

Women Education in Remote Areas of AJK: Scope of Open & Distance Education

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Abstract

This research paper explores the problems, challenges and opportunities for women's education in remote areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir. Quantitative approach of research has been used for this study. A survey form consisting of five open ended questions have been used to collect data from both literate and illiterate women. According to economic survey of Pakistan overall literacy rate of Pakistan is 62.6% in which 73.3% are male and 51.9% are female. Literacy rate of rural areas women are very lower as compared to urban areas women which is only 40.8%. Lack of motivation, cultural norms and conservative attitude towards genders, patriarchal culture, lack of educational facilities, illiterate family environment, family support, resource management, poverty, family and society barrier, early child marriages, non-availability of transport and limited knowledge towards Islam are the main problems and challenges of women education in rural areas. Despite these issues and challenges government and higher education commission of Pakistan are trying their best to resolve these issues and promote women education especially in the rural areas. In this regard, open and distance education is the solution and may be utilized as way forward to promote women education.

Keywords: *Women education, open & distance education, remote areas, literacy*

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Introduction

If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. This well-known proverb has become a motivation all over the globe to promote female education. Article 25A of Islamic Republic of Pakistan states that, “education is the fundamental right of every citizen”. However in rural areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir women are away from this basic right. According to Pakistan Education Statistics (Pakistan, 2023-2024), literacy rate of women in Pakistan is 51.9%, significantly lower than that of men (73.3%). Only 40.8 % percent literacy rate of women were identified in the rural areas which is most dangerous and question mark for all stakeholders. This disparity has various reasons including lack of motivation, cultural norms and conservative attitude towards genders, patriarchal culture, lack of educational facilities, illiterate family environment, family support, resource management, poverty, family and society barrier, early child marriages, and only focus of Quran-e-Majeed.

Currently Pakistan has the lowest female literacy rate in the Asia (Anna Askari, 2023). Women education and empowerment are directly related to each other. Through education women know their basic rights. Education is worldwide accepted need of everyone especially for women (E.M.King, L.A. Lillard , 1983). The United Nation and other organization have more focused towards women education. Education is essential need of human and economic development (Abdul Ghafoor Awan, 2020). Women are the asset of every country. Country cannot develop without women’s equal participation in each field. Women have a pivotal role in the economic growth of country. From mother to wife they played a crucial role. Almost half population of Pakistan is consists of women. Without their representation Pakistan cannot achieve his development and economic growth. Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto (Shaheed), Ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan and Maryam Nawaz, Chief Minister of Punjab (Pakistan) all played their role in the development of country.

Women in the rural areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir are facing multiple problems and challenges. This paper will highlights the problems, challenges of women’s education and how these challenges overcome. For collection of data quantitative technique of research have been used in this study. Two types of survey forms have been prepared. Survey form one made for illiterate women consists of five questions and survey form two made for literate women. Same problems of both illiterate and literate women were found. However, both literate and illiterate women think that women education is necessary, and they were looking confident and hopeful for future.

Literature Review

Education is the basic right of every citizen (Bibi, 2018). Purpose of life cannot be understood without education. Women are the assets of any country without their representation country cannot grow. Men and women are considered as two wheel of vehicle. As vehicle cannot drive with one wheel, same country cannot grow without women education. Women have a pivotal role in the development of country. In the western countries, women are on the top position of bureaucracy. Country economic growth is directly proportional to women education.

Napolian says, “give me good mother and I shall give you good nation”. This quotation directly reflects the importance of women for country and society. Lower women education has destructive effects on economic growth (Abdul Ghafoor Awan, 2020). Awan (2011) examined the influence of education on poverty decrease. (Muhammad Afzal, 2011), driven at education, financial process and impoverishment. They use co-integration method to find out long run relationship between education and economic prosperity.

The countries which neglect the women education are unbalanced and poor. Education is not just to take a degree but it is crucial to make change in human behaviors (Basharat Ali, 2021). Lack of women’s education not only effects on the family but also have a negative impact on the country and society (Mercy, 2017). The education system of country is the master determinant of all change (Coleman).

History demonstrates that women were dominated by men. Females were considered as a weak gender from past till present. From the history women were even not allowed to take tickets for election. Women were even not allowed to talk to people. These sever nature issues can only be solved through education. In the rural areas, women day starts with work and end with work (Basharat Ali, 2021).

From mother to wife women have a crucial role in the world. Society is incomplete without women. In developing country women education has been ignored for decades. Pakistan is a region where this issue exists. Although government has taken many initiatives to reduce this but still issue remains due to some political interference and some time from religious factors and patriarchal culture. Almost half of population of Pakistan is consists of women but literacy rate as compare to men is very low.

In the rural areas of Pakistan, literacy rate of women is only 40% which is a wakeup call for government and other bodies to overcome this challenge. The rural areas women are uneducated due to traditional

thinking they thought that women are just made for house work and look after the children (Basharat Ali, 2021). Many other issues like lack of motivation, illiterate family environment and poverty are the obstacle in women's education. We must have to work on it and aware the importance of women education in the rural areas. Community must inform the social-economic issues of women's education to government and other lawmaking bodies (Muhammad Asghar, 1993).

Misty Lacour (2011) highlights that poverty has a negative effect on the women education as poor parents cannot educate their children. Poor Children were always at risk due to poverty. Poor parents cannot understand the importance of education. If we look at school, a gap between rich and poor students exists. A sense of inferior has found in the poor student's mind (Basharat Ali, 2021). Due to this student prefer to leave the school and go to child work. Farrulsaqlain found that national policies play an important role in women education. Khan (2023) examined that illiteracy is directly related to poverty.

Poor financial status, children remain busy to support their families. Due to family support their education cannot be completed. According to Pirzado, Parvez, and Saeed Nasim (2006), "girls and boys are separately supporting their family financially". In the rural areas of Pakistan, mostly girls are working in agriculture related activities. In the rural areas, girls day starts with bringing wood from jungle (forest). They also go out to cut the grass along with males. Most of their time is spent to look after animals. After coming back from taking care of animals, they have to do some other household work like cooking, cleaning, washing etc.

Another factor that dangerously affects the girl's education is parent's attitude. In most rural areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir, parents think that women education is just wastage of time and money. Parent's think that girls will not stay at home for long time and at the end they will get married so they will not benefit from their education (Qaiser Suleman, 2015). In rural areas, most parents not allow girls to go for higher education to urban areas because they think that in this way they will make any relationship with others. Illiterate parents are another big hurdle for girl's education in the rural areas. Most parents are illiterate and they do not know the importance of education. Due to lack of awareness, they cannot tell the educational benefits to their children. Parents think that children will just support themselves (Qaiser Suleman, 2015). Illiterate parents even do not visit to school and communicate with teacher regarding their educational progress. On the other hand, literate parent continuously visit to school and check the progress of their children.

The Teachman's (1987) study found that there is a positive effect of parent's education on children's education. In the same study, he has found that mother education has a positive impact on daughter's education as compared to son's education (Qaiser Suleman, 2015). Burney and Irfan (1991) examined that girls of educated parents were admitted to higher level schooling. Educated parents have a taste of knowledge and know the benefits of education therefore, they want their children especially girls become educated. On the other hand, illiterate parents are just busy in their work. They do not have the time to discuss with their children.

In rural areas, culture and tradition is also a big challenge for girl's education. In the rural areas, as the girls enter adolescence, they are married. They become unable to continue their education in this way. This cultural norm badly effects the girl's education (Qaiser Suleman, 2015). Most of rural people think that there is no need of job for women, so education is meaningless to them.

Long distance to school also affects girl's education negatively. In the rural areas of Pakistan, school are situated far away from home. Long distance creates multiple problems for girls (Qaiser Suleman, 2015). Security of girls is threatened in this way. Mostly parents do not allow their girls to go to school. Due to insecure environment, they think that this risk may cause sexual abuse. Due to long travel to school, mostly parents decides to give their girls religious education. Transport facility in the rural areas is not available for girls therefore, they have to travel by foot for long distance. Non-availability of boundary walls in the school also creates negative effect in the girl's mind. Non availability of toilet in many schools, especially after girls reach puberty is the cause to leave the school (Hunter, 2005).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are given below:

- 1) To explore the problem and challenges of women's education in the rural areas.
- 2) To interpret how patriarchal culture effects the women education.
- 3) To examine why motivation become a hurdle in women education.
- 4) To draw the attention of government and higher education commission of Pakistan towards women's education.

Methodology

For this study, quantitative approach of research has been opted.

Participants

Females from remote areas of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir were approached to collected data. Illiterate and literate female have been interviewed. The female participants were confident while sharing their problems.

Data Collection Tool

Two types of survey forms have been prepared. Survey form I was prepared for illiterate women and survey form II for literate women who are currently student or have completed their education.

Survey Form I (For Illiterate Women)

1. Why you couldn't get education?
2. What are the problems which affect your education? Give name.
3. In your opinion what are the benefits of women education?
4. In your opinion what are the barriers in women education?
5. In your opinion "What are the probable solution of these issues"?

Survey Form II (For Literate Women)

1. Why you want to get education?
2. What are the problems faced by you during education?
3. What benefits you will get after education?
4. In your opinion what steps should take for educational improvement?

Data Collection

Data were collected through questionnaires by conducting a survey based interview. Data have been collected on survey form that consists of open-ended questions. Illiterate women had shared their responses on five questions of data form and literate women has shared their responses on four questions of data form. Collected data have been analyzed through thematic approach.

Findings

In order to analyze responses of respondents thematic technique of research has been used.

Thematic Analysis of Responses

S#	Main Theme	Sub Theme	Code
<i>Illiterate Women's Responses</i>			
1.	Management Problems	➤ Resource Management	• House work load
		➤ Time Management	• Misuse of mobile phone
			• Resources are least in number
			• Transport issues

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health issues • Language issues • Early child marriages • Family pressure of not getting education • Old parents at home and look after them • Lack of critical thinking • Parents death • Women are just made up for house work and to take care of child • Women are not allowed to get education in the family • Strict supervision at women while moving outside • Women are not allow to talk to anyone • Women hesitation while talking to parents regarding education • Strict family environment • Difference between boy and girl • Education has not benefits for women • Gender difference • Lack of family support |
| 2. | Patriarchy (Male Dominance Society) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Family Barriers ➤ Society Barriers | |
| 3. | Motivational Problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lack of motivation from society ➤ Lack of motivation from family | |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illiterate family environment • Only focus on Islamic education • Lack of personal interest • More focus on men education • Women education is just waste of time • Family not know the benefits of women education • Parents are not educated |
| 4. Financial Problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Poverty ➤ Inflation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income of father • Fees issues • Book and uniform not provide by parents • Maximum number of children |
| 5. Rise in Population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Large family members ➤ Early Child Marriages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum children in one family • Maximum focus on boys instead of girls • No family planning |
| 6. Least number of educational institutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Least number of secondary and higher secondary schools ➤ Bad infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only schools upto 5th standard held • Non availability of school buildings • Non availability of furniture |
| 7. Traditional Problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mother is not educated ➤ Society has least number of educated women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the family women did not get education • No future after getting education • At the end women have to get married |

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| 8. Religious Factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Only Quran-e-Majeed is allowed to study ➤ Islam bound the parents to get married their daughter after mature ➤ Less Knowledge towards Islam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and look after the children • Quran-e-Majeed education is enough • Islam does not allows women to go outside and talked to male • Dress issues • At the age of 18 women must have to get marriage |
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Literate Women's Responses

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| 1. Management Problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resource Management ➤ Time Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House work load • Misuse of mobile phone • Resources are least in number • Transport issues • Health issues • Language issues • Early child marriages • Family pressure of not getting education • Old parents at home and look after them • Lack of critical thinking • Parents death |
| 2. Technical Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Network Issues ➤ Least number of network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electricity issue • Non availability of service • Less number of network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non availability of student friendly internet packages |

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| <p>3. Patriarchy Culture (Male Dominance Society)</p> | <p>➤ Family Barriers
➤ Society Barriers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are just made up for house work and to take care of child • Women are not allowed to get education in the family • Strict supervision at women while moving outside • Women are not allow to talk to anyone • Women hesitation while talking to parents regarding education • Strict family environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference between boy and girl |
| <p>4. Motivational Problems</p> | <p>➤ Lack of motivation from society</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education has not benefits for women • Gender difference • Lack of family support • Illiterate family environment • Only focus on Islamic education • Lack of personal interest • More focus on men education • Women education is just waste of time |

- Family not know the benefits of women education
 - Parents are not educated
- 5. Financial Problem
 - Poverty
 - Inflation
 - Low income of father
 - Fees issues
 - Book and uniform not provide by parents
- 6. Least number of educational institutes
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- 7. Religious Factors
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 - Less Knowledge towards Islam
 - Quran-e-Majeed education is enough
 - Islam does not allows women to go outside and talked to male
 - Dress issues
 - At the age of 18 women must have to get marriage
- 8. Curriculum
 - Old syllabus
 - Language barriers
 - Lengthy syllabus
 - Not up to date syllabus
 - Lack of extracurricular activities
 - Mixed syllabus
 - Quran-e-Majeed education
 - Language problems

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| 9. Family pressure | ➤ Subject selection
➤ House work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose subject according to family • No own choice while selecting subjects • Choice less subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work at home |
| 10. Teacher Training Problems | ➤ Lack of qualified teacher
➤ Technological issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non availability of workshop for teachers • Teacher not know the use of latest technology • Teacher selection is not as per merit • Teacher are not professional |

Discussion

(1) Management Problems (Time/ Resource Management). Second objective was to highlight management related problem of women towards education. Maximum number of women were found with the management issues. They cannot manage their time and resources properly. House work load, spending maximum time on mobile phone, transport issues, health issues, languages issues, old parents at home and parental death are the most common issues which affects their education. Most of their time spend on house related work and look after the home. In most rural areas language has become a challenge for women. Illiterate family environment is also a big issue. English language becomes a big issue for women. But now English become an international language. Rural girls do not understand English which case educational lack. In most hose there are old parents found. Women at home spend most of their time to look after the parents.

(2) Patriarchal Culture. Family and society barriers. Third objective was to find out how male dominant the female. Most of people think that women are just made up for house work, to serve the men, and to look after the child. Women cannot move without men permission, while moving outside even when went to madrasa they are supervised. They are not even allowed to talk to anyone. In the home rural parent while taking any decision there priorities are boys, girls in this way are ignored. When women reach to higher secondary level they do not allow them to go to

other district or in urban school and college. Some families and society thinks that job is not the work of women; if any woman is educated she does not allow going for job.

(3) Motivational Issue (Lack of parent's interest/ Illiterate family environment). Fourth objective was to observe how motivations change the behavior of women. Mostly parents found illiterate, due to illiteracy they do not know the benefits of education. They are unable to tell only one benefit of education. If someone gets admission in school, parents even do not go to school to discuss and check the progress of his child, their communication skill is not good. Due to bad communication skill they feel shy while talking to teachers. In this way they cannot check the overall progress of child. If any student is weak in study, he has no idea about that. In this way they do not support their children to get education that why they decided to leave the school. Due to illiteracy parents are busy in farming and cultivation, they did not get any job; they think that education has no benefit.

(4) Parent Behavior (Bad parental relationship). Second objective was to determine how parent's relationships influence the girl's education. Low income of men causes quarrel at home. Basic need of women not fulfilled. Due to non-provision of basic need parents are quarreling with each other. They do not think towards the education of child. Women especially ignored in this way.

(5) Financial Issues (Poverty and Inflation). Second objective was to find out how poverty and inflation disturb the education of women. It was seen that majority of rural families are poor and have no better income mean. Parents have no jobs and are doing just farming or other labor related work in the villages, their income is very low. Due to low income they hardly manage household expenditure as household items are high in cost. Parents do not purchase books and uniform for their girls and pay their school fees. They decided to not send their girls to school.

(6) Less Number of Schools (Non availability of vehicle/ Distance/ Lack of Infrastructure). In the rural areas educational institutions are less in number. Up to primary level in each village almost school exists but secondary and higher secondary schools are less in number. Higher secondary schools are too much away from homes. Parents feel insecure while sending their girls to higher secondary school. There is no proper infrastructure in the school. Furniture and technical instruments are not held there. Washrooms are not held especially for female students in the school. There is no vehicle available for female students from their residencies. They cannot travel long distance by foot. Due to long distance

and non-availability of transport parents decide to get them religious education.

(7) Teacher Training (Lack of Qualified Teacher/ Technological Issue). Teacher training is a big issue in the rural areas. Teachers not enrolled as per the required standard. Mostly teacher not know the use of technology. As this is the era of technology, teacher must know the use of technology. There are no proper workshops arranged for teachers by the educational authority. Another big issue is that teachers are less in number and have burden of maximum subject teaching. Upto primary level there is only one teacher available in the school. Teacher teaches the whole classes and all subject to students. How it is possible that one teacher teaches to whole classes and whole subjects.

(8) Early Child Marriages. In the rural areas female get marriages in the early ages. In adolescence they are forced to get marry. Parents thinks that girls after adolescence are not allow to stay at home they have to be married. They think that to marry girl is there responsibility. In this way many of young girls do not continue their education. After marriage girls become more responsible and look after the husband's house and look after their parents. After some time she become mother and more responsibility come to their shoulders. In this way their dream of education ruined. Their thinking totally change after baby birth, her total focus is babies look after.

(9) Curriculum Issue (Lengthy Syllabus/ Language Challenge). Government introduced one curriculum for whole country which becomes challenge for the remote areas student. As each province, district and village have its own culture and language. Syllabus is too lengthy and language is English. Rural female students feel uncomfortable and shy while speaking English. Some female students feel difficulty while selecting subject. Some time they face parent's pressure while choosing subjects. Subject according to their taste cannot select. It is another very big challenge towards female's education.

Conclusion

No doubt women education in Pakistan becomes a big issue and challenge. Despite many steps taken by government towards education, there are still many problems and challenges that exists in the rural areas. Financial, management, motivational, illiterate family environment, early child marriages, less number of educational institute, non-availability of transport and parental behavior are the main challenges and problems in the women education. Although issues and challenges exist but there are

also solutions for it. Government and higher education of Pakistan is trying their best to bring changes in women education.

On the basis of finding, there are some useful suggestions that can be helpful to reduce women educational issues in the remote areas. Firstly, highlight the importance of women education through monthly seminars. Higher education commission of Pakistan and other Ministry of Education is required to conduct monthly seminars on the importance of women education. Educational experts should be invited in the seminars. Media, print media and social media platform also plays a crucial role in this way. Media, social media and print media platform should use to highlight the importance of education. Media should conduct special educational program on the women education topic. In physical seminars, parents and females should be invited specially. There should be a question-answer session for parents and females. Females should be encouraged while asking questions. Secondly, government should make legislation for the compulsory women education. In this regard, open and distance education is the solution and may be utilized as way forward to promote women education in terms of being them literate.

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