

EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS IN RURAL PAKISTAN: FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS FOR CHILDREN IN DISTRICT KARAK, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the facilitators and barriers that shape children's educational journeys in District Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Using qualitative approach, we explored the perspectives and experiences of local communities and young people regarding their educational trajectories. A case study design was employed, with one Union Council (UC) purposively selected for in-depth investigation. A comprehensive profile of the selected UC was developed to identify young people who were out of school or had dropped out before completing Grade 10th, as well as those who had successfully completed graduation. Twenty male and female participants from each group were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The data was analyzed thematically, resulting in five major themes: (1) gender norms and educational opportunities; (2) parental economic capital; (3) parental social capital; (4) parental cultural capital; and (5) institutional and structural inequalities. The findings suggest that educational (dis)advantages are transmitted across generations through interconnected social, economic, cultural, and institutional mechanisms. The educational success of children, therefore, cannot be understood solely in terms of individual ability, motivation, or merit. Rather, it is significantly shaped by the socio-cultural and material environment in which children grow up, including the opportunities and constraints created by wider institutional and structural conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the the fundamental pathway through which children achieve knowledge, develop their skills, get aspirations and social mobility. However, all children do not get education in equal socio-economic and cultural conditions as provided by their parents and the state. The socio-economic class/status of parents, unequal access to opportunities and resources,

structural, geographical and institutional inequalities, and social networks of parents, and individual aspirations of children are interlinked together having complex interactions. Some children may get supportive environment which facilitates them in their educational journey, while other face barriers which restrict them getting the same success and achievements. The educational journey of a child starts within the

home and parents, and goes through school, community networks and social institutions. The socioeconomic capital of parents strongly influence this educational journey of their children. The opportunities and resources available to children depend upon the social, economic, and cultural capital/status of parents. In contrast, the lack of financial resources, weak social capital, and low cultural capital of parents limits access to opportunities and resources.

Various social mechanisms contribute to the transmission of social advantages and disadvantages from parents to their children. These mechanisms include the socialization process within the family, economic inheritance, parents' educational attainment, and their social and cultural capital. Broadly speaking, family and education are the two most important mechanisms through which social class is reproduced across generations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Children are influenced by parents in many ways. First, the beliefs, attitudes, and value system of children are framed by parents through the process of socialization. Their capabilities and understanding of different educational pathways and careers are shaped by the experiences, perspectives, and aspirations of their parents, which are transmitted to their children. Secondly, parents are role models, and their children look up to them for guidance. Thirdly, different parents provide different types of opportunities to their children, in which parents from higher social classes have advantage over those coming from more humble background. Fourthly, and more importantly, the social class of parents often determines their social connections and social networks, i.e., high class parents and their children they are exposed to influential positions, high social capital, and professional circles, which directly and indirectly influence and frame the future of their children. Lastly, in the provision of good-quality education and care, the financial support of the parents plays a significant role in shaping the future of their children. On the other hand, children from weak parental background, lacking all these resources, encounter disadvantages (barriers)

from their parents and social environment as well. Along with the parents' influence, there are many important personal factors that contribute to educational journey of a child, such as self-concept, interest, skill, knowledge, personality, ethnicity, age, and gender. The in-depth qualitative study is therefore important to explore why and how children from different social backgrounds are usually different in their educational outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental dynamics and interactions, including both facilitators and barriers, play a significant role in shaping children's educational experiences, aspirations, and career development. Facilitators such as parental involvement in children's education are associated with better academic grades and test scores, regular completion of homework, improved school attendance, greater likelihood of pursuing higher education, and more positive attitudes and behaviours in school. Fuller and Olsen (1998) found that parental involvement is essential for improving children's academic performance. Similarly, Epstein (1987) argued that parental involvement in almost any form can contribute to improved educational achievement among children. The gender of a child is also a significant factor in influencing the education and career choices of children (McMahon & Patton 1997). Kniveton (2004) has found that gender biased socialization is observed in homes in which female children are encouraged for female roles like secretary, clerical, and nursing roles while male children are prepared for masculine roles like doctors, police officers, etc. Ullah and Ali (2018) have found that the socioeconomic and educational background of parents not only determines the education and career of their children, but also the type of school, which also trains the children to accept their respective class and behave in a social structure accordingly. Meyer (1977) has indicated in his study that in the modern age, the differences and social inequalities in society are largely contributed by schooling. Different types of schools work as an

essential lever in distributing social positions.

Ullah (2013) & Qadeer (2006) have found that Pakistan is a multi-cultural, racially and ethnically group-based, highly stratified society. Different clans, ethnicities, genders, castes, and class systems are the basis of social stratification. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), the different educational systems seriously disadvantage the poor, lower, and lower-middle-class children in the competition for educational achievements. The social status, class, values, and hierarchy of an individual are primarily determined by education, which is distributed through the distribution of cultural capital. The possession of dominant habitus and cultural capital is facilitated by success in the education system. Similarly, Pajares & Schunk (2003) argued that the home setting and family lifestyle provide a system of physical, social, and intellectual aspects directly affecting students' domains of learning. Hearn (1984) has identified that the profession, income, and the educational level of parents are also identified as very important factors for the career choices of children.

It has been found that the sociolinguistics skills and vocabulary of children are significantly influenced by their parents (Kassim, 2011), and that educated parents can easily help out their children in their educational activities due to which their children have better academic performance (Jeynes, 2007; Harb & El-Shaarawi, 2006). On the other hand, uneducated and poor parents are unable to help out their children because poverty is the biggest barrier for disadvantaged bright students, which prevents them from access to and participation in opportunities available to them.

This study uses the Capital Theory of Bourdieu (1986) who has differentiated capital into different types, including social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986, 1977), the most visible and most valuable form of capital in capitalist societies is economic capital, and it is the most important determinant of social status and power of individuals. It has been revealed through many

studies that parental economic capital affects their children's educational attainment in many ways. The families who have bigger economic capital invest more in the school education of their children. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) defined cultural capital, which consists of habits, tastes, cultural knowledge, language proficiency, and involvement in cultural issues, as a form of capital. Roose (2015) argued that with the passage of time, children internalize the cultural capital of their parents. Hence, this study aims to understand how the different types of social capitals (and the lack of it) works as facilitators or barriers in the education journey and achievement of children in rural Pakistan.

Although the existing literature has made important contributions to understanding the factors influencing children's educational experiences, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research focuses on specific educational problems or particular stages of children's education at a given point in time, rather than examining the entire educational journey, from school entry to educational aspirations and achievements. The present study addresses this gap by examining the barriers and facilitators that influence children's educational trajectories across different stages. Second, much of the literature focuses primarily on educational exclusion and the barriers that prevent children from progressing, while comparatively less attention has been given to the factors and mechanisms that enable children to overcome these barriers and successfully navigate their educational journeys. This study therefore examines both barriers and facilitators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of educational progression. Third, an important gap in the existing literature is the limited incorporation of children's own voices and narratives concerning their educational experiences. By adopting a child-centred approach, this study gives children an opportunity to describe and interpret their own educational journeys.

METHOD

The study was conducted in a rural area of District Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The district lies in the south of the province and has a population of about 0.8 million, predominantly belonging to the Khattak tribes of Pashtun ethnic group. Around 90% population lives in rural areas. The district has a higher literacy rate in the province and most people are engaged in government jobs. The study has used qualitative research methods, in which interviews have been used as the primary tool of data collection. The sample size was twenty (20) participants (both male and female) who were selected purposively. A Union Council profile was created in which we identified youth who were out of school or had dropped out before Grade 10, and compared them with youth who had completed graduation. Twenty male and female youth from each group were interviewed using a semi-structured guide. Informed consent was obtained from all participants who took part in this study. The recorded interviews were transcribed, themes were identified, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. All ethical principles were followed during this research, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following themes were found and are discussed below:

1. Gender Norms and Educational Opportunities

The data revealed that among other barriers, cultural expectations and gender norms work as important structural barriers in the educational journey of children. Parental decisions specifically about girls' education are influenced by socially constructed beliefs about gender in rural communities in Pakistan. The cultural expectations of parents restrict them in educational opportunities, leading to gender-based educational barriers and disparities, as one of the participants asserted:

"My father was not in favor of my admission in high school, though it is very close to my house. It is because our family is afraid of the negative attitudes of the community towards girls studying in boys' school. " (Child, dropped out, female-12).

It was also found that there are limited educational opportunities for female participants as compared to males in the study area. Being a rural set-up, the cultural beliefs and parents' restrictions hinder the educational attainment and career choices of female children. Thus, educational inequalities among children are not only based on the economic capital of parents, but they are also framed by the norms of culture and gender norms, as one participant highlighted:

"My brothers are allowed to travel to the city for college, but my parents think it is not safe for a girl to go so far from home. They say that I will eventually get married, so there is no need for me to study more. I wanted to continue my education and become a teacher, but being a girl has made it much more difficult for me to achieve this dream." (Child, dropped out, female-13).

As illustrated by the quotations above, gender is one of the most significant dimensions of an individual's social identity and an important factor shaping children's educational trajectories. The findings suggest that gender is closely associated with socially constructed expectations, roles, privileges, and restrictions that influence children's access to educational opportunities. In the context of rural communities, these gendered expectations can significantly shape parents' decisions regarding children's schooling, mobility, subject choices, and future careers. In many cases, girls find themselves in a more disadvantaged position than boys because of cultural norms, traditional gender roles, concerns about safety and mobility, and expectations regarding domestic responsibilities and early marriage. These factors can restrict girls' opportunities to continue their education, particularly when schools are located far from their homes or when higher levels of education require them to travel outside their communities.

The findings further indicate that the educational disadvantages experienced by girls often become more pronounced as they progress to higher grades. Many girls are compelled to discontinue their education before completing Grade 10. Consequently, girls may have fewer opportunities than boys to develop their educational potential and pursue their desired careers. Thus, gender operates not only as a barrier to educational access and continuation, but also as a mechanism through which broader social inequalities are reproduced across generations.

2. Economic Capital of Parents: Income, Occupation, and Socioeconomic Status

The economic capital of parents is an important factor that mostly affects the education of children. It reflects the lifestyle, access to resources, and social class of a family. It was found in this study data that when parents' resources are limited, it mostly becomes a barrier to the educational journey of their children. Children from such a background usually face disadvantages as poor parents cannot provide educational help to their children. Sometimes, this also results in school dropout. Such children are engaged in earning for their family survival, as one of the participants mentioned:

"The biggest obstacle and barrier was poverty and the weak economic position of my parents. I was the eldest child and engaged in early earning. That's why I left school. Our school Headmaster told my father not to drop this child, and I was good at studies, but there was no other way" (Child, dropped out, male-16).

Some other children told a similar story who faced poverty due to which he could not continue his studies.

"My father is a school-bus driver. Sometimes I helped my father because I was interested in driving. Due to lack of attention from my parents and poverty in my studies, I left school in grade 8th, and started driving" (Child, dropped out, male-14).

"My parents were aged and illiterate. We faced extreme poverty. In our surroundings, we were very poor, and that's why I left school. I have six sisters and two brothers. All of them are uneducated" (Child, dropped out, male-15).

On the other hand, a number of participants reported that their educational success was facilitated by the economic resources and financial capital available within their families. The better economic capital of parents enabled children to attend better schools and access learning opportunities that may not have been available to children from economically disadvantaged households.

"My parents could afford to send me to a good private school, and they never had to worry about school fees, books, uniforms, or transportation. Because of their financial support, I was able to study in a good environment and continue my education without interruption. I believe the opportunities I had were largely because my family had the resources to provide me with a better education." (Participant, graduated, male- 20)

The findings suggest that family economic capital plays an important role in shaping children's educational trajectories and outcomes. Families with greater financial resources are better positioned to invest in their children's education and provide them with sustained educational support, thereby increasing their chances of completing higher levels of education and achieving their academic and career aspirations. Conversely, children from economically disadvantaged families may face financial constraints that interrupt their schooling, limit their choice of educational institutions, or compel them to enter paid work before completing their education. Thus, economic capital can function both as a facilitator of educational mobility and, through its unequal distribution, as a mechanism contributing to the reproduction of educational and social inequalities across generations.

3. Social Capital of Parents: Social Status, Networks, and Community Connections

An important finding of this study is that the parental social background (social capital of parents) is a significant factor that works as a facilitator as well as a barrier in the educational journey of children. Social capital of parents, including their social status, interpersonal

relationships, social networks, community connections, and access to influential individuals and institutions plays an important role in shaping children's educational trajectories. Parents who possess influential social networks may be better positioned to obtain information about educational opportunities, identify good schools and colleges, arrange additional academic support, and establish connections with teachers and other influential individuals. Such networks can provide families with information and opportunities that may not be equally accessible to those with limited social connections. In contrast, economically constrained families rely on free government schooling, not necessarily by preference but due to structural barriers as well. Thus, it depends upon their parents' social background, social networks, and community connections where children are encouraged or restricted in their education. The educational journey of children is not only dependent on the abilities of a child, but it also depends upon the involvement of his/her parents.

One participant described how his family's social connections helped him navigate educational opportunities:

"My father knew almost all the teachers in my school personally. Whenever I needed some help, teachers extended that help and provided guidance because of my father's relationship with them. Therefore, I did not faced any problem in school."(Participant, graduated, Male-19)

The data indicated that the support of parents is one of the major aspects of facilitators in the educational journey of children. Parents mostly provide financial help, guidance, emotional support, and involvement that help their children to achieve goals. This type of facilitation by parents gives motivation, confidence, and navigation of achievements. Through parents' help, children are enabled to overcome their educational challenges.

The findings of the data indicated that parents who have strong social capital are expected to provide better opportunities to their children. Through their social networks, they are usually more connected with the schools of their

children. The social capital of parents is therefore very important, and it can positively affect the educational achievements and career projections of their children. On the other hand, parents with weak or limited social relationships usually cannot provide the same opportunities to their children that other parents can, as one of the participants added:

"I never made excuses to leave school, and I was very regular and punctual in school timings. My father was always in touch with my teachers and principal of my school asking about my results and progress" (Participant, educated, male-16).

Children who grow up in families with extensive social networks may interact with educated professionals, teachers, academics, civil servants, and other successful individuals. These interactions can expand their aspirations and provide them with information about careers that may otherwise remain outside their immediate social environment.

Thus, parental social capital appears to operate through several interconnected mechanisms, including access to information, institutional connections, guidance, mentoring, social exposure, and educational role models. These resources can help children overcome some of the barriers associated with limited economic or cultural capital and can facilitate their progression through different stages of education. However, unequal access to social networks also means that children from socially privileged families may enjoy advantages that are not equally available to children from less-connected households.

4. Cultural Capital of Parents: Education, Material Resources, and Cultural Practices

Cultural capital, which includes parents' educational attainment, knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, language practices, and other cultural resources, also plays an important role in shaping children's educational journeys. Parents with higher levels of education are often better positioned to understand the educational system, recognize the importance of continued schooling, provide academic guidance, and assist their

children in making informed educational and career decisions. Educated parents can nourish their children academically more than illiterate parents. The perception of parents about education deeply influences their children, like the attainment of education, values, and, above all, their career.

The data indicated that educated parents mostly give more importance to education. They can also provide academic guidance and often check the progress of their children. They have comparatively more awareness and access to information, and they are usually well-communicated with the teachers of their children. Contrary to this, uneducated parents are mostly not capable of providing effective educational support to their children. As a result, there is a difference found in the educational achievements among the children of educated and uneducated parents. The following excerpts from interviews illustrate this point.

"My mother is illiterate, and my father is only primary pass. They cannot help me with my homework and assignments. I had not received any academic help from my parents. My parents gave no attention and took no interest in my studies and school. At last, I left school in grade 9th". (Child, dropped out, male-18).

"I faced no economic issues, but I think the attitude of my parents towards education and their lack of interest in my study and schooling has affected me. Because my parents are illiterate, and they cannot guess about the value of education" (Child, dropped out, male-18).

The data further illustrated that the facilitation of autonomy and freedom for children helps them in their educational journey. When children are given a choice to decide on their subject selection and career decisions, they usually have stronger commitment and have a greater sense of responsibility. It mostly intersects with the personal abilities of children, and they align their educational journey with more interest and abilities. In this way, they move on in their educational journey as one participant added:

"My parents gave me full freedom in subject selection and provided me all sorts of support. Studying Urdu Literature was my own choice, and I have graduated in Urdu literature now" (Child, graduated, female-17).

The findings therefore suggest that cultural capital operates through everyday family practices and interactions, shaping how children perceive education, what they aspire to achieve, and the extent to which they are supported in pursuing those aspirations. Children who grow up in families with greater educational and cultural resources may enter school with certain advantages, including familiarity with educational practices, greater confidence in interacting with teachers and institutions, and stronger expectations regarding higher education. In this sense, cultural capital, like economic and social capital, can serve as an important facilitator of educational success and social mobility, while unequal access to such resources may contribute to the reproduction of educational inequalities across generations.

5. Institutional and Structural Inequalities

The analysis of data showed that there are institutional and structural inequalities which affect the educational journey of children negatively. Institutional and structural factors determine the availability, accessibility, quality, and continuity of educational opportunities. While individual motivation and family support are important, children's educational journeys are also strongly influenced by the wider social and institutional environment in which they live. Factors such as the availability and quality of schools, distance from educational institutions, transportation facilities, school infrastructure, etc. can either facilitate or constrain educational progression. An isolated geographical/remote area usually deprives children of education. This is usually the case in rural communities in Pakistan.

"I have passed grade 5th from a public school. There was no high school in our area. I was unable to study more in a faraway school. Now I am married and I am a housewife" (Child, dropped out, female-02).

"One of the main reason due to which I left the school was lack of public transport. My house is disconnected from the road and we were unable to arrange private transportation. For us, living in a rural area meant

that continuing school was much more difficult.” (Child, dropped out, Male-03).

The institutional and structural inequalities depend upon the socio-economic background of parents. It was found that those parents who are comparatively well off have greater access to resources like quality education mostly private education. Their children have more educational opportunities, well qualified and trained teachers and other learning resources in their schools. Thus, children from privileged families are in the position to convert the social, economic and cultural capital into educational advantages. These advantages further help them in getting better positions like jobs and good careers. The social class of parents, become facilitators for their children while disadvantaged background of parents encounter institutional barriers for their children because their parents have no access to sources and resources. In most of the rural areas, children face poverty of their parents, the conditions of schools and academic level, geographical access to schools, and the overall social structure of the community. Thus, multiple barriers are faced by these children living in rural areas. These interconnected barriers become cumulative disadvantages passed to children.

DISCUSSION

The study found that children's educational journey in rural Pakistan is shaped by a range of interconnected factors. These include individual factors, particularly children's gender; family-related factors, including the economic, social, and cultural capital of parents; and broader institutional and structural inequalities. Together, these factors can either facilitate or constrain children's access to educational opportunities, progression through different stages of schooling, and ultimately, their educational success.

The findings of this study are consistent with the existing literature and support the argument that social inequalities are reproduced and transmitted across generations through sociological processes deeply embedded within the broader social structure. Although individual

effort, ability, and personal motivation are important in shaping educational outcomes, their influence cannot be considered independently of the structural forces that shape the opportunities and constraints available to individuals and families. These forces operate as powerful social facts, influencing educational choices, aspirations, and decisions and, in many cases, placing significant constraints on the capacity of individuals and families to determine their educational trajectories solely through personal effort. For example, Medved et. Al. (2006) claim that parents directly and indirectly convey their message while advising their children to view their career choices based on their gender. According to Wilson and Wilson (1992), parents teach their children through their interactions and experiences about "men's work" and "women's work". According to Kniveton (2004), children are treated and socialized in a gender biased manner where parents encourage their female children to take up roles like nursing, clerical, and secretary positions, while male children are encouraged to be masculine and are aspired for roles like police officer and doctors, etc. Wilson and Wilson (1992) further found that male children have higher aspirations and ambitions than female children for higher-level careers. This is due to early socialization, where boys are considered that their activities in school were more beneficial to their careers than girls. Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien (2002) argue that although women's career choices have increased dramatically, occupational choices of women are still more limited than men's choices. It is perhaps due to the socialization of girls and cultural expectations wherein a woman's life is restricted to caring for the family and her career prospects are considered secondary. Girls mostly pick up traditional female roles, whereas boys mostly pick higher-status jobs because occupations are a symbol of status and prestige (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002). Galambos and Silbereisen (1987) found that fathers treat their children in a more sex-differentiated way as compared to their mothers. Fathers encourage their sons to be more independent, harder, and

achieve more challenging goals but did not encourage the same behaviors in their daughters.

The economic capital of parents is one of the most important factors in shaping the educational trajectory of children. If a family has a wider environment of materials and economy, their children have wider opportunities to develop various skills. Bloome (2018) has found that parents send their children to schools of their choice that have strong economic capital. Lareau (2011) has pointed out that parents with high economic capital give higher education and high-status occupations to their children. Such parents give priority to organized activities that facilitate educational success for their children. Similarly, economically rich parents spend more time engaging in developmental activities that take advantage of the success of their children. Therefore, parental economic capital is considered very important for their children's likelihood of becoming successful.

Bourdieu (1986) has argued that the socio-economic and educational background of parents not only represents the social class of the family but also determines the education and career of their children. According to Bourdieu (1977, 1986), the most visible and most valuable form of capital in capitalist societies is economic capital, and it is the most important determinant of social status and power of an individual. The families, who have more economic capital, invest more in the school education of their children. This leads to a chain of cultural and social reproduction.

It was found in this study that social and cultural capitals of parents, especially the connections of parents and social prestige greatly help children to have access to education and learning opportunities. This finding of the study aligns with longstanding sociological theories and empirical research like Lareau's (2011) concept of 'concerted cultivation' among middle-class families versus 'natural growth strategies' in working-class families, where school choice itself becomes a classed practice. Concerted cultivation is a type of parenting style of middle-class people who rear their children in a particular way. In

this distinctive pattern of the child-rearing process, the parents cultivate the social abilities, confidence, language skills, and educational progress in them, where children are like soil and the skills are like seeds to cultivate in it. The natural growth strategy is more common in poor and working-class families where children grow and play in more, free environment where parents intervene less in their children's activities (Lareau, 2011).

Empirically, this finding resonates with research from South Asia. Ullah and Ali (2018) found that in Pakistan, private school enrollment rises sharply with household income, with private schools perceived as higher quality despite mixed evidence on learning outcomes, and therefore, more popular among the social elites. These authors further argued that the dual system of public and private education has created de facto segregation, where school type becomes a proxy for family background, limiting inter-group interaction and future social mobility. Thus, the findings suggest that schooling in this context is not a neutral service but a stratified field where family background determines access. This has policy implications: without addressing affordability and perceived quality gaps between government and private schools, educational inequality will continue to be transmitted intergenerationally. According to Pajares and Schunk (2003), academic achievement is also affected by the treatment of parents with their children at home. This is because the home environment has a direct and indirect impact on the children's academic capability and achievement. Additionally, Schoon (2011) has found that the home setting and family lifestyle provide a system of physical, social, and intellectual aspects directly affecting students' domains of learning. Covay and Carbonaro (2010) have found that the social status of parents is the measuring standard for the educational journey of their children. The study of Cheung and Andersen (2003) revealed that co-curricular activities in schools and social, cultural, and political discussions of parents with their children on these issues all contribute

significantly to educational and career trajectories. Streib (2015) found in his study that social class is strongly associated with the content of bridging and bonding social capital because it shapes the content of norms and values children experience at home. According to Keller & Whiston (2008) and Zingaro (1983), the difference in habitus and family background, children follow their parents and peers in schooling, which is the ritual performance, only indicates that the type of school and social background of their parents do affect the educational success and career aspirations. These findings resonates with Bourdieu's theory of social capital which says that social positions form a social space that is defined by many characteristics, not only occupation, income, and education, but also some other characteristics, like age, gender, and place of residence, that jointly lead to certain conditions of existence that frame the people's perceptions and preferences.

The data revealed that the parents' occupation, which usually defines the socioeconomic status of parents, can have positive or negative consequences for their children's education and career aspirations. This study found a strong effect of parents' occupation on the schooling and education of their children. Parents' occupation limits the education level, mode of schooling, and the future of the children as a whole. The data also revealed that high and prestigious jobs of parents positively affect the educational journey of their children and vice versa. Bloome (2018) has found that the decision of a career is based on the social status of students, which is actually the social status of their parents based on their occupation, educational level, monthly income of the family, and many other indicators. A similar study by Rury (2016) indicated that parents with high economic capital give higher education and higher-status occupations to their children. Such parents give priority to organized activities that facilitate educational success for their children. Lareau (2011) has found the same in her work: economically rich parents spend more time engaging in developmental activities that provide

an advantage and success to their children. Sullivan (2001) is of the opinion that families that possess a high level of cultural capital also tend to possess other socioeconomic resources, which have a positive effect on children's educational success. Most commonly, the children who possess a high level of cultural capital have social and economic capital, which promotes their educational success and high educational aspiration.

The findings of this study demonstrate that children's educational journeys in rural Pakistan cannot be understood solely in terms of individual ability, motivation, or effort. Rather, educational opportunities and outcomes are shaped by a complex interplay of family resources, social relationships, cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and broader structural inequalities. In this regard, the findings resonate strongly with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) argument that educational institutions do not operate as neutral spaces. Instead, schools may privilege children who already possess the forms of economic, social, and cultural capital valued by the education system, thereby contributing to the reproduction of existing social inequalities. Similarly, Naveed (2024) found that in rural Punjab, factors such as caste, landownership, patronage, social status, and local power structures shape educational opportunities and prospects for social mobility. These findings suggest that children's educational experiences in rural communities are deeply embedded in wider systems of power, class, status, and social relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the facilitators and barriers shaping children's educational journeys in rural District Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is concluded that educational advantage and disadvantage are produced and reproduced through interconnected social mechanisms. Economic, social, and cultural resources available within families interact with schools, teachers, communities, and wider institutional and structural conditions to shape children's

educational trajectories. Facilitators can create pathways towards educational achievement and social mobility, while barriers can restrict those pathways and reproduce existing inequalities. Thus, educational success is neither entirely a matter of individual merit nor simply the outcome of parental effort. It is the product of an unequal social environment in which children begin their educational journeys with different levels of resources, opportunities, support, and constraints. In this sense, the study reinforces the broader sociological argument that education can serve both as a pathway to social mobility and as a mechanism for the reproduction of social class and inequality across generations. Policymakers should develop and implement evidence-based policies to reduce structural and institutional inequalities in children's access to and progression in education.

Authors' Contribution

The primary author (KS) conceived the idea, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the article. The second author (MH) helped in data analysis and revising the first draft, while the third author (NS) supervised the research.

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