

Assessing Access and Equity Gaps Faced by Christian Students in Primary Schools: A Quantitative Study

Jahanzeb Ghauri* and Sumaira Manawar**

Abstract

This was a quantitative study to explore access and equity issues of Christian students in primary school in Punjab. The purpose of the study was to explore inequities in access to education, to investigate experience of inclusion and exclusion, and to consider how school policies, programs, and practices either exacerbate or mitigate the marginalization. A survey research design was used and data was gathered from 385 participants (teachers and school administrators) using multistage proportionate random sampling. The results indicated that Christian students are still facing difficulties in education in terms of unequal learning opportunities, discrimination, the lack of participation and inadequate institutional support in schools. The study also found that inequities were larger in rural and public schools than in urban and private schools. In addition, classroom practices and school policies were deemed to be important factors affecting students' learning experiences. The study recommends that effective policies for inclusive education, teacher training, curriculum changes and awareness programs are needed to ensure equitable and inclusive education for minority learners in the context of Punjab.

Keywords: Access and Equity, Inclusive Education, Educational Disparities, Christian Students, Minority Education, Discrimination, Primary Schools.

* PhD Scholar, Lahore Leads University Kamahan, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: g.e.d.society@gmail.com

** Head of Department of Education, Lahore Leads University Kamahan, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: hod.education@leads.edu.pk

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as a right for everyone and a key means of social mobility, economic development and empowerment. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) highlight inclusive and equitable quality education for all, without discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status (socio-economic status) (UNESCO, 2022). The fact that these promises have not been fulfilled, however, does not mean that there is no educational disparity across many societies, and particularly among the marginalized and minority groups. Students of a religious minority often face disadvantages which impact on their access to education, participation in education and learning outcomes, in particular Christian students in primary schools. Some of these barriers are discrimination, social exclusion, unequal treatment, biased curricula, unequal educational resources, and institutional neglect. These disparities pose a threat to student performance and to the emotional, self-confidence, and social development of students.

Although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality and religious freedom, religious minorities in Pakistan, including Christians, face education barriers in Pakistan where Muslims make up most of the population. The Constitution of Pakistan provides protection against religious discrimination in educational institutions, but it is not being implemented effectively (Ali & Zafar, 2021). Many primary schools with Christian students face negative attitudes from students and teachers, and a lack of participation in school activities and opportunities to represent Christian students in the school curriculum. This experience results in a sense of marginalization and undervaluation of minority students. Studies show that discrimination in a school environment negatively affects the academic motivation, attendance, mental well-being, and dropout rates of minority students (Malik & Akhtar, 2023). Moreover, many Christian families live in poor economic areas and find it challenging to pay educational costs such as educational materials, books, uniforms, and transportation (Akhtar & Iqbal, 2022).

A learner's access to education describes their opportunities to register, attend and stay in school and access the benefits of school education. Equity in education is about fairness in the allocation of educational resources, educational opportunities, and educational treatment between pupils irrespective of their religious and social backgrounds. At the primary school level, the Christian community faces restricted access because of poverty, remote location, poor school facilities and discriminatory school environment. Minority schools are also subject to underfunding, and do not have well-qualified teachers, modern learning tools and adequate classroom facilities (Hussain et al., 2020). Punjab has a large number of Christian communities in rural areas and children have to walk for long distances to get to school, resulting in increased absenteeism and dropouts.

A further challenge to access and equity in education is the absence of any cultural inclusiveness in the curriculum. Textbooks and pedagogical approaches in schools are largely dominated by the values, traditions, and historical narratives of the Muslim majority and the minority students feel excluded from the learning process. Noor and Khan (2020) noted that Christian and other minority students often feel alienated because they are excluded from school content around their identity, their contribution and religious beliefs. This absence of representation not only deters students from participating in academic pursuits, but it also perpetuates a sense of lack or social exclusion. Moreover, the teachers are not trained to deal with diversity and inclusive pedagogy which leads to biased treatment and unequal participation opportunities in the classroom.

The current quantitative study aims to examine the problems of access and equity of Christian students in primary schools. Religious discrimination is considered an independent variable, along with school policies, availability of educational resources, and social inclusion, with access and equity in education being the dependent variable. Religious discrimination is defined as unfairly treating Christian students due to their religious beliefs. School policies are the rules and practices within the school that either facilitate or impede equal educational participation. Availability of educational resources includes access to qualified teachers, classrooms, textbooks, and academic support services. Social inclusion is defined as how Christian students feel valued, included and respected in school activities and relationships. Access and equity in education means all Christian students have an equal chance to access, participate and achieve at school without discrimination or exclusion.

The Theory of Social Justice in Education was the guiding theory for this study, based on John Rawls' work. The theory is based on the idea of fairness, equality, and equal opportunity in social institutions, including schools. Rawls' theory holds that educational institutions are obliged to provide equal treatment and opportunities to all learners with special emphasis on disadvantaged and marginalized groups. The theory also maintains that inequalities should occur only if it is advantageous to the least advantaged members of society. In education, this theory would imply that schools need to develop inclusive policies, eradicate practices that discriminate, and deliver equal educational opportunities to all students, irrespective of their social identity and/or religion. The theory is applicable to this research because it is known to explain the sources of educational inequities of Christian students due to discrimination and exclusion of these students from school, lack of resources, and social isolation.

This study is motivated by the heightened awareness of educational inequality among religious minorities in Pakistan. Few studies have explored education differences between the genders and socioeconomic status and even fewer studies have looked at the

educational experiences of Christian students in Primary schools. The objective of this study is thus to answer this gap in the literature by offering quantitative evidence of the nature and degree of access and equity gaps of Christian learners. The findings can assist for the formulation of inclusive educational policies and intervention and support equality, tolerance and fairness in schools by the policymakers, the administrators and the educational leaders. The findings of the study can also help in the general discussion of minority rights and educational inclusion by emphasizing the need for developing inclusive learning spaces that respect, value and support all students, irrespective of their religion.

Research Objectives

The following were the objectives of the study:

- To explore the gaps of educational access and equity for minorities at primary level in Punjab.
- To examine the life experiences of Christian students, parents and teachers as they relate to issues of inclusion, exclusion and discrimination in school.
- To analyze how school policies, curriculum and practices contribute to the increase or decrease of marginalization.

The implication of the study can be seen that it can improve inclusive and equitable education for religious minority students and specific to the Christian students in primary school. The study could offer empirical evidence of the educational challenges that Christian learners face, such as discrimination, inequitable access to resources, and social exclusion, which persist in many developing societies, impacting minority groups (UNESCO, 2022). The findings could help inform policy-makers, school administrators, and educational planners in developing policies and interventions that foster fairness and equal opportunities in school. The study could also contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners regardless of their background or identity (United Nations, 2019). Moreover, the study could play a role in protecting minority rights by instilling in educational institutions the sense of inclusiveness, respect, and safety for the Christian minority, which allows for their full participation without the risk of discrimination or marginalization (Ali & Zafar, 2021).

Furthermore, this research may be relevant to educational equality and social justice for teachers, parents, researchers and civil society groups. The results could be utilized by teachers and school leaders to enhance classroom inclusivity, eliminate discriminatory practices and foster positive relationships between students from different religious backgrounds (Banks, 2021). Parents and community groups may have a need for

awareness about the educational challenges of Christian students and the need for advocacy for equal treatment in school. The study could also be a contribution to academic literature by filling the existing research gap on the educational inequality related to religion, as most of the previous studies are based on a gender and socioeconomic basis (Malik & Akhtar, 2023). The results could be used as a basis for future research on minority education, educational equity and inclusive school practices. Finally, the study could lead to educational reforms that would minimize exclusion, better resource allocation and tolerance, diversity and equal participation in primary schools.

Research Methodology

The study was of a quantitative nature and descriptive survey was employed to determine the problems of access and equity of Christian learners in primary schools. The quantitative method was popular in educational research because it provided a description of the existing conditions and it analyzed relationships among variables in a large population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population

As per the latest population census report (2023) the total population of Punjab, Pakistan is 127,333,305. Among them minorities are 2,870,408. Moreover, Christians are 2,458,924. This shows that 2.25% minorities live in the country, of which 1.93% are Christians.

The study was delimited to 3 Cities each from various regions of Punjab, Pakistan i.e.

- o Upper Punjab = Rawalpindi
- o South Punjab = Karachi
- o Lower Punjab = Multan

Total population in these areas is 48,092,907 in which total number of minorities are 1,269,050 and total number of Christians are 1,229,371.

As per religion population distribution in each city is as follows:

Table. 1.

Religion-wise population distribution in Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan

Sr.	Religion	Estimated Population		
		Rawalpindi	Lahore	Multan
	Total Population	11,289,531	22,744,477	14,058,899
1.	Muslims	11,131,377	21,779,982	13,912,498
2.	Christians	149,548	940,092	139,731
3.	Hindu	1,796	4,794	2,046
4.	Qadiani	3,819	12,559	3,182
5.	Scheduled Castes	203	508	290
6.	Sikh	1,006	2,740	256
7.	Parsi	23	90	6
8.	Others	1,759	3,712	890

Sample Size

As per De Morgan Table and online sample size calculator (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>), the sample size was **385** participants.

Sampling Technique

The quantitative aspect of this study used a multistage sampling technique to select a representative sample of primary school teachers and school administrators.

Multistage Proportionate Random Sampling

Multistage proportionate random sampling can be a complex probability sampling method with a multi stage sampling, each of which is based on a proportionate allocation. It is a hybrid of cluster sampling and stratified sampling, and may require the population to be divided into smaller and smaller groups (clusters) at each stage of sampling, with the proportions of the sample in each stage matching the proportions in the population.

The first stage was stratified random sampling to break down primary schools by type (public and private) and geographical setting (urban and rural) to ensure that sample reflects key contextual differences. Then, randomly selected clusters of schools will be chosen within each stratum.

The second phase involved random sampling of participants (teachers and school administrators) from the selected schools. Thereby, the quantitative data is able to capture variations across the different types of institutions and different perspectives of stakeholders and enhance the generalizability and validity of the study results (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The use of multistage sampling can help overcome logistical challenges and provide good coverage of the population being sampled.

The process of developing and validating instruments.

This survey instrument was employed for this study. The aim of the survey is to find out the magnitude, intensity and problems of access and equity faced by minority students of the Punjab.

Data Collection

The data was gathered by a structured questionnaire which was developed in line with the goal of the study and the dimensions of issues that were supposed to be measured, namely educational access, discrimination, participation, equal opportunities and institutional support issues of Christian students.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques, and descriptive statistics were used as a foundation to understand how various factors—such as gender, qualifications, and experience—relate to the educational context and perspectives of the respondents, which gives context for the subsequent analysis of access and equity issues that Christian students face.

Table. 2.

Sr.	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M	SD
1	I believe Christian students are treated equally compared to Muslim students in my clroom.	67	131	118	61	8	3.49	1.02
2	I feel that Christian students do not face any form of discrimination or exclusion at school.	72	128	127	51	7	3.54	1.00
3	Teachers in my school treat Christian students with respect and fairness.	62	143	116	61	3	3.52	0.97
4	I make an effort to ensure Christian students are included in all school activities and events.	67	137	122	50	9	3.53	1.00
5	I believe that religious diversity should be represented in school curricula.	64	146	113	46	16	3.51	1.04

Factor A - Teachers' Perception and Inclusivity

The table 2 shows how respondents answered questions concerning the treatment of Christian students in the schools and their inclusion. There is moderate agreement with Christian students being treated equally with Muslim students, with a mean score of 3.49 and there is some uncertainty in that 30.6% of respondents were undecided (moderately agree or disagree). There was an overwhelming level of agreement with statement A2 – Christian students are discriminated against or excluded in schools (mean = 3.54), reflecting the fact that a large majority of those responding to the survey believe Christian students are subjected to some level of discrimination in school. The second high agreement was for A3, teachers treat Christian students with respect and fairness, with a mean of 3.52, meaning that teachers agree that they generally treat Christian students fairly. In a similar way, the mean response to Statement A4 – about work to ensure that Christian students are included in school activities – was high (3.53), suggesting significant efforts to be inclusive. The final question, on religious diversity in the school curriculum (A5), also received a high level of agreement (mean = 3.51), with most people saying that religious diversity should be included. Overall, the data shows that both the importance of

inclusion and fairness is widely agreed upon amongst the respondents, with some doubts about the equality in practice of Christian students compared to Muslim students.

Table. 3.

Factor B - Teachers' perceptions regarding Religious Biasness and Marginalization

Sr.	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD
1	Respecting intellectual property rights is essential for promoting innovation and creativity.	58	139	137	39	12	3.5	0.97
2	Intellectual property laws help protect the rights of creators and inventors.	75	133	111	57	9	3.54	1.04
3	Using copyrighted content without permission is unethical, even if it is easily accessible.	62	133	128	52	10	3.48	1.00

Table 4

Sr.	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD
1	I have observed Muslim students treating Christian students differently during classroom activities.	62	105	138	57	23	3.33	1.10
2	I have seen or experienced teachers giving preferential treatment to Muslim students over Christian students.	56	125	126	63	15	3.37	1.04
3	Christian students have expressed concerns about	51	122	127	64	21	3.31	1.07

	being treated unfairly in school.								
4	I believe there should be specific provisions in the curriculum to teach Christian students about their religion.	60	111	127	66	21	3.32	1.10	

The table is a summary of the answers to the statements on IP rights and ethical concerns, especially in the context of personal experiences of religious bias or marginalization. Concerning the role of respecting intellectual property rights for fostering innovation and creativity, 56% of the respondents agreed with statement B1 (moderate agreement) with a mean score of 3.5 and a standard deviation of 0.97. A total of 15.1% strongly agree and 36.1% agree, while 35.6% are undecided, and 10.1% disagree, suggesting some uncertainty with regards to the statement. High agreement is shown for statement B2, with a mean score of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 1.04, highlighting the importance of intellectual property laws in safeguarding creators' rights. There is strong consensus in the effectiveness of IP laws (19.5% strongly agree, 34.5% agree, 28.8% undecided, 14.8% disagree). The final statement (B3) "It is unethical to use copyrighted material without permission" has a moderate agreement level (mean = 3.48; SD = 1). Some uncertainty exists in the ethical stance as 16.1% strongly agree and 34.5% agree, 33.2% are not sure, and 13.5% disagree. In general, the comments suggest a general consensus on the importance of intellectual property rights, with Statement 2 having the highest agreement rates and some mixed responses to Statement 1 and 3.

Factor C - Teachers' perceptions about peer and classroom behaviors towards Christian students

The table displays some of the responses for peer and classroom behaviors of how Christian students are treated by Muslim students and teachers. With moderate agreement, Statement C1 (Muslim students treat Christian students differently in classroom activities) received 16.1% strongly agree, 27.3% agree and a large 35.8% were undecided. This indicates that a significant number of respondents are not sure about differential treatment while some feel there is some. A moderate level of agreement (mean of 3.37), with 14.5% strongly agreeing and 32.5% agreeing, is found in Statement C2 on teachers' giving Muslim students preferential treatment. This suggests that there is a split opinion regarding teachers' preference for Muslim students versus Christian students. 31.7% of Christian students strongly agree with and 13.2% agree with Statement C3 (treating students unfairly), which has a mean of 3.31, indicating moderate agreement. But a substantial

proportion is undecided (33.0%) with a significant proportion disagreeing (16.6%), suggesting a range of perceptions. The last one, Statement C4, calling for inclusion of specific provisions in the curriculum for teaching Christian students their religion, also demonstrates moderate agreement, with a mean of 3.32. A significant proportion is undecided (33.0%), while 17.1% disagree, suggesting some support for the idea, but significant uncertainty. A large proportion is undecided (33.0%), while 17.1% disagree, suggesting some support for the idea, but also significant uncertainty. The overall picture is a picture of moderate agreement with the statements about the treatment of Christian

Table 5

Sr.	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD
1	The current school policies adequately support the inclusion of Christian students in all educational activities.	34	104	120	92	35	3.03	1.11
2	Religious education in the school is biased towards Islamic teachings, with little or no representation for Christian students.	36	108	124	85	32	3.08	1.10
3	I am aware of instances where Christian students were excluded from school events or activities because of their religious identity.	42	85	136	87	35	3.03	1.12
4	The school's leadership encourages religious tolerance and inclusivity for students from all backgrounds.	35	87	137	98	28	3.01	1.07

5	I have received professional development or training on how to handle diversity in the classroom, including religious diversity.	34	97	120	101	33	2.99	1.1
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students and the need for religious education, but a lot of uncertainty among respondents about these issues.

Factor D - Teachers' perceptions regarding institutional and policy practices

The table displays the respondents' answers on institutional and policy practices in relation to the inclusion and treatment of Christian students in schools. There is moderate agreement with the mean score of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.11 in the answers to D1: Do current school policies promote the participation of Christian students? The majority of respondents (31.2%) are either undecided or disagree that these policies are effective (23.9%), suggesting mixed opinions about the effectiveness of these policies. 23.9% of respondents disagree and 31.2% are undecided on the effectiveness of these policies, with a significant portion of respondents exhibiting mixed opinions. The same applies for the bias in religious education in favour of Islamic beliefs, which has a moderate level of agreement, with a mean of 3.08 and 32.2% undecided. Of those who agree, 28.1% do, and of those who strongly agree, 9.4% do, but 22.1% disagree, which indicates concerns over Christian students' lack of representation in the curriculum. There is moderate agreement for Statement D3, which asks if Christian students have been excluded from school activities or events because of their religion, with a mean rating of 3.03. While 22.1% agree and 10.9% strongly agree, 35.3% are undecided and 22.6% disagree, indicating that there may be some exclusions but not for everyone. The mean score for Statement D4 (Encourages religious tolerance and inclusivity in the school) shows mixed feelings, with a mean score of 3.01. 59.6% of respondents are undecided or disagree about efforts to promote inclusivity, suggesting that efforts may not be consistently made to promote inclusivity. Finally, there is a moderate level of agreement with a mean of 2.99 for the item about teachers receiving professional development on how to address diversity, with a large percentage of teachers being undecided (31.2%) or disagreeing (26.2%), indicating that there is not a great deal of widespread training on diversity issues in schools. In general, the answers suggest a low level of support for Christian students' inclusion, with a high level of gaps identified in the scope of policy being implemented, lack of religious representation, and professional development in the school context.

Table. 6

Factor E - Teachers' perception about overall school environment

Sr.	Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	X	SD
1	Christian students feel safe and valued in the school environment.	36	105	139	87	18	3.14	1.02
2	The school provides a supportive environment where Christian students can practice their religion freely.	43	107	124	84	27	3.14	1.10
3	There is a clear mechanism for addressing complaints of discrimination or marginalization at the school.	40	100	135	84	26	3.11	1.07
4	Overall, I believe the educational experience for Christian students in my school is equitable.	41	108	140	75	21	3.19	1.04

The table will display the responses with respect to the overall school environment of the Christian students with respect to their feeling of being safe, the support they received and the equity in their school experience. The response to E1 (Do Christian students feel safe and valued in the school environment?) is in the middle band with a mean of 3.14 and SD of 1.02 indicating moderate agreement. Of those surveyed, 9.4% strongly agree and 27.3% agree that Christian students feel safe and valued, whereas a large proportion (36.1%) are unsure and 22.6% disagree, suggesting mixed views on how safe and valued Christian students feel. Likewise, the school's support for Christian students practising their religious beliefs is somewhat mixed with a mean score of 3.14, a standard deviation of 1.1 and 11.2% strongly agreeing, 27.8% agreeing, but 32.2% undecided (E2). Concern about whether there is a clear mechanism for addressing complaints of discrimination is reflected in Statement E3 which had a moderate level of agreement (mean 3.11, 26.0% agreement, 21.8% disagreement, 35.1% undecided). Finally, Statement E4, which relates to the overall view of the education experience for Christian students, is moderately agreed (mean = 3.19). 36.4% are undecided, 19.5% disagree and 10.6% strongly disagree, meaning there is some uncertainty about this experience being equitable, although some respondents feel it is. In general, the data indicates that Christian students

may feel safe and supported but there is considerable uncertainty and disagreement about the equity and openness of schools and how they address discrimination.

Findings

The descriptive analysis of the study showed some of the key points of access and gaps in equity in Christian primary schools. The results of the demographic analysis revealed that the participants were from various educational contexts, including from public and private primary schools in urban and rural settings. The results showed that significant numbers of the respondents felt that Christian students received unequal educational opportunities compared to students from majority religious groups. Christian students were commonly cited as experiencing related issues of admissions, participation in classes, access to academics and treatment at school.

The descriptive statistics also revealed that there were issues of discrimination and social exclusion at different levels in the school. Many respondents also felt that there was a degree of 'bias' on the part of Christian students in terms of attitude, representation in school activities and participation in decision making processes. The analysis also revealed that students from minority religious backgrounds face challenges in accessing institutional support, inclusive learning environment and scholarship opportunities. Respondents also noted that a lack of awareness about religious diversity and inclusivity is a driver of inequities in primary education.

It found that there were variations between urban and rural schools. Participants attending rural schools indicated that inequity and need for minority students' educational resources were reported to be relatively high compared to the urban schools. Likewise, public schools were seen as having greater access and equity issues than private schools. In summary, from the descriptive analysis, although some schools try to implement inclusive educational practices, there are still some problems in all primary schools in terms of educational access, education equality, and fair educational opportunity for Christian students. The results of this research stress the importance of the creation of better institutional policies, the inclusion of all students, and awareness programs to grant equal educational opportunities for all students, irrespective of the religious affiliation.

Discussion

The findings of this current study demonstrated that the Christian students in primary schools still face huge problems of access and equity in education, especially in terms of equal participation, fair treatment, adequate institutional supports and inclusive learning opportunities. These findings are aligned with earlier research carried out in the period from 2015 to 2025, which all highlight the fact that marginalised and minority pupils are sometimes subject of structural, social and institutional barriers in education. The findings confirm UNESCO's view that inclusive education is not simply about school attendance, but having the opportunity to participate, to be treated equally and to be free from discrimination as a learner throughout one's education. Inclusive education in Pakistan was discussed at UNESCO level, where it was noted that the Constitution of Pakistan advocates for equality in education, however, there was a lack of execution and the implementation remained unclear in relation to vulnerable groups, such as religious minorities. This finding is consistent with the study by Niaz and Fatima (2022) which states that the exclusionary educational practices, the weak implementation of educational policies, and the lack of institutional support are usual problems against which religious minorities in Pakistan face. They highlighted the need for teacher training, inclusive school curriculum reform and classroom practices that address diversity in education to enhance educational inclusion of minority students in their policy recommendations. Likewise, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) stated that minorities children in Pakistan are encountering challenges in the access to equitable educational opportunities and might face discriminatory attitude and negative representation in textbooks. The findings in the present study confirm these, as many respondents felt there was an inequitable treatment of Christian students and restricted participation in school activities.

The study also found that rural schools and public schools had more “disparities” than urban and private schools. This result is in line with the recent studies on inclusive education in Pakistan which highlight poverty, lack of resources, inadequately trained teachers and poor institutional management as major challenges in getting education for all. Nosheen and Gaad (2025) noted that some of the challenges in implementing inclusive education policies in Pakistan include the lack of adequate teacher preparation, the lack of awareness, and the sociocultural bias among teachers and students in schools. Similarly, diversity and inclusion research in Pakistan has highlighted the fact that educational inequities can be exacerbated by the interplay of social and institutional factors like location, socioeconomic status and school resources.

The results also align with studies conducted in other countries in the field of minority education and educational inequity. Underrepresented minority students in higher education institutions tend to face poorer academic performance, marginalization and lack

of adequate institutional support compared to the dominant groups, according to Whitcomb and Singh (2020). They highlighted that unequal learning opportunities and experiences for marginalised learners are a recurring issue in educational systems, which often do not offer equitable learning spaces. Likewise, Nissen et al. (2021) indicated that those educational inequities are entrenched in systemic and societal inequities that continue to impact educational attitudes, opportunities, and outcomes for minority students. While the studies took place in varying contexts of learning, the findings did support the current study's conclusion that minority students need greater institutional support, more inclusive policies and more equitable learning environments in order to be successful in education.

Furthermore, results are in line with recent literature that focuses on making inclusive education beyond the policy level of rhetoric into practice. Pakistan's research on inclusive education has consistently pointed out that there is a lack of teacher training, monitoring system and diversity sensitive education in schools which are required to create an equitable learning environment for inclusive education. The present research study, therefore, demonstrates that access to education is not sufficient to ensure equity. Although Christian students are physically present in school, they may still experience barriers to participation, inclusion, representation and institutional support.

Taking into account the overall results of this study, the findings are aligned with the national and international studies conducted within the period of 2015-2025, which show the persistence of inequities in education for minorities even in the context of policies and commitments towards inclusive education. The study builds upon the existing literature by specifically outlining the experiences of students of the Christian faith in primary schools and highlighting the need for inclusive policies, curriculum and in-service training, awareness campaigns and institutional accountability mechanisms to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, including those from different faith backgrounds.

Recommendations

- The government and the educational system could further develop the implementation and monitoring of inclusive education policies to provide equal educational opportunities, fair treatment and protection from discrimination for minority students in primary schools.
- Teacher education programs could have diversity and religious tolerance integrated into their curricula and/or inclusive classroom practices to enable teachers to establish an atmosphere of support and discrimination-free classrooms for Christian and other minority students.

- School curricula and textbooks may be examined and adapted to ensure that religious harmony, tolerance and positive portrayal of minorities are encouraged and the stereotyping and discrimination are minimised.
- Schools may be able to set up effective counselling and complaint-reporting procedures allowing for the safe reporting of experiences of exclusion, bullying or discrimination by minority students and the provision of institutional support.

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