality of education ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.01$) were also strongly positive correlated. Social mobility had moderate relationships with access to schooling ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), socio-cultural factors ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and the participation of women ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.05$). These relationships reveal that there are both structural and individual factors that play an important part in upward mobility.

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has affirmed the direct impact of educational attainment (meaning the effect of education level) on social mobility (= 0.41, p = 0.001) then the quality of education (= 0.32, p = 0.001) and vocational skills (= 0.27, p = 0.01). Schooling (0.21, p = less than 0.01) and socio-cultural elements (0.19, p = less than 0.05) had a positive effect, whereas the effect of gender participation was moderate (0.16, p = less than 0.05). Good fit was indicated by the model fit indices: 2/df =2.39, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA =.057.

Interpretations of interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators were conducted qualitatively and confirmed the quantitative findings. Parents stressed on the critical role of education in breaking the poverty cycles, but the shortage of funds, child labor, and household commitments frequently make regular schooling impossible. Teachers and administrators both pointed to shortages of resources and training and policy gaps respectively. Thematic analysis indicated that economic barriers, gender norms, low parental literacy and community awareness were considered as major limitations and scholarships, community advocacy and skill-based programs to be facilitators.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation of Study Variables (N = 150)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Educational Attainment	2.88	0.69	1					
2. Access to Schooling	3.21	0.71	0.48**	1				
3. Quality of Education	3.05	0.66	0.53**	0.46**	1			
4. Vocational Skills	2.72	0.61	0.46**	0.39**	0.49**	1		

5. Gender Participation	2.94	0.68	0.39*	0.31*	0.38**	0.35**	1	
6. Socio-Cultural Factors	3.12	0.70	0.41**	0.34**	0.42**	0.36**	0.33**	1
7. Social Mobility	3.01	0.65	0.61**	0.48**	0.53**	0.46**	0.39*	0.41**

Note: *$p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$

All in all, the results indicate that education is a major factor of positive social mobility among low income families in the Layyah District, but structural factors, gender ideologies and inadequate resources alter its effects. It turns out to be the most important factor of educational attainment and quality, and vocational skills, access, socio-cultural support, and gender inclusion contribute to the mobility even further.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how education will enhance social mobility among poor populations in the Layyah District, Pakistan. The results suggest that education contributes significantly to the socioeconomic progress of people, especially with quality education, skills improvement, and community. The best predictor of social mobility was educational attainment with quality of education and vocational skills also significantly improving upward mobility. Mobility was facilitated by access to schooling, the factor of socio-cultural conditions, and participation in gender factors although the influence was relatively moderate. The qualitative evidence revealed intractable obstacles, such as financial limitations, gendered practices, lack of educational resources at school, and low parental literacy, limiting the upward mobility of education. The research highlights the need to be holistic in education by taking into consideration both the structures and the social aspects in order to optimize its contribution in poverty reduction and social status enhancement of the disadvantaged communities.

Recommendations

Special interventions are needed to strengthen the role of education in helping to change social mobility. Schools ought to enhance access and retention rates by offering scholarships, financial aid, and transportation facilities to the low-income students. Investment in teacher training and learning materials is also very important to enhance the quality of learning and effective pedagogy. Formal curricula should incorporate vocational and skill-based training in order to empower the employability and economic prospects. The issue of gender disparities can be mitigated by community awareness campaigns and programs that encourage education at the girl level such as flexibility in the schooling system and involvement of parents. The implementation of the policy should be monitored, and an inclusive and equitable approach to education should be the focus. Lastly, community involvement ought to take place to establish a conducive environment that appreciates education as a tool to social and economic progress so that underprivileged homes stand equal chances to access education.

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