

Lived Experiences of Educational Exclusion among Christian Children from Brick Kiln Families in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore how level of poverty and parent literacy affects children's access to education in brick kiln communities. The objective of the research was to examine the impact of poverty and working conditions on pupils' decisions to attend school and their attendance and to investigate the role of parental literacy in facilitating pupils' education. A qualitative research design was utilized and data gathered was obtained from interviews with parents, teachers and community members. The results included that poor families faced significant constraints on school access, due to their inability to pay for school-related costs and the pressure on child labour. Parental literacy was discovered to have an essential role in influencing children's involvement in the education system, their support of academic learning, and their educational goals. Structural barriers such as long distance to school, poor transportation, poor infrastructure, discrimination and gender related barriers were also identified in the study. The results indicate that poverty and education access is closely linked to parental literacy. The study suggests financial assistance, adult literacy programmes, better educational facilities and inclusive policy to improve educational opportunities for the children of brick kiln communities.

Key words: Poverty, Parental Literacy, Educational Access, Brick Kiln Communities, Child Labor, Educational Barriers.

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Introduction

Education is the bedrock of social and economic development across the globe and a human right. It is an effective tool to fight poverty, to achieve social equality and to improve human capital by providing people with knowledge, skills and critical awareness for their meaningful engagement in society (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). While there is an established link between quality education and social and economic development, access to quality education is highly uneven, and especially difficult for marginalized and economically vulnerable groups in developing countries. Christian children living in the brick kiln communities are one of the most under-resourced communities in terms of education in the province of Punjab, Pakistan, where they are subjected to multiple and intersecting challenges stemming from extreme poverty, intergenerational bonded labour, high levels of illiteracy, child labour practices and systematic religious discrimination. All these have the cumulative effect of fostering cycles of poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion, which are passed down from one generation to the next (Ali & Chaudhry, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

The brick kiln industry is a significant part of the informal sector in Pakistan, with an estimated 4.5 million workers involved in approximately 20,000 brick kilns across the country (Radio Veritas Asia, 2023). Many of these workers are from minority Christian communities, trapped in systems of bonded labour, where individuals are trapped in patterns of debt bondage that force them to work under the slavery-like conditions over generations (Al Jazeera, 2019). The continuous cycle of debt entails whole family systems including women and children also getting involved in brick production to ensure daily quotas set by kiln owners are met. Children are therefore constantly subjected to heavy work such as moulding, carrying and stacking bricks, which is created in an unsafe environment, leaving them scarcely able to attend school regularly and forcing them to drop out of school early. This phenomenon creates a vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy and exploitation in labour markets, which is very hard to be broken down (Ahsan, 2020).

Among the brick kiln families, poverty is the most basic structural obstacle to accessing education. Laborers in this category generally have incomes that fall short of what is needed to provide for their households, including for food, health, shelter and education. Education costs such as tuition fees, uniform costs, books, stationery and transportation are also high costs that may be impossible for a low-income family to afford. Other costs that are not directly linked to the student's education (such as the lost labour of the child) further discourage school attendance (Khan & Shah 2022). The reality is evident – and there is a lot of it – that poverty has a significant role in affecting school enrollment rates and increasing drop-out in children from low-income families (UNESCO, 2020).

Brick kiln settlements, in turn, are the immediate and underlying causes of poverty-related educational exclusion, creating a vicious circle of social inequalities and perpetuating intergenerational economic dependency.

The lack of physical and social environment in brick kiln settlements is another form of educational deprivation. Most of the time, the vast majority of the kiln workers live in makeshift housing with employment control, located in remote and isolated areas which lacks access to basic public services such as clean water, sanitation, healthcare and education (ICIMOD, 2022). Schools in the area are often poorly equipped, teachers are less qualified, classroom facilities, furniture and teaching aids are less adequate. Poorly resourced and overcrowded classrooms reduce quality of education and engagement. Importantly, children's participation and achievement in and through schooling is shaped by the physical learning environments and educational infrastructure (World Bank, 2021). The brick kiln settlements therefore are structurally constrained in terms of space and matter, which affects the educational opportunities of children living in these communities.

Another key determinant of the educational pathways of children is parental literacy. Literate parents are more likely to know the long-term benefits of going to school, to pressure children to attend regularly, to help with schoolwork and provide an enabling learning environment at home. On the contrary, parents who are unskilled or unable to read and write might focus on the current cash-flow needs rather than investing in their children's education, with the consequence being lower motivation to attend and stay in school (Raza et al., 2022). Children are exposed to little academic support or role modelling at home in communities with low chronic levels of adult literacy. Parental illiteracy, therefore, plays an important role in lowering enrolment, regularity in attendance and achievement of children in brick kiln communities.

Child labour is one of the most tangible and harmful impacts of poverty in brick kiln communities and also a key factor in low enrolment rates. Children working in brick making are exposed to heavy and dangerous tasks for long hours, and do not have adequate time and energy for learning or study, or for developmental play. The negative impacts of child labour on the physical, psychological, cognitive and educational outcomes of children have been well documented in the empirical literature (Bhardwaj et al., 2023). Children who are not involved in economically productive activities by early and throughout their childhood lose out on the formal education system and lose their ability to participate in the social and economic mobility of their future. This is a vicious circle: poverty requires child labour, child labour excludes education, and without education poverty will be transmitted to the next generation (Nawaz & Saeed, 2021).

Apart from structural economic issues, the religious discrimination and social exclusion also marginalises Christian children in brick kiln communities. In Pakistan, Christians are at a disadvantaged position in the socio-economic hierarchy and face state-sponsored discrimination in schools, workplaces, and homes. In schools, Christian children can be bullied, ostracized, discriminated against and treated poorly by other children and teachers who can negatively impact their self-esteem, engagement in education and motivation to learn (Barnabas Aid, 2023). These discriminatory experiences can result in higher drop-out rates among minority children and lower aspirations for education. Religious discrimination, bonded labour and poverty combine to form a very unique kind of vulnerability for the children of brick kilns in Punjab (Ali & Chaudhry, 2021).

In this context, two theoretical approaches provide complementary lenses for understanding educational exclusion: Two theory-based frames provide complementary lensing mechanisms for understanding educational exclusion in this context: Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) states that education is a productive investment that increases the individual's productive capacities, improves labour market productivity and extends the economic opportunity in the long-term. The more that families value education in economic terms, the more likely they are to value and invest in their children's education. But poor families do not have enough money to invest in education, and hence, have lower human capital formation and lower chances of intergenerational mobility. Social Exclusion Theory, on the other hand, places emphasis on the institutional and structural aspects of exclusion, looking at the practices of discrimination and the inequalities in institutions that limit the social, economic and political involvement of disadvantaged groups. The brick making families in Punjab who are Christian face multiple marginalisation along class, occupation, and religious lines, all of which contribute to their lack of access to quality education and opportunities for social mobility.

The efforts of government and civil society to increase educational access to the disadvantaged groups, including the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Ehsaas Education Stipends and community-based educational providers like The Citizens Foundation (TCF) and The Indus Resource Center (IRC), have failed to work effectively to break the cycle of structural barriers to educational access such as bonded labour, deep poverty and religious discrimination (Iqbal, 2022). An effective policy response is thus needed – one that incorporates specific measures designed to increase access to education, decrease poverty, increase parental literacy and prevent children from engaging in labour exploitation. Identifying context-specific and evidence-based interventions for Christian brick kiln children in Punjab requires an understanding of the overlapping structural barriers they currently experience that prevent them from participating and progressing in school.

Research Objectives

The following objectives of the study were:

- To explore the impact of poverty and living conditions of daily labour on school enrollment and attendance of children living in brick kiln families.
- To examine the contribution of parental literacy towards educational support and aspirations of children in Brick Kiln families.

This study may give a complete picture of the educational challenges of children of brick kiln families from Christian backgrounds in Punjab which could be helpful for various stakeholders. The results could inform policy makers in the making of inclusive education policies, financial aid policies and child labour prevention policies for the marginalized communities.

The findings of this study could draw attention to discrimination and financial difficulties that these children may encounter in educational settings, and prompt schools to implement culturally responsive pedagogies and scholarship initiatives. The results could inform the design of successful interventions at NGOs and religious groups, such as free school programs or advocacy efforts that address the structural and cultural issues found.

It could offer evidence to Christian communities and social activists in campaigns for equal educational opportunity and to protect themselves from economic exploitation and discrimination. This research could provide a valuable contribution for future studies that investigate the relationship between religious minority status, poverty, education in Pakistan and could serve as a starting point for more research on the gender gaps, long-term literacy effects and policy effectiveness in brick kiln communities.

Overall, this study could play a significant role in the efforts to achieve social equity and economic mobility by providing evidence to inform strategies to address lived experiences, labor conditions, parental literacy limitations, and structural barriers documented through its key objectives.

Research Design

The research design used in this study was qualitative research using interpretivist paradigm which aimed to gain insight into the meaning of social phenomena as seen by the people involved themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative approach was more suitable because of the complexity and limited research on educational challenges for

Christian children in brick kiln families in Punjab, as it highlighted the depth, nuances and contextual nature of their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Population

There were about 20,000 brick kilns in Pakistan, with 10,394 brick kilns in 36 districts of Punjab (ICIMOD, 2022; Lodi et al., 2013). Of these, 9,459 were active and 935 inactive. Brick Kiln industry was one of the most lucrative and socially deprived industries of labor in the country.

According to baseline data from ICIMOD (2022), a typical family involved in brick kiln work in Punjab comprised of a husband, wife, grown up male child, grown up female child, aunt, uncle, and sometimes, grandparents. Most of the green brick molding were done by worker families, but other site-specific tasks were done by individually hired workers. Adult family members worked at various kiln sites, depending on their skills.

There were 9,459 brick kilns with about 94,590 families engaged in brick production in Punjab and about 107,318 families engaged in the brick kiln sector in Pakistan (ICIMOD, 2022). In the country, over 20,000 brick kilns operated with over 0.2 million families and over 0.98 million workers were employed. In Punjab alone, 463,491 workers (female = 94,590; male = 368,901) were employed, with an average of 49 workers per kiln (ICIMOD, 2022).

Educational Provisions for Brick Kiln Children

The Government of Pakistan offered multiple opportunities for brick kiln families to access school education in Punjab through its Monitoring and Evaluation wing (M&E, P&D, 2020). A total of 22,683 children from labourer and brick kiln families were enrolled in government supported educational institutions in 36 districts as follows:

Table 1

School Options Provided by Government for Brick Kiln Children

Sr.	School Type	Enrollment
1	SED, PEF, Partner PEF	2,975
2	Brick Kiln Schools	18,496
3	NGO Schools Transferred	1,212
Total		22,683

In spite of these measures, several deficiencies were noted in school enrolment, retention and quality of education especially for religious minority children (Ali & Zafar, 2018).

Christian Population in Punjab

The latest data by Population Census Report (2023) shows that the total population of Punjab was 127,333,305, including 2,870,408 religious minorities. Christians made up 2,458,924 of the total province population, 1.93% and were the largest minority group in the province.

Table 2

Religion-wise Population Distribution in Punjab (Census, 2023)

Sr.	Religion	Estimated Population
1	Muslims	124,462,897
2	Christians	2,458,924
3	Hindu	228,559
4	Qadiani	140,512
5	Scheduled Castes	21,157
6	Sikh	5,649
7	Parsi	358
8	Others	15,249

This demographic framing highlighted the need to explore the interaction between religious minority status and socioeconomic disadvantage and the impact it had on educational outcomes (Nasir & Majoka, 2011; Lall, 2012).

Sampling Technique

Theoretical sampling was used in the whole qualitative stage of this study to make the process of data collection in line with the emerging patterns and concepts related to educational access of Christian children of brick kiln families in Punjab. Initially a small number of participants were recruited including children, parents and educators from the brick kiln communities; data was collected using in-depth interviews or focus group discussions.

Instrument

Semi-structured interview protocols were used to capture perceptions, personal experiences and access to educational resources of parents and teachers of Brick Kiln

children. Interviews helped to explore parental literacy, poverty-related barriers and the effects of religious identity on educational participation.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was an iterative and reflexive process in accord with the Grounded Theory principles (Charmaz, 2014):

1. Initial sampling started by selecting participants who had close and relevant experiences with the topic of the study, such as Christian brick kiln families, in-school and out-of-school children, and teachers in these communities.
2. Iterative Data Collection and Analysis: Data was analyzed on a continuous basis using thematic analysis with new insights emerging from the interviews guiding subsequent interviews and sample selection.
3. Ongoing Sampling Decisions: The researcher determined which perspectives and/or cases needed further exploration to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon or clarify uncertainty and gaps in emerging theory.
4. Saturation: Data collection was continued until theoretical saturation occurred, that is, until no new data was found that could offer new theoretical categories or insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The interview was conducted in both Urdu and Punjabi (the participants' language) to ensure the natural expression of the participants and reduce the language barrier. Audio recording interviews with informed consent were then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) was applied to the transcription of the data to identify any common themes, patterns of discrimination and coping strategies. The analysis was carried out in six phases according to Braun and Clarke:

1. Being familiar with the data,
2. generating initial codes,
3. searching for themes,
4. reviewing themes,
5. Identifying and labelling themes,
6. and preparing final report

NVivo software was used for coding and organizing qualitative data. The results of this phase will guide the creation of a quantitative survey in Phase 2.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the ten in-depth interviews with Christian children and their families in brick kiln communities of Punjab in Pakistan is presented. The study adopts a thematic analysis approach to examine the lived experiences, perceptions, and the issues that exist in accessing education in these marginalised households. These patterns, barriers and coping mechanisms are identified and then organized thematically, categorically and coded. The social-economic, cultural and familial contexts and factors such as poverty, parent literacy, child labour, gendered education, parental aspirations are emphasised. The findings are presented with illustrative quotes from participants throughout to substantiate findings and give a true representation of what the community lived. This thematic exploration sets the ground for comprehending the structural and contextual factors taking effect on educational outcomes of children in brick kiln families.

Table.1.

Summary of overall themes

Sr.	Theme	Sub-codes / Categories	Total Frequency	Coverage (%)	Illustrative Quote
1	Economic Constraints	Poverty, Debt / Kiln Ownership	20	100%	“Poverty is the main reason; we need them to work at the kiln.” (I1)
2	Educational Barriers	Parental Illiteracy, School Attendance / Challenges	18	100%	“We are illiterate, so we cannot help our children with studies.” (I1)
3	Child Labor & Gender Roles	Child Labor, Gendered Education	18	100%	“Only the girls go. The boys help us at the kiln.” (I6)
4	Social Support Systems	NGO / Community Support, Family Cooperation	10	60%	“Sometimes, but not enough. They have ten jackets, and forty children need them.” (I3)

5	Aspirations & Future Goals	Aspirations / Future Hopes	10	100%	“I want them to study and have a better life. Maybe a teacher, a nurse, or someone with a safe job.” (I6)
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Table 1 provides a summary of the themes which emerged from the thematic analysis of all ten transcription of the interviews. The findings indicate that economic constraints are a basic obstacle, as the lack of money and debt of brick kiln families are always barriers for children's education and child labour. Educational barriers involve lack of parental literacy and school attendance difficulties and are closely interrelated, affecting children's learning support and continuity in school. Child labour and gender roles play a major theme emphasising that boys are mainly involved in kiln work while girls are more likely to attend school, thereby bringing together economic necessity and socio-cultural norms. In a minority of instances, social support systems (including NGO support or family cooperation) were identified as a way of addressing some of the barriers; however, these are not consistent and are not sufficient to address structural disadvantages. Lastly, aspirations and future expectations were a common theme, reflecting the resilience and aspirations of families who, despite the constraints that they experience, still value education and want to see their children having better life chances. Overall, the table reflects the dynamic relationship between structural, social and cultural factors, as economic disadvantage, lack of parental literacy and gendered ideas about work affect educational outcomes, and family and community resilience offer some protection and motivation for participation in education.

Table 2

Theme 1 – Economic constraints

Theme	Category	Code Node	Frequency	Coverage	Illustrative Quote
Economic Constraints	Poverty	Household financial hardship	10	100%	“We owe 500,000 rupees to the kiln owners.” (I1)
	Debt / Kiln Ownership	Loans, wage deductions	10	100%	“Earlier, we had a loan of 400,000; now

it's 485,000."
(12)

Theme 1 shows that economic constraints have emerged as one of the main obstacles to educational opportunities for Christian children from brick kiln families. All ten of the interviews reported poverty, which affected the ability of families to afford basic school supplies, uniforms and books. Poverty is the primary reason, one parent explained, "They need to work at the kiln, not go to school to earn money for the family. One other participant commented that it was hard to afford school fees and other household costs, saying that, "It is difficult, we can only get school uniforms for one school at a time." The school's direct effect on financial hardship and the survival before school syndrome are reflected in these statements.

The issue of debt to the owners of the kilns was a recurring problem, and families often spoke about the impact of loans on their finances. A participant said, "Well, we had a loan of 400,000 earlier and now it is 485,000." The economic dependence on kiln work was stressed by another who pointed out that after the deduction of wage, there was no food money to spend on education: "We are indebted to the owners of the kilns who are demanding 500,000 rupees of us, that is, our wages." This type of responsibility cripples the capacity to buy educational resources and in turn makes the child, especially the boy, to be engaged in labor, thereby reducing learning opportunities.

In general, poverty and debt are deeply intertwined economic limitations, which shape the perceived and actual constraints of schooling. Evidence suggests that, although schools are accessible, their attendance, engagement, and success in education are nonetheless influenced by financial deprivation of the participants. These families' repeated experiences highlight the need for interventions to promote income stability and debt relief to ensure equitable access to education in brick kiln communities.

Table 3

Theme 2 – Educational Barriers

Theme	Category	Code / Node	Frequency	Coverage	Illustrative Quote
Educational Barriers	Parental Illiteracy	Cannot help children with homework	10	100%	"We are illiterate, so we cannot help our

School Attendance / Challenges	Distance, weather, lack of shoes/uniform	8	80%	children with studies.” (I1) “Sometimes it’s difficult because of fog and cold. They don’t have proper shoes or jackets.” (I3)
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Theme 2 highlights the educational disadvantages to which children of families from brick kilns in the Christian faith are subjected, mainly associated with the lack of education among both fathers and mothers. Illiteracy by parents consistently arose as a factor during all ten interviews, placing restrictions on the academic support parents could provide. One mother explained, “We tell them we are illiterate, so we cannot help our children with studies” and another mother stated, “I cannot help with lessons, but I encourage them to study and try getting help from neighbors,” indicating that illiteracy is directly linked to homework not being completed and learning not being reinforced at home.

Distance, weather and the absence of adequate school supplies were additional impediments to school participation. One parent explained how cold weather made it difficult to get children to school: “Sometimes it’s difficult because of fog and cold, they don’t have proper shoes or jackets,” while another said, “The school is far, they have to come a long way, which is also economic hardship of the parents.

Together, these barriers suggest that children’s learning experiences are not just affected by the number of schools available to them, but also the children’s families’ ability to provide learning opportunities and cope with environmental barriers. However, despite these difficulties, parents may persist in efforts to keep their children in school, showing resilience and prioritising school attendance even in difficult circumstances. The issue of parental illiteracy and structural attendance difficulties highlights the importance of providing targeted interventions including community tutoring programs, providing transport for children or families, and providing education-based resources within the brick kiln community to improve educational access and equity.

equity in brick kiln communities.

Table 4

Theme 3 – Child and Roles

Theme	Category	Code / Node	Frequency	Coverage	Illustrative Quote
Child Labor & Gender Roles	Child Labor	Boys working instead of school	10	100%	“The boys help in arranging bricks for drying.” (I1)
	Gendered Education	Girls attend school preferentially	9	90%	“Only the girls go. The boys help us at the kiln.” (I6)

Theme 3 brings the focus of child labour and gendered expectations in relation to educational access for Christian brick kiln families to the fore. Most of the interviews indicated that boys are mainly involved in kiln work and do not have a lot of time and opportunity to study. One parent explained that the boys help to arrange bricks to dry, another parent said that they need to be home to help with the income for the family, which means that the boys go to work rather than school.

On the other hand, there is a gender inequality in schooling resources, as girls are more likely than boys to be prioritized for school when resources are available. A mother commented, “Only girls go. Boys help us at kiln.” This reflects the gender bias in accessing education. This pattern suggests that cultural norms and realities meet economic pressures in ways that affect boys' and girls' learning opportunities.

It is also shown in the theme that child labour is not just an economic problem, but is part of expectations and values within the family and community. Parents often have a balance between earning money in the present and investing in their children's education for the future. The encouragement of girls' schooling, where possible, is complemented by boys' work, which perpetuates the intergenerational cycle of work dependency and restricts schooling opportunities for boys. The results indicate that besides economic support, it is necessary to implement gender sensitive educational interventions to reduce educational inequities in the brick kiln communities, so that all children, irrespective of their gender, have equal access to school attendance and to learning and development.

Table 5

Theme 4 – Social Support Systems

Theme	Category	Code Node	Frequency	Coverage	Illustrative Quote
Social Support Systems	NGO Community Support	External aid (clothes, books)	5	50%	“Sometimes, but not enough. They have ten jackets, and forty children need them.” (I3)
	Family Cooperation	Parents dividing kiln and household duties	4	40%	“I send her home an hour earlier. She prepares food, helps the children, and teaches them while I continue working.” (I3)

In Theme 4, the importance of support mechanisms, both external and internal, in addressing the education challenges experienced by children of Christian brick kiln families is highlighted. Some families receive help from NGOs and/or community initiatives, although the economic and structural barriers are widespread. One parent commented, “Sometimes, but not enough. They have ten jackets and forty kids who need them, and you can't solve the financial and logistical problems of these communities just with jackets.”

The internal family cooperation also appeared as one of the main support systems. Often parents arrange house and kiln tasks so that children have time to go to school. A participant said, “I send her home an hour early and she prepares the food, helps the children, teaches them, and I am still working; shared responsibilities so that children can still be educated, even in difficult times.

The results indicate that support systems mitigate some of the adverse effects of poverty, illiteracy of parents and child labour but they are not consistently reached and coverage is highly differential within the family. Outside help, from NGOs, is rare and frequently inadequate, as is active cooperation and resilience to family strategies. This theme provides evidence that the quality of children's learning outcomes in these

communities is related to the existence or absence of enabling support networks that can improve the engagement with school and continuity of learning.

Table 6

Theme 5 – Aspirations and Future Goals

Theme	Category	Code / Node	Frequency	Coverage	Illustrative Quote
Aspirations & Future Goals	Aspirations / Future Hopes	Parents' desire for children's upward mobility	10	100%	"I want them to study and have a better life. Maybe a teacher, a nurse, or someone with a safe job." (I6)

While there are significant economic and educational obstacles to their aspirations in these communities it was noted that the future aspirations and goals of parents were a positive motivator in Theme 5. In each of the 10 interviews, parents voiced a wish for their kids to succeed in school and to get a better life. This was reflected in one parent's comments, "I want them to study and have a better life, maybe a teacher, a nurse or someone with a safe job," highlighting the importance of school as a means of escaping poverty. Another parent echoed this sentiment, saying, "I want my daughters to get an education and have good jobs; I also want my sons to get an education and to get out of this difficult life." This meant a gender inclusive vision of educational and employment aspirations, even when economic means were limited.

The aspirations need to be clearly expressed and show resilience, helping to motivate families to support school attendance, even when the resources are limited in the short term. Parents put in a lot of effort to send children to school, attend school, and provide additional schooling for children when they are unable to read and write, or parents are too busy to attend school. This theme highlights that the engagement in education is not just a structural issue, like poverty, debt, or child labour but that parental motivation and aspirations for upward mobility are important in the sustainability of children's engagement in education. The common theme of aspirations across all the interviews suggests that this is a key motivator which needs to be taken into account when designing interventions to improve educational access in brick kiln communities, where family voices are needed.

Research Question 1: How does socio-economic status (poverty) impact children's access to education?

Following are the key findings emerged form data analysis:

- Financial difficulties were a recurring theme for participants.
- Many respondents said that families don't have enough money to pay school fees, school uniforms, and school transportation.
- Parents reported that the basic needs for survival are given a higher priority than education, particularly in low-income families.

Research Question 2: What effect does parental literacy have on children's educational opportunities?

Following are the key findings emerged form data analysis:

- Parents who are unable to read and write were reported as saying that they are not able to help with homework or to help children in their academic work.
- The parents who had limited literacy had a problem communicating with teachers and comprehended school requirements.
- Teachers observed that children of literate parents are more engaged and performing academically.

Research Question 3: Does the relationship between poverty and educational access go through the medium of parental literacy?

Following are the key findings emerged form data analysis:

- Interviews showed that poverty reduces the educational exposure and awareness of parents, impacting on children's educational process.
- Parents' unawareness of education systems was highlighted as having an impact on opportunities for children.
- A large number of participants voiced the need for adult literacy programs to assist their children in their education.

Research Question 4: What are the key constraints on access to education in brick kiln communities?

Following are the key findings emerged form data analysis:

- Irregular attendance was reported with participants stating that child labour was essential for their family's survival.

- The distance to the schools and transportation were often cited.
- Poor school infrastructure, discrimination and social exclusion were identified by the respondents.
- Gender barriers were also noted, particularly for girls' education.

Research Question 5: How can access to education be enhanced for children living in brick kiln communities?

Following are the key findings emerged form data analysis:

- Participants spoke about the importance of free education, scholarships and school supplies.
- High demand for schools which are more accessible and transport.
- Suggestions from the respondents were community awareness programmes and parent education programmes.
- Government support and inclusive policies were emphasized by teachers and administrators.

The results are uniformly revealing that the various components of poverty, parental education, and structural constraints are deeply interwoven and constitute the most powerful factors affecting access to education in brick kiln communities; targeted financial, institutional, and community-based interventions and programs are key to improving educational outcomes in these communities.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that poverty is one of the significant challenges that limit access to children's education in the brick kilns. Low-income families are unable to afford school fees, school uniforms, books, and transportation were reported. This results in parents placing more importance on meeting basic survival needs than on education. These findings align with the findings from UNESCO (2022) that children of the poor are more likely to be educationally excluded and less likely to attend school. Likewise, the World Bank (2018) pointed out that educational opportunities are constrained and dropout rates are higher due to economic deprivation.

The effect of parent's literacy was also observed to be significant enough to affect children's educational access. Parents who are unable to read and write experience problems with helping children at home with the homework, with understanding school requirements, and communicating with teachers. Children of parents who can read and write generally perform better academically and are engaged in schoolwork; teachers observed. The study finding coincides with that of Davis-Kean et al., 2021 who reported

that parental education has a positive impact on children's academic performance via educational support and involvement. The study also indicates that the relationship between poverty and access to education is mediated by the literacy of parents. Parents' lack of education often leads to limited knowledge of the value of education and their capacity to help children pursue their education, particularly in school. According to OECD (2019), investing in parent education is one way to mitigate the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on children's learning outcomes.

Apart from this, some structural barriers were found, such as child labour, distance of schools, transportation issues, lack of school facilities, discrimination and gender disparities. Child labour was also very relevant, as many families rely on the income that their children bring in to survive, which results in irregular school attendance or school dropouts (ILO, 2021). Other barriers for girls are cultural norms and domestic duties (UNESCO, 2023).

The results in general show that the problems of poverty, illiteracy of the parents, and structural problems are interrelated problems of educational access. Thus, the provision of financial support, adult literacy classes, better school infrastructure and inclusive government policies are important to ensure better opportunities for children's education in brick kiln areas.

Recommendations

- Brick kiln children might be supported in their education through financial support programmes such as scholarships, free school materials, transport facilities and educational incentives. These measures could lower the economic costs to the household, and promote regular attendance and enrollment in school.
- Adult literacy and parental education programmes might be scaled up in brick kiln communities to enhance parents' illiteracy, education awareness and capacity to help their children's learning. Fostering parental literacy may boost education expectations and children's participation in learning.
- Structural barriers like child labour, far school distances, poor infrastructure and gender inequalities might be addressed by interventions within the government or community sectors. They may foster a more inclusive educational setting and enhance educational opportunities for children in brick kiln populated areas.

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