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Policy analysis of girls' primary school completion in rural Sindh: Root causes and policy recommendations using IIEP education policy toolbox

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POLICY ANALYSIS OF GIRLS' PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION IN RURAL SINDH: ROOT CAUSES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS USING THE IIEP EDUCATION POLICY TOOLBOX

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& Tauseef Lateef

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ABOUT THE LEARNING CYCLE ON DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION POLICY PLANNING

This case study is a result of the KIX EAP Learning Cycle "Diagnostic tools for improving education policy planning". Facilitated by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), this professional development course ran from 20 September to 11 November 2022. Across 8 weeks, this Learning Cycle enabled participants to identify system bottlenecks for improving education policy planning, with a special focus on the use of diagnostic tools for system performance analysis. 14 national teams from 13 countries took part in this Learning Cycle: Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Pakistan (Balochistan), Pakistan (Sindh), Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor Leste and Yemen.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASC	Annual School Census
EAP	Europe, Asia and the Pacific
GIS	Global Information System
GPSC	Girls' Primary School Completion
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
KIX	Knowledge Innovation Exchange
LSU	Local Support Unit
PIDE	Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
RSU	Reform Support Unit
SEMIS	Sindh Education Management Information System
SESP/R	Sindh Education Sector Plan and Roadmap

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Pakistan Economic Survey of 2022 indicates that only 43.8% of students are enrolled in primary schools, with just 14.1% reaching the middle grades, and only 1.29% reaching college level. This situation is worsened by a higher proportion of female dropout, leading to a female literacy rate of only 51.9%. The Sindh province, the second most populous province, comprises 23.3% of the overall population. Sindh has shown a low school completion rate for female students, especially in rural districts. This study focuses on the school completion of female primary students in the two rural districts of Sindh: Larkana and Dadu.

Data availability

The Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS) serves as a component of National EMIS and provides annual data on about 45,000 government schools in Sindh. The provincial and district-level data used in the report was gathered from secondary sources, including a) SEMIS, b) the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), c) Education Sector Plans (2019–24) and d) the profiles of schools in Sindh. The report provides current statistics related to the problem of girls' primary school completion, including a) population of primary school students by district, b) enrolment and completion rates of primary students by gender and district, c) repetition and drop-out rates of primary school students by gender and district, d) number of teachers by district and e) student–teacher ratio by district.

Examining level completion

The case study identifies and examines indicators related to levels 1 and 2 of the IIEP Education Policy Trees. The rate of girls' primary school completion within and across both districts is very low compared to that of boys. The cross-district analysis shows that the Larkana district performs better in terms of relatively higher girls' enrolment and completion of primary grades and relatively fewer dropouts than Dadu. Based on the data, different constraints and potential root causes related to 'school demand and supply' were identified.

The root causes on the demand side are a) poverty, b) low trust in the public sector, c) low opportunity for other religions and d) lack of safety/security and basic facilities at school for girls. The root causes related to the supply side are a) teacher regularisation of contract teachers, b) low incentives to attract appropriate teacher candidates, c) less availability of female teachers in the vicinity, d) teacher absenteeism, e) weak annual appraisal, f) weak transfer policy, g) dysfunctional buildings, h) less provision of separate schools for girls, i) lack of meaningful and skill-based teaching experience and j) distant schools and lack of transport for schools.

Potential policy options

The report concludes with potential policy options to improve primary school completion rates, especially for girls: 1) relief from poverty, 2) ensuring safety and security, 3) providing basic facilities, 4) establishing nearby schools, 5) recruiting more female teachers, 6) monitoring teachers' attendance and 7) ensuring proper maintenance of school buildings. Overall, the study highlights the importance of evidence-based policy interventions to increase access to and participation in education, especially for girls, and to ensure their primary school completion.

INTRODUCTION

This report emerged from the policy analysis work produced as part of the course titled 'Diagnostic tools for improving education policy planning' by the IIEP-UNESCO with support from KIX. This course enabled us to explore diagnostic tools and their implications, specifically for developing countries, and helped the team unpack diagnostic tools and learn the history of their evolution. We further learned how the education management information system works and how data is essential for policy decisions. Finally, we engaged with real policy analysis using the IIEP Education Policy Toolbox. As a team, we chose to study the issue of girls' completion of primary education in two districts of the Sindh province: Larkana and Dadu. Using the Policy Toolbox, we made a policy decision tree, gathered data that could help us understand each factor and then made policy decisions and forward policy recommendations.

Figure 1. Maps of Pakistan and Sindh (Ministry of Defence, 2020).



Map of Pakistan



Map of Sindh

The report compared the completion rates between boys and girls in both Larkana and Dadu, two similar districts in the Sindh province of Pakistan, which are located in proximity to each other. The report begins with a background of Pakistan and the Sindh province, the general situation of the province and the effects of recent floods on schools. Afterwards, it presents the problem statement, data sources and analysis. It then shares the current statistics pertaining to girls' primary school completion (GPSC) in the selected districts. Following the background section, the report presents the policy decision tree using the IIEP Education Policy Toolbox pertaining to primary school completion among girls in rural Sindh. Further, it discusses each of the bottlenecks and root causes behind

the low primary school completion rates among girls in rural Sindh. Finally, it engages in the policy decision process and makes policy recommendations based on prioritised root causes affecting GPSC.

Background

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world, with a population growth rate of 2%. The overall literacy rate of Pakistan is 62.8% (Economic Survey, 2022). The enrolment rate in Pakistan for different levels of education is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Enrolment rate in Pakistan (Economic Survey, 2022).

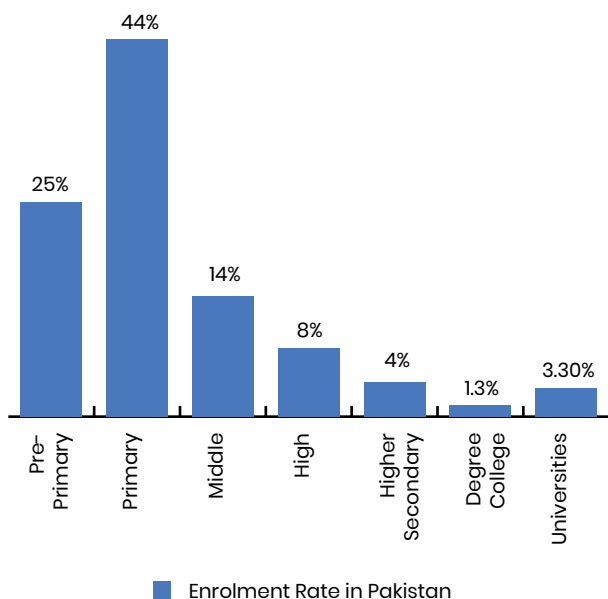
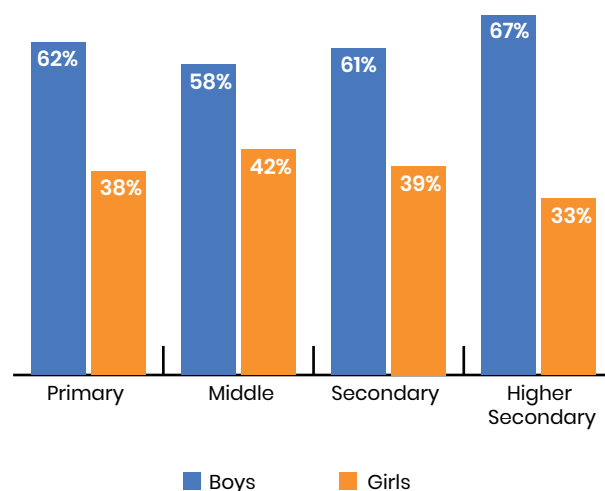


Figure 4. Enrolment rates in Sindh (Economic Survey, 2022).



The formal education system of Pakistan is comprised of five stages (Figure 3): primary (grades 1 to 5; age range of 6–10 years old), elementary (grades 6 to 8; age range of 10–13 years old), secondary (grades 9 to 10; age range of 13–15 years old), higher secondary (grades 11 to 12; age range of 15–17 years old) and higher education (university programmes; undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, doctorate and postdoctoral; for those 18 years old and older).

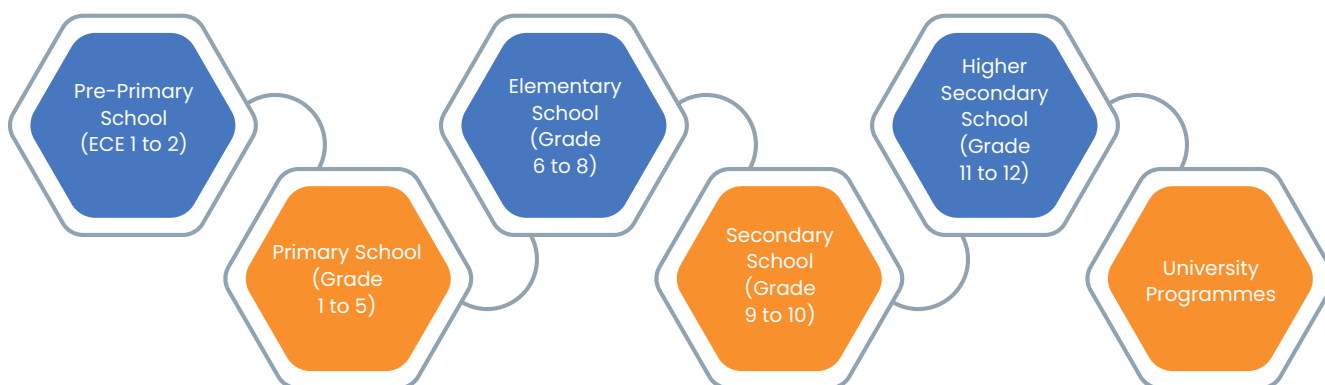
Pakistan comprises of four provinces and two regions, with Sindh being the second most populous province, making up 23.3% (47,886,051) of the overall population (230,909,516; males = 52% and females = 48%). Sindh is geographically sub-divided into two regions: urban, with about 52% of the population (24,910,458), and rural, with about 48% of the population (22,975,593). The literacy rate of Sindh is 61.8% (males = 36.4% and females = 24.8%). Additionally, the literacy rate in urban areas is greater at 77.9% (males = 42.6% and females = 34.9%) than in rural areas at 72.3% (males = 29.4%

and females = 13.4%). The overall enrolment rates displayed in Figure 4 also show the same trends, with more participation from boys (62%) than girls (38%). Likewise, participation in primary grades is comparatively better than in other grades, wherein the number of boys (62%) is greater than that of girls (38%).

Context of Government Schools in Sindh

In order to understand and appreciate the policy analysis and the attached recommendations, it is imperative that the audience have some sense of the context. Since the baseline of current education indicators is low, we can only expect to grow in relation to that within the limitations of time, resources and capacities. The pictures below present a subjective display of the relatively better and bad quality of girls' schools. There are also some pictures that illustrate the condition of classrooms after floods and temporary tent shelters for continuing schooling during the emergency.

Figure 3. Education system of Pakistan (Asian Development Bank, 2019).



Better Quality

Bad Quality



Current Condition of Government Schools in Sindh after Flood

Problem Statement

The Pakistan Economic Survey (2022) highlights the lower primary school completion rates of female students in rural Sindh (Dadu and Larkana districts). The current primary completion rate is even below the targets set in the Provincial Education Sector Plans 2019–2024, which aimed at 46% of girls completing primary school (SEMIS, 2022).



DATA AVAILABILITY

Considering the nature of the problem, the required provincial and district-level data was gathered from secondary sources, including a) Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS), b) Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), c) Education Sector Plans (2019–2024) and d) profiles of schools in Sindh. The major source from which the data were extracted was SEMIS.

Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS)

SEMIS was initiated in 1991 with an Annual School Census (ASC) exercise in collaboration with the World Bank for the province of Sindh. SEMIS serves as a component of National EMIS. It started with simple tables that provided basic data on schools. However, in recent years, it has evolved and now provides complex data to stakeholders for making decisions. SEMIS provides data on about 45,000 government schools in Sindh, from student-teacher ratios to budget expenditures and various indicators of school performance at the district and taluka levels. The school census is held once a year, with the cut-off date of 31 October. In each district, the Reform Support Unit (RSU) has a Local Support Unit (LSU) responsible for data collection for SEMIS. The SEMIS data is helpful in locating a school physically by using a Global Information System (GIS) based on the allotted SEMIS code.

The aspects of SDG 4 indicators have also been included recently with SEMIS data to further help in decision-making. SEMIS served as basic and first-hand data to develop the Education Sector Analysis on which the Sindh Education Sector Plan and Roadmap 2019–2023 was developed. Access to SEMIS data is restricted to authorised individuals, and a limited amount of data and information in the form of reports is shared with the public. However, SEMIS has certain limitations, such as data being restricted to a limited set of variables, data not always being used in decision-making and the insufficient capacity of SEMIS for analysing and using data for creating interventions. The validity of the data is also an issue. In some cases, data do not reflect the true realities on the ground. Another major shortcoming is that SEMIS does not include data on private schools. The nature of the structure and functioning of SEMIS is captured in Figure 5.

Figure 5. SEMIS structure and functioning (developed by research team and SEMIS representative).

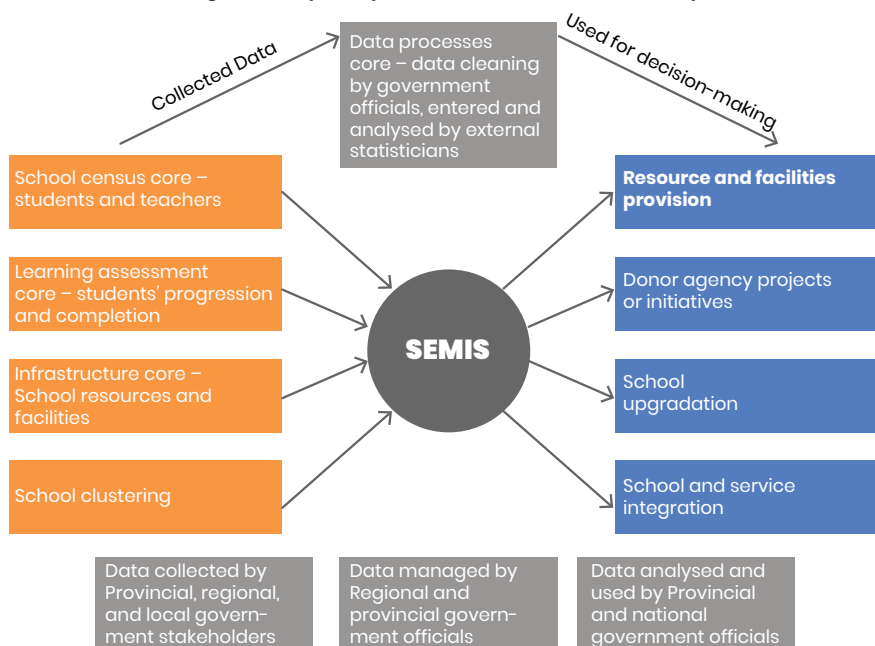
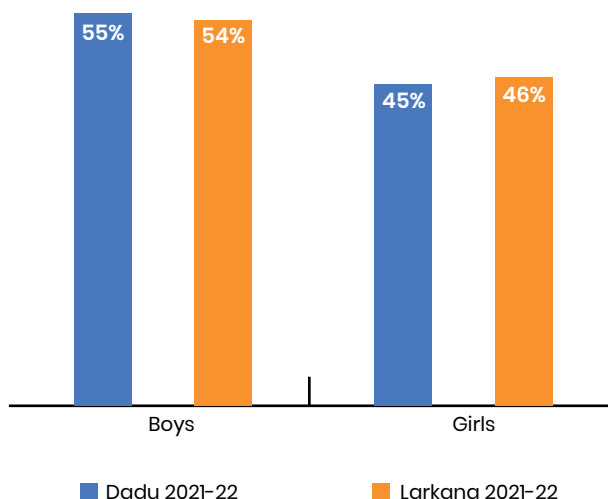


Figure 6. Gender-wise population of primary school students in Dadu and Larkana (SEMIS, 2022).



The data regarding population, enrolment, school completion and drop-out rates, along with the number of teachers and student-teacher ratios at the district level, were extracted from SEMIS data. However, the data regarding school buildings, basic facilities (i.e., boundary walls, drinking water, toilets, and electricity) and other related variables were extracted from the SEMIS data at the provincial level, as district-level data are not available within the limited time available for developing this report.

Data Analysis

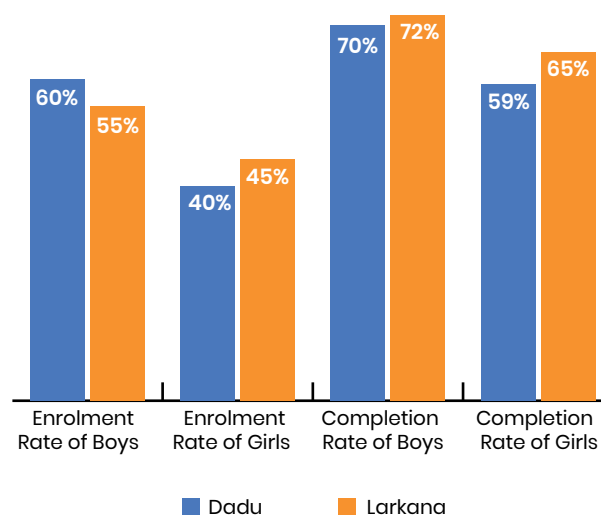
As the data was numeric in nature, quantitative descriptive analysis was employed to determine the population, enrolment, completion and drop-out rates, the number of teachers and student-teacher ratios within rural Sindh and across the selected districts. In this, the cumulative percentages of population, enrolment, completion and drop-outs, along with school infrastructure and basic facilities, were also presented using descriptive statistics at the provincial level. The data are presented using bar charts.

Current Statistics Related to the Problem of GPSC

In this section, we will present some basic statistics related to the issue of GPSC and compare the districts of Dadu and Larkana. The data presented in Figure 6 reveal that the population of primary school-going boys is relatively higher than girls in both Dadu and Larkana.

Similarly, the enrolment rate of primary students laid out in Figure 7 also shows a relatively greater number of boys than girls in both Dadu and Larkana. Likewise, the completion rate shows the same pattern, wherein boys complete primary school more than girls do in both Dadu and Larkana. However, within Dadu, the difference between the completion rates of

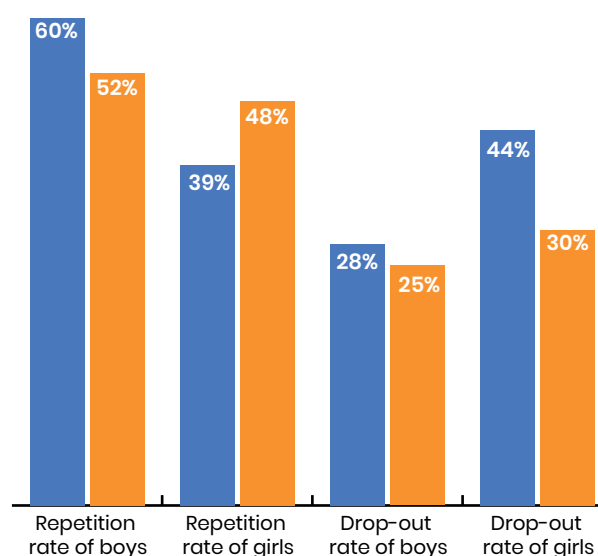
Figure 7. Gender-wise enrolment and completion rates of primary school students in Dadu and Larkana (SEMIS, 2022).



boys and girls is greater than in Larkana. Also, more girls from Larkana seem to complete primary school than girls from Dadu.

Moreover, as evidenced in Figure 8, the repetition of boys is comparatively higher than girls, while the drop-out rate is greater among female students than among males in primary schools. Across districts, the repetition of girls is greater in Larkana than Dadu. The opposite pattern is evident in boys' repetition in both districts. Likewise, the drop-out rates are higher among Dadu students (both boys and girls). However, the ratio of girls' drop-out is also much higher in Dadu.

Figure 8. Gender-wise Repetition & Drop-out Rates of Primary School Students in Dadu and Larkana (SEMIS, 2022).



The data shows that the rate of GPSC within and across both districts is very low compared to boys. However, cross-district analysis shows that Larkana is performing better in terms of relatively higher girls' enrolment and completion of

primary grades and relatively fewer dropouts than Dadu. Yet, the enrolment and completion of girls is low, and their drop-out is high. Therefore, further analysis of possible factors or reasons behind this was carried out using the diagnostic tool of IIEP-UNESCO the 'IIEP Education Policy Toolbox' for 'School Completion'. The tool acts like a policy decision tree and will be discussed in more detail below.



EXAMINING LEVEL COMPLETION

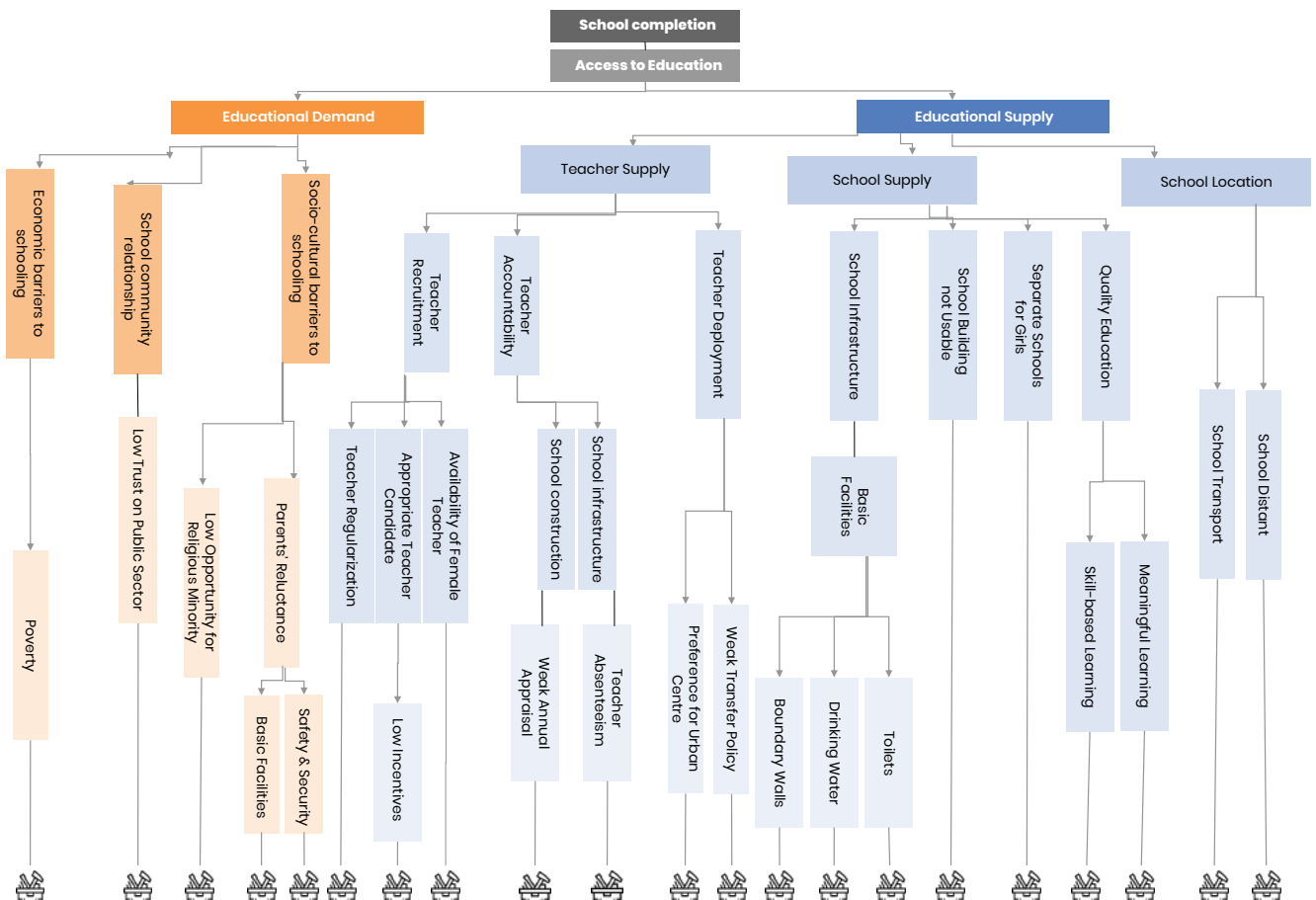
The policy decision tree in Figure 9 was developed to identify the root causes of GPSC for the districts of Sindh using the diagnostic Policy Toolbox. The diagnostic analysis focused on access-related causes, which were further broken down into two domains: educational demand and educational supply. This section presents a separate analysis of the root causes of both domains. It is important to note that the data from the Dadu and Larkana districts were not available for all the root causes identified in the policy decision tree. In such cases, the available data or evidence at the provincial level were considered.

The root causes for GPSC on the educational demand side are a) poverty, b) low trust in the public sector, c) low opportunity for other religions and d) lack of safety/security and basic facilities at school for girls.

The root causes for GPSC under the educational supply side are a) teacher regularisation of contract teachers, b) low

incentives to attract appropriate teacher candidates, c) less availability of female teachers in the vicinity, d) teacher absenteeism, e) weak annual appraisal and transfer policy, f) dysfunctional buildings, g) less provision of separate schools for girls, h) lack of meaningful and skill-based teaching experience and i) distant schools and lack of transportation for schools.

Figure 9. GPSC in Rural Sindh: Policy decision tree (developed by the research team).



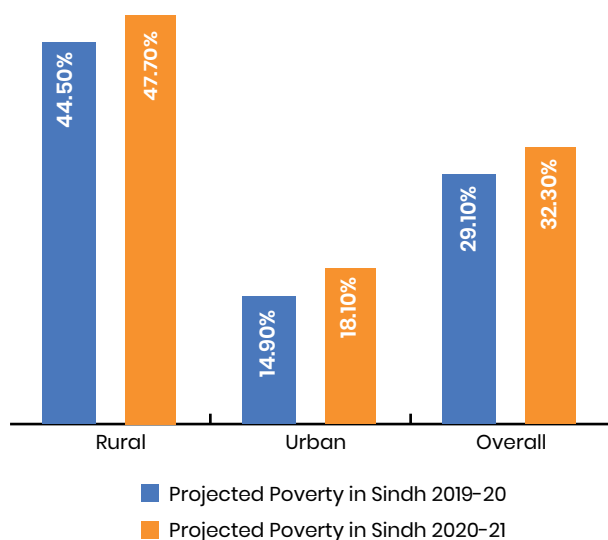
With regard to the root causes identified through the policy decision tree, each cause was analysed by considering the data and evidence available from SEMIS and other sources. The analysis helped in making subsequent policy decisions and recommendations.

Educational Demand-Side Root Causes Behind GPSC in Rural Sindh

a) Poverty as a Barrier to GPSC

Provincial data was analysed to determine projected poverty within Sindh in both urban and rural areas. Figure 10 shows that overall poverty is around 30%, reaching nearly 50% in rural Sindh. This shows that about half of the population in rural Sindh lives in poverty. It is also noted that poverty has increased in the past few years. We have already noted that the drop-out rate is increasing among all students but more so among girls. This indicates that due to the increase in poverty, the overall drop-out rate is increasing, particularly for girls. This could be due to the preference of people to finance boys more than girls when they have meagre resources (Noureen & Awan, 2011; Siddique, 2017).

Figure 10: Projected poverty in Sindh (PIDE, 2021).

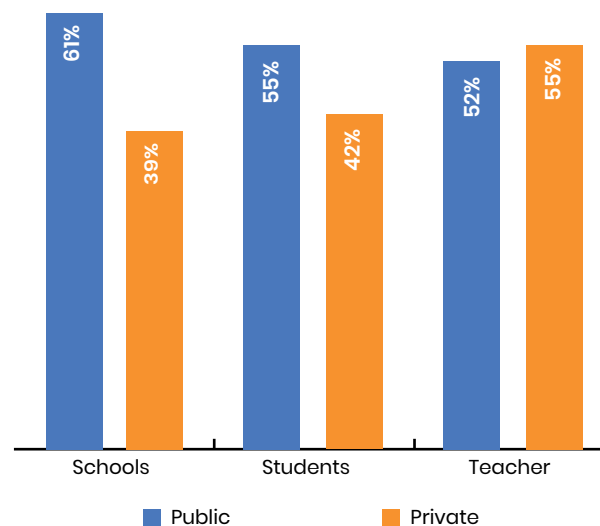


b) Low Trust in the Public Sector as a Barrier to GPSC

The trust deficit in the public sector, particularly in education, is indicated by the rise of private schools since the late 1990s in Pakistan, as well as in Sindh. The data show that the number of private schools is increasing day by day along with an increase in enrolment in these private schools. This rise of private schools is due to the trust deficit in the public sector (Abbas & Ahmed, 2016). As soon as private schools become available, parents move their children there. Pakistan private school federations demonstrated that 197,000 private schools have 15,000,00 faculty members and 20,000,000 students. Similarly, the enrolment trend in private schools have significantly increased in Sindh as well. The provincial data show that 38%

of all schools are private schools, which accommodate 44% of all students. It illustrates a much greater student-school ratio in private sector schools compared to public sector ones, including in rural Sindh. Recently, this coverage has increased up to 50% (Crawford & Hares, 2021).

Figure 11. Rise of private sector education in Sindh (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2018).



c) Low Opportunity for Other Religions as a Barrier to GPSC

In Pakistan, the population is comprised of 97% Muslims and 3% non-Muslims. Religious literacy is confined to Islamic studies (Ashraf, 2019), resulting in limited or no access to separate religious learning opportunities, along with the compulsion to study Islamiat and Ethics only (SNC, 2021). Considering this, the recent Single National Curriculum of Pakistan (SNC, 2021) has recently initiated religious education by proposing separate textbooks targeting other religions for non-Muslim students, starting from grade 1 onwards. This is still in progress; hence, evidence has not yet been documented.

d) Lack of Safety/Security and Basic Facilities as a Barrier to GPSC

There was no available district-level data related to the concerns of safety and security, which can be measured through the availability of proper buildings with boundary walls in schools. The provincial data, shared in Figure 12, reveals that more than half of the schools have an established building. However, Figure 13 demonstrates that around half of the schools do not have boundary walls. A similar trend is observed in girls' schools, wherein more than half of the schools do not have proper buildings. More than half of the girls' schools do not have boundary walls, creating security problems that hinder girls' schooling and completion.

Figure 12. School buildings in Sindh (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).

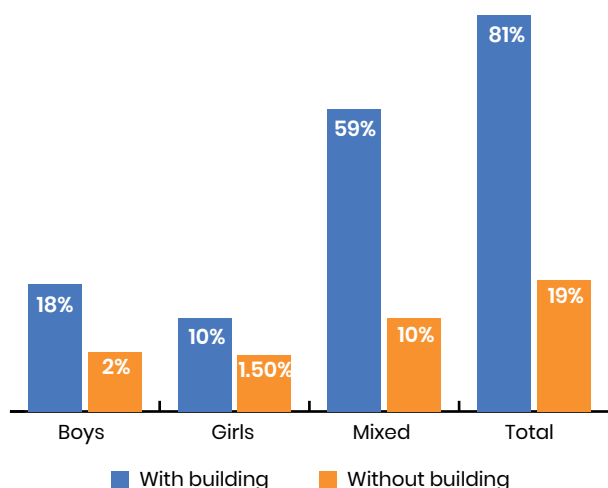
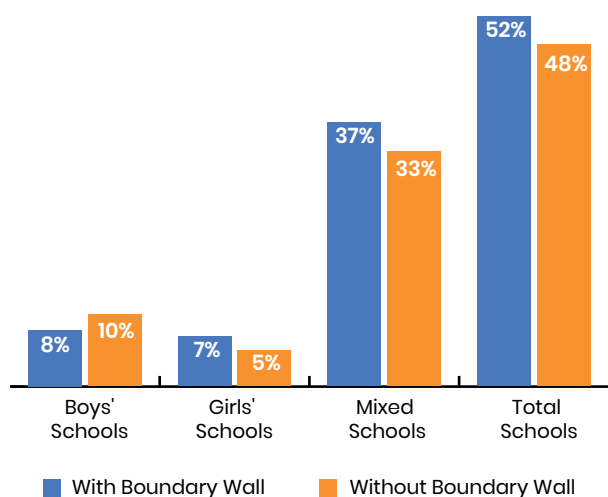


Figure 13. School Boundary Walls in Sindh (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).



Even for boys' schools, the number of schools without boundary walls is greater than those that have boundary walls, which also affects boys' safety and security.

Educational Supply-Side Root Causes Behind GPSC in Rural Sindh

a) Teacher Regularisation as a Barrier to GPSC

In Sindh, teacher recruitment in the government sector is less frequent. This is because a low number of vacant positions are found and announced. Additionally, the criteria for recruiting teachers are very general; examples of such are as follows: completion of 14 or 16 years of education, earned professional degree [BEd (4 years/2.5 years/1.5 years), MEd (2 years), MPhil], no restriction of previous (teaching) experience and age range (21–45 years). This general criterion attracts a huge number of applicants (who are unemployed or seeking initial employment). Consequently, a large number of new

teachers are recruited contractually (for 1–3 years). However, with the fear of job insecurity and lack of clear rules for teacher regularisation, teachers become confused and distracted from teaching (Hussain, 2021).

Moreover, the process of teacher regularisation is unclear. A study asserted that teachers go through a long struggle to regularise themselves as teachers. This includes holding teachers' protests, putting pressure on government officials and getting political settlements after bureaucratic negotiations (Hussain, 2021). This illustrates that educational officials follow directions of political higher-ups rather than devising a system to regularise teachers.

b) Low Incentives to Attract Appropriate Teacher Candidates as a Barrier to GPSC

As mentioned above, the general criterion increases the number of teacher candidates. The salary for newly appointed teachers is not up to the mark, whereas the candidates who are more qualified, such as those who possess post-graduate academic qualifications or sound professional experience, end up excluding themselves from the profession due to receiving lower salary packages. This is because teacher salary is associated with their motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), job satisfaction, social standing, perspectives and attitude towards the teaching profession (Shaik, 2012; Shah & Khan, 2012). Under such circumstances, attracting appropriate teacher candidates becomes challenging; hence, the teaching-learning processes might affect students' continuation in their schools, particularly girls belonging to rural contexts. It is also important to note that separate datasets regarding low incentives and/or salaries for teachers (previously or newly appointed) are not available at either the national or provincial level.

c) Less Availability of Female Teachers as a Barrier to GPSC

The data regarding the number of teachers—gender-wise—is available at the provincial level and shows that there are more primary teachers than secondary teachers and that the percentage of male primary teachers is very high compared to female teachers, as shown in Figures 14 and 15. It has been argued that female teachers can improve the educational outcomes of girls (Card et al., 2022). However, the impact of gender matching is dependent on context. In settings where female role models are scarce, such as in science and maths classes or in less developed countries, female teachers can have a greater impact. Recent studies have shown evidence of this in Francophone Africa, India and China (Delaney & Devereux, 2021). In settings with gender matching, female teachers can help overcome gender stereotypes and biases (Bertrand, 2020).

Figure 14. Primary school teachers in Sindh.

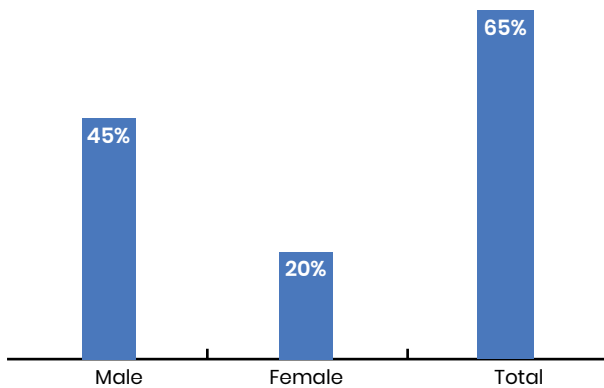
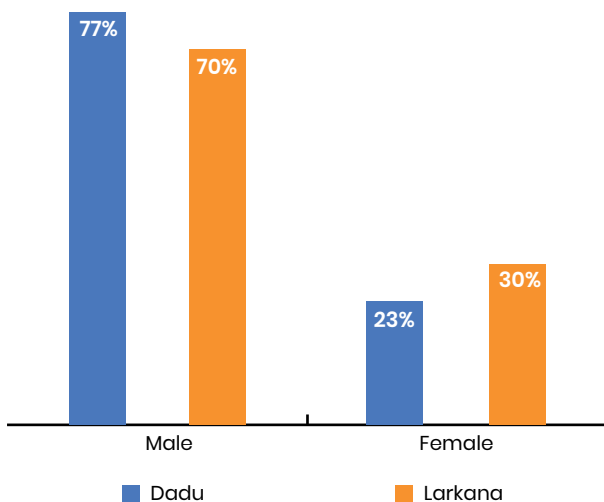


Figure 15. Primary school teachers across Dadu and Larkana.



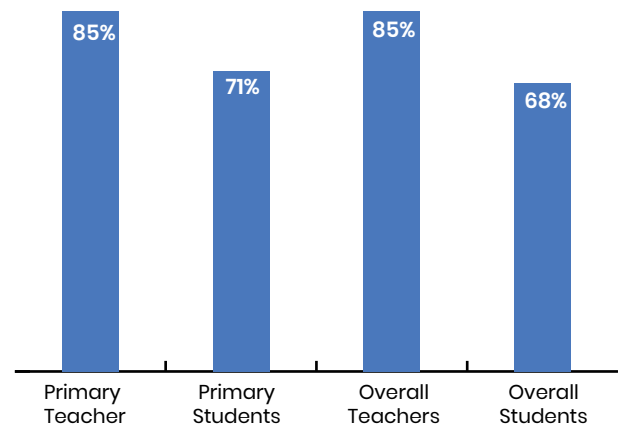
In Sindh, the number of primary school teachers is much greater than that of teachers at other levels. Amongst these, more than half are male. Similarly, the district-level data demonstrate a similar pattern, wherein the proportion of male teachers is higher than female ones. Furthermore, the data also shows that Dadu has a relatively greater number of male primary school teachers than Larkana. Likewise, Larkana has more female teachers than Dadu. This shows that the availability of qualified females in the vicinity is limited, resulting in a lesser number of female teachers within schools (Sheikh et al., 2015). It becomes difficult for parents to send girls to schools with fewer or no female teachers.

d) Teacher Absenteeism as a Barrier to GPSC

It is widely said that students follow what their teachers do. If teachers are frequently absent from school, students also follow (Husain, 2014). However, a separate dataset regarding teachers' and students' attendance was not readily available for this report (the data are gathered but not publicly available) at either the national or provincial level. However, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) (2021) reported the attendance of teachers and students on the day of the survey. Figure 16 shows that teacher attendance is relatively

better than that of students, both for the primary level and cumulatively. Furthermore, there is a need to record students' and teachers' attendance. The better attendance of teachers is a result of the biometric attendance system introduced by the government. It is still to be seen how better attendance of teachers results in a better student completion rate.

Figure 16. Students' and teachers' attendance at public sector schools of Sindh (ASER, 2021).



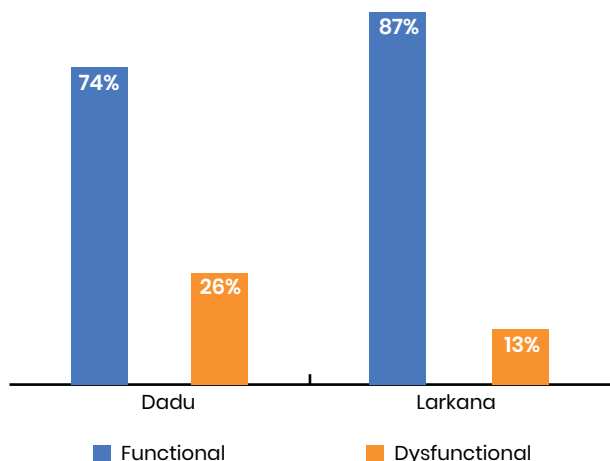
e) Weak Annual Appraisal and Weak Transfer Policy as Barriers to GPSC

The data at either the national or provincial level and the empirical evidence regarding weak annual appraisal, weak teacher transfer policy and teachers' preference for urban centres are not readily available. However, it is commonly known that the public sector is weak in this regard. There is a suggestion proposed by the Sindh Education Sector Plan and Roadmap (SESP/R, 2019–2024) regarding the initiation or development of a teacher management system with a proper annual performance appraisal system to better manage teachers' performance. Similarly, for transfer policy, the SESP/R (2019–2024) has proposed an idea to develop a teacher transfer policy for teachers that takes into account various aspects (including personal and professional) of genuine transfer, thus ensuring a proper student–teacher ratio. This is because SESP/R (2019–2024) has proclaimed that there are huge inconsistencies in the student–teacher ratio within and across rural and urban settings. Therefore, it is necessary to devise a proper transfer policy. Although these proposed suggestions are documented provincially, their initiation or progress is not evident. This factor causes low teacher performance, which affects students' completion rates, particularly for girls.

f) Dysfunctional Buildings as a Barrier to GPSC

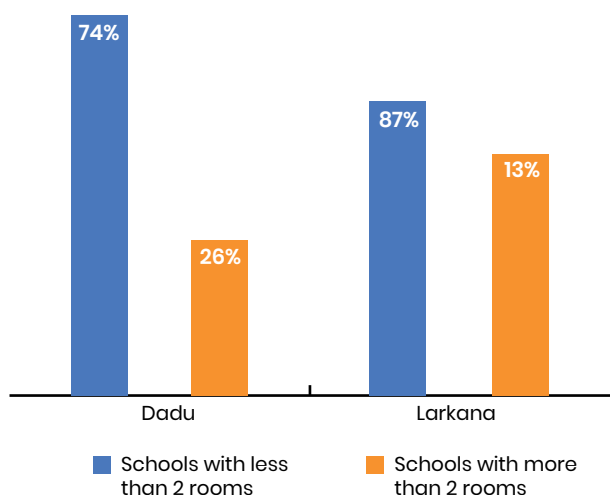
Provincial (Figure 12) and district-level (Figure 17) data show that there are a significant number of schools in both Dadu and Larkana districts which are dysfunctional. Comparing the two districts, the proportion of dysfunctional schools across Dadu and Larkana is 2:1, wherein Dadu possesses nearly double (200%) the dysfunctional schools of Larkana.

Figure 17. Functional versus dysfunctional schools across Dadu and Larkana (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).



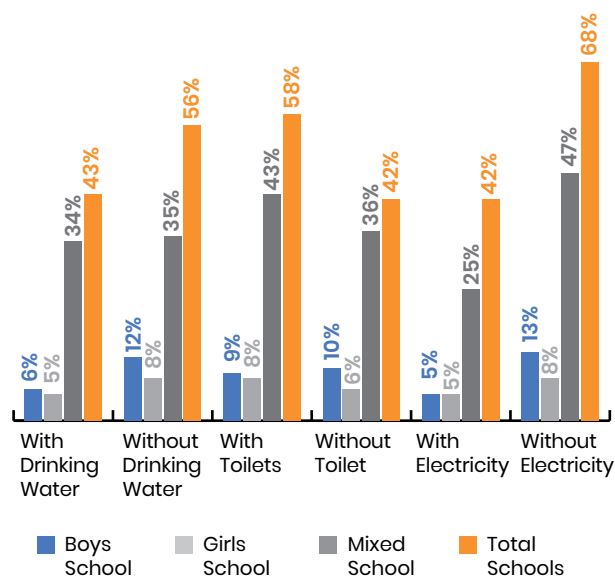
Further analysis of the school infrastructure in Dadu and Larkana in Figure 18 shows that in both regions, majority of functional schools have less than two rooms, with only a small proportion of schools having more than two rooms to accommodate students. The proportion of rooms in schools in Larkana is relatively equal, but the situation in Dadu is worse. Providing adequate school infrastructure is a significant challenge in Sindh, especially in Dadu. As a result, access to and completion of primary education particularly for girls might be negatively impacted.

Figure 18. School infrastructure across Dadu and Larkana (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).



In addition, the provincial data (as district-level data is not available) in Figure 19 reveals a lack of basic facilities at school, showing poor learning situations at school that cause low completion rates.

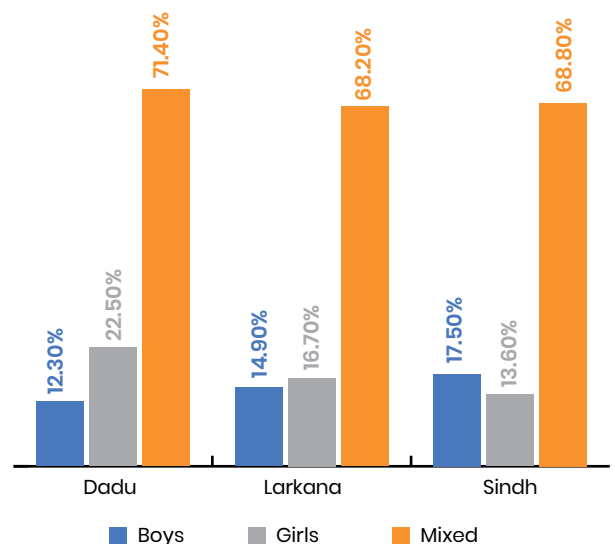
Figure 19. Basic facilities in government schools of Sindh (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).



g) Less Separate Schools for Girls as a Barrier to GPSC

Both the provincial and district-level data in Figure 20 show that, in terms of single-sex schools, the proportion of girls' schools in both districts is greater than boys' schools. However, the number of mixed schools is more than the total number of single-sex schools across Dadu and Larkana. A similar pattern is found in overall Sindh, where mixed schools outnumber single-sex schools. However, separate schools for boys are relatively more than for girls in Sindh overall. The smaller number of separate girls' schools and greater number of mixed schools hinder girls' access to and completion of primary schools. This could be due to cultural norms and social safety and security concerns; thereby, parents resist sending their girls to mixed schools, particularly their older daughters.

Figure 20. Gender-wise: Number of government primary schools in Sindh (Profiling for Government Schools, 2019).



h) Meaningful and Skill-Based Teaching Learning Experience as a Barrier to GPSC

The data at both the national and provincial levels regarding the provision of meaningful and skill-based teaching and learning experiences are not available. However, a recently conducted nationwide study revealed that rote teaching-learning and outdated instructional practices are being carried out (Bhutta & Rizvi, 2021). Consequently, meaningful and skill-based instruction and assessment practices are less likely to be seen or found within the context.

i) Distant Schools and Transport as a Barrier to GPSC

Separate data at either the national or provincial level regarding the distance between school and home and the school transport mechanism are not available. However, some empirical evidence shows that in rural Sindh, the average distance covered by students from home to school and vice versa is 4.93 km each way (Nayyar et al., 2019). Similarly, it is also stated that no proper transport facilities are provided for students. Based on this, it can be argued that primary school-going girls are too young to cover this distance on their own, and they usually require a family member to drop them off and pick them up. This becomes problematic for parents to send their girls to schools located away from home, hence affecting access to and completion of school among girls, particularly for older girls.

IV

POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS

Having analysed all the root causes of the demand and supply side that hinder girls' primary completion rates, we engaged in the difficult process of making policy decisions and forward recommendations. This was a difficult process given the constraints of finance and capacity that policy decision-makers face while prioritising which causes they need to tackle first and choosing which ones to tackle at a later period.

Our group comprised a multi-sector team belonging to the government, non-government organisations, the NGO sector, academia and the development sector. We collectively sought to evaluate the root cause in order to prioritise solutions. Each root cause was ranked by all the team members and, overall, seven root causes were identified as most significant. The top three root causes from the demand side and the top four from the supply side were chosen to be forwarded to policymakers with recommendations for their solution. The next section lists these seven items with recommendations.

1. Relief from Poverty

Poverty causes children, particularly girls, to drop out. This is because people usually prefer to invest in educating boys rather than girls. Considering this, the government of Sindh has taken several initiatives, including the provision of stipends to girls from primary to secondary grades based on their attendance. This is already in practice under the 'Benazir Taleemi Wazaif' programme. Therefore, it is suggested that targeted subsidies be provided to girls specifically for primary grades along with the basic necessities for their learning and development within and outside schools. A more targeted programme that can identify and target the most vulnerable individuals may result in better outcomes. Moreover, it is recommended that a certain mechanism be created in which assurance to female students and their parents is provided with respect to the students' employability after the completion of secondary grades.

2. Ensuring the Safety and Security of Students Within Schools

Students' safety and security are essential components to consider. Its absence results in parents' reluctance to send their children, especially girls, to school. Considering this, it is recommended to provide proper functioning buildings

with boundary walls to all schools and girls' schools in particular. The provision of toilets and water should also be ensured. Similarly, it is also proposed that school stakeholders' capabilities should be developed to take up responsibilities for the social security of girls, which can reassure parents. Meanwhile, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has developed a framework for imparting safeguarding skills among students. It is recommended to ensure the implementation of the NDMA framework within schools in order to enable students to deal with uncertainties accordingly.

3. Providing Basic Facilities Within Schools

The provision of basic facilities is the key contributing factor to ensuring access to schools. However, our professional observations presume that these basic facilities are provided by government bodies to some extent. However, due to a lack of school stakeholders' accountability, these resources are ill used. Considering this, it is recommended that an external team be allocated to provide and ensure the maintenance of the available resources and facilities within schools. Therefore, it is also proposed that proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms be created and employed.

4. Establishing Nearby Schools

In current times of uncertainty, parents and students themselves prefer nearby schools. However, the unavailability of nearby schools has become a hurdle in access to education for all students and girls in particular. Considering this, it is recommended that schools be established within a radius of 2 km. Additionally, it is proposed that proper school transport be provided for students, especially girls, in order to ensure their social security. It is also suggested that closed or dysfunctional schools for girls be re-operationalised to provide them with schools within their localities.

5. Recruiting More Female Teachers

Parents feel more assured culturally if their girls study with the teachers of the same gender. Therefore, the target of enhancing girls' access to schools can better be ensured by recruiting more female teachers. For this, the recommendation

is to first prepare such candidates from the vicinity to make it more feasible for them to continue teaching within the locality. This could best be done by encouraging secondary school girls for the teaching profession by involving them in the teaching process, offering internships, conducting temporary hiring and then regularising them based on certain pre-determined criteria. Moreover, it is proposed that relatively better incentives for female teachers be provided while justifying their family and social roles.

6. Monitoring Teachers' Attendance

Teachers' attendance is marked daily for processing salaries. However, the ill practices of teachers in terms of getting frequent offs are commonly observed. Teacher absenteeism encourages students to do the same. Meanwhile, a biometric attendance system for teachers is already in practice, but it

is also being compromised. Therefore, absenteeism among teachers is frequent. Considering this, it is recommended to conduct proper monitoring and evaluation of teachers by developing a teacher management system and making it one of the indicators taken into account in the annual appraisal. Support and accountability from the community can also go a long way in dealing with this issue.

7. Ensuring Proper Maintenance of School Buildings

The provision of the school buildings is not enough to assure maximum girls' access to schools. However, the maintenance of these facilities is equally important. Therefore, it is recommended to develop and ensure the implementation of the school maintenance policy in collaboration with a third party from the government sector.

V

CONCLUSION

This report tries to use the IIEP Policy Diagnostic Tool to analyse the root causes of girls' primary completion rate in two districts of Sindh: Dadu and Larkana. The diagnosis shows that an evidence-based approach to understanding problems is necessary to better understand the causes and propose solutions to them. The identified root causes of GPSC were looked at in detail considering available data. While some data on the district level were available, there were many aspects that lacked district-level data. Nevertheless, we conducted an analysis of the issue as best as possible within the time constraints. In the end, we collectively shortlisted some priority areas to put forward for policymakers to make evidence-informed decisions. The course of which this report is part has helped all of us use policy diagnostic tools for national policy analysis and propose solutions. We hope that the recommendations put forward here guide policymakers in their endeavours to deal with the challenge of girls' primary completion.

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