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Unveiling the Nexus Between Poverty and Higher Education: A Case Study of University of Balochistan, Quetta

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Abstract

This research article delves into the nexus between poverty and higher education in Balochistan, employing quantitative methods to unveil the barriers to pursuing higher education in one of the prestigious universities. The quantitative analysis highlights disparities in educational access and insights into students' experiences with financial hardships and compromises in lifestyle. It seeks to deepen understanding of how socio-economic conditions, including poverty, unemployment, and limited economic opportunities, shape students' educational experiences at the University of Balochistan with limited resources and opportunities. The study's findings underscore the potential of targeted interventions and inclusive strategies to promote educational equity and social mobility in Balochistan. These strategies can empower all individuals to access and succeed in higher education, thus contributing to broader socio-economic development in the region. To ensure students can pursue higher education, contribute to personal and professional growth, and ultimately uplift the nation's economic development.

Keywords: Higher Education; Poverty; University of Balochistan, Quetta.

Introduction

Education is a pathway to human rights and the core of all progress. It is a prerequisite for equality, inclusion, and sustainability (UNESCO, 2000). Education, significantly higher education, has the potential to be a catalyst for economic development and poverty reduction. It plays a pivotal role in innovation, modernization, and novelty. The urgency of addressing the issue of poverty-related barriers to education cannot be overstated. When the opportunity for education is not available, poverty is more likely to be perpetuated from one generation to the next. The cycle of poverty and lack of education is a vicious one, with individuals in need often choosing not to pursue education to find work, thereby preventing

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them from acquiring the reading and numeracy skills necessary to advance in their jobs. Years later, their children find themselves in a similar situation, with no choice but to leave school and seek employment. Poverty is a significant factor in a person's limited access to educational opportunities and a problem that demands immediate attention.

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, faces substantial challenges in higher education due to poverty-related barriers that hinder access and success. However, the University of Balochistan represents a microcosm of the broader challenges students face in accessing higher education due to socio-economic constraints and limitations. We can significantly improve students' academic achievement and access to high-quality education by addressing these issues. The ability of students to receive a high-quality education is significantly impacted by poverty, which can impact their academic performance. Lousy housing, inadequate food, bad health, and a lack of financial resources are just a few of the numerous disadvantages that students who live in poverty are more likely to suffer. These issues can significantly impair a student's capacity for learning and high-level achievement. Poverty adversely affects the health and nutrition of university students in Balochistan, Quetta. A variety of socioeconomic factors influence an individual's access to Higher education. These factors include the parent's education, source of income, number of family members, program quality, university excellence, and lack of financing. (Yasser et al. 2022). (Yasser et al. 2022).Some of these include the mother's education, the father's education, the father's employment, the parent's marital status, the number of family members, the quality of the program, the quality of the university, and the lack of funding.

Scope of Research

The socio-economic disparities among the student body contribute to unequal educational outcomes. The research underscores the urgency of addressing educational inequities in Balochistan, as the lack of action could lead to long-term socio-economic consequences. Consequently, there is an urgent need to explore the socio-economic conditions of students at the University of Balochistan concerning poverty, lack of resources, and their impact on educational experiences, academic achievement, and long-term socio-economic prospects.

By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to identify key factors contributing to educational inequities and inform evidence-based interventions and policies that promote inclusive higher education opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, there is a critical gap in the literature regarding the nuanced understanding of how these socioeconomic factors influence educational access, retention, and academic performance among students at the University of Balochistan.

Rationale of Research

The research study aims to investigate the nexus between poverty and higher education at the University of Balochistan, a public university in one of Pakistan's most impoverished regions. Despite the recognized importance of higher education in economic and social development, access to higher education is often hindered by socioeconomic factors such as poverty (Tariq, M., 2010).

Numerous studies have highlighted the challenges that poverty poses in accessing higher education. For example, a study by (Saeed et al., 2023) found that students from low-income backgrounds face significant barriers, including lack of financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, and limited access to support services. This suggests that poverty can profoundly impact the ability to access higher education and the likelihood of success and completion.

In the context of the University of Balochistan, where a large proportion of the population lives below the poverty line (Nawaz-ul-huda et al., 2012), exploring the specific challenges impoverished students face in accessing and succeeding in higher education is crucial.

In Balochistan's challenging socio-economic conditions, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds encounter formidable barriers to pursuing and succeeding in higher education. The authors highlight the problems of inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified faculty, and insufficient financial resources as significant barriers to higher education in the region (Ali et al., M, 2015). These factors also impede their capacity to pursue further education and prolong the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the prevailing socio-economic conditions, characterized by poverty, unemployment, and limited economic opportunities, further compound students' difficulties, impacting their academic performance and overall educational experiences.

Objectives of Research

- To analyze the socio-economic factors influencing Higher Education at the University of Balochistan, Quetta.

- To figure out the challenges faced by university students

Theoretical Framework

The social sciences relate to the relationship between education and poverty. Educational research has consistently found home background

(socioeconomic status) to be an essential determinant of educational outcomes, and economic research has shown that education strongly affects earnings. (IAE, IIEP, 2008).

The conceptual framework for this research study is primarily influenced by broader societal and structural factors such as unequal distribution of resources, lack of opportunities, and institutional barriers (Sen, 1999). The core concepts in the conceptual framework include poverty, access to higher education, success in higher education, and the role of support services. Poverty will be measured based on income levels, household economic status, and living conditions. Access to higher education will be assessed regarding enrollment, retention, and academic performance.

The capabilities approach, developed by Amartya Sen, emphasizes the importance of individuals' capabilities and freedoms to lead a life they value, highlighting that poverty restricts individuals' capabilities and opportunities (Sen, 2009). Success in higher education will be evaluated based on graduation rates, employability outcomes, and post-graduation achievements. The role of support services will include financial aid, academic advising, counseling, and mentorship programs.

Significance of Research

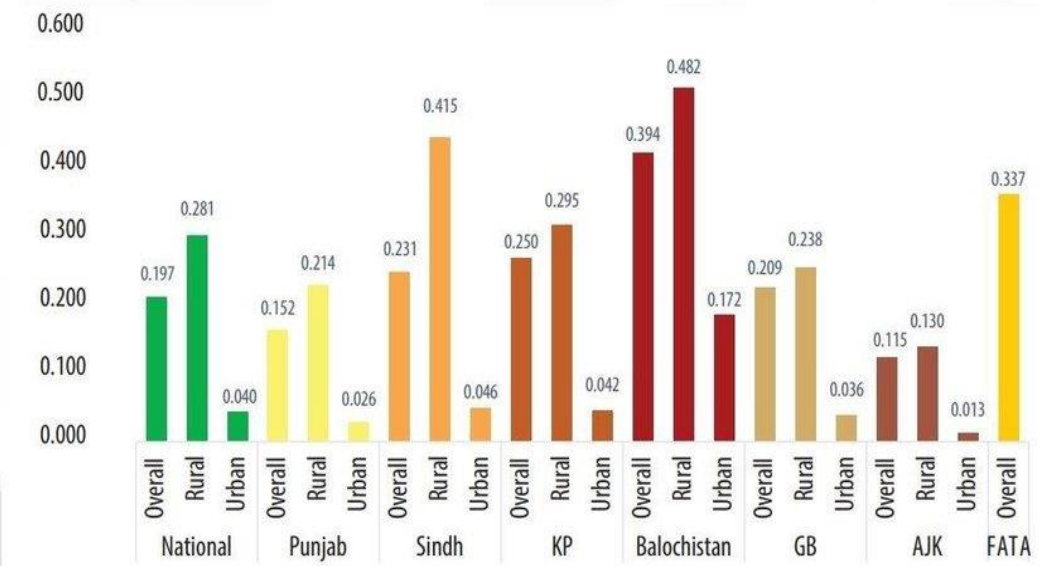
Research on poverty and higher education, specifically at the University of Balochistan, is essential for understanding and addressing barriers economically disadvantaged individuals face in accessing higher education. This research can inform policy interventions, improve financial aid programs, contribute to the existing literature on poverty and higher education, and guide institutions in effectively supporting students from low-income backgrounds. By highlighting the specific challenges impoverished students face at the University of Balochistan, the study will inform the development of targeted interventions and support services to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to pursue higher education and achieve academic success.

Limitation of Research

Based on this theoretical framework, the research will explore how poverty, as a structural constraint, impacts access to and success in higher education at the University of Balochistan. The study will examine the final year undergraduate students and employ study on individual characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and academic preparedness, and broader social factors, such as institutional policies and support services, in shaping students' experiences of poverty and higher education.

Literature Review

Balochistan is a resource-rich province of Pakistan with abundant natural resources, including minerals, natural gas, and coal. These resources have the potential to drive economic growth and improve the living conditions of the people in the province, but Balochistan is still plagued by poverty. In 1998-99, poverty was observed to be highest in the province of KPK at 71 percent and lowest in Balochistan at 55.9 percent, but this trend was reversed in 2018-19 as the lowest percentage of poverty, which was 16.3 percent, was recorded in the province of Punjab and highest in Balochistan at 40.7 percent. Many factors, such as the inflation rate in Pakistan, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, contribute to such alarmingly high figures of poverty in Baluchistan, which are high levels of income inequality and low employment opportunities (PIDE, 2021). As per World Bank 2023, poverty is expected to reach 37.2 percent ($3.65 /day 2017ppp) in 2023. The rate is slightly below the last observed measure in 2018, which stood at 39.8 percent; however, when accounting for population growth, there are almost 3 million more poor people in the country than in 2018.



Source: UNDP Multi-dimensional poverty index 2020-21

Balochistan, covering about 44% of Pakistan's territory and housing about 6% of its population, faces unique challenges in delivering education services due to its vast distances and low population density. The province also grapples with the country's highest rate of multidimensional poverty, highest nutritional deficiencies, and lowest literacy rates (44% for the 10-plus age group), especially for rural females (17%), among all provinces in the country (Qureshi et al., 2023).

Higher education, a catalyst for a nation's economic prosperity, holds immense potential to uplift Balochistan's economy. It is a proven fact that no country has ever had sustained economic growth without significantly investing in higher education. From the undeveloped to the developed, high priority is placed on higher education as a substantial factor directly tied to a nation's economic development through innovation and skill-level enhancement. The complex and multifaceted relationship between economic conditions and higher education offers hope for Balochistan's future, underscoring the crucial role that higher education can play in transforming the region's economic landscape.

The establishment of the University of Balochistan took place in 1970, by an ordinance by the then Governor of Balochistan, marking a significant milestone in the province's educational landscape. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), established in 2002, provides funds to public sector universities and the mandate to promote research culture and development in the country. After establishing HEC, the number of public and private universities in the province rose to nine. In Balochistan, 46,739 students are enrolled in bachelor, master/MPhil, and PhDs 2020-21, compared to 3700 students in 2002 (Bashir et al., 2023), PIEs 2020-21.

Balochistan's universities spend around Rs 3 billion yearly but face grave financial problems. Their income cannot keep up with their expenses, leading to a significant funding gap. The government of Balochistan and HEC provide funding to the province’s universities, but the amount is often insufficient to meet their needs. The provincial government released only 2.5 billion rupees to 11 universities in 2022-23 (Shah, 2022).

According to PIE 2020-21, several public/private universities exist. The number of universities varies according to the province's population and demand. Balochistan's current population is 14,894,402, and the total number of 10 universities is insufficient to accommodate the students.

Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive research approach to understand the barriers economically disadvantaged individuals face. The research design inquiry is to answer how poverty impacts higher education at the University of Balochistan, Quetta. The quantitative analysis highlights disparities in educational access. The participants/respondents of this research study were final-year students. The study mainly focused on the affordability and socioeconomic impacts of poverty on higher education. Through Purposive sampling, undergraduate students, a total of 100 respondents were interviewed. The survey results were evaluated using statistical software such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize participant responses. Inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis, investigate correlations between variables.

Analyses and Interpretations

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon correlated with various social and economic variables, including education level, gender, remittances received, number of assets owned, household size, and employment status of household head. Correlation results show that education can be a significant factor in determining poverty. Spending on education is regarded as an investment in human capital. Many developing countries like Pakistan have a low level of investment in education. There is always equal to no investment in education by government authorities and electable, both on provincial and national levels. Each year, budgets are allocated for education purposes but are invisible. It is documented that 17% of its budget is allocated to education (Daily Times, 2022).

Acquiring education helps individuals to overcome their state of poverty. Table 1 shows that all. According to the analysis, education is strongly correlated with socioeconomic variables such as the number of people earning, transportation cost, textbook affordability, food affordability, rent affordability, and other utilities. On the other hand, the number of scholarships available, the significance of scholarships, and accommodation costs are negatively connected with higher education, indicating the students' success level if the above facilities are available to them.

Correlation of Study Variables

Variables	Description	Pearson Correlation	Significance
Income	Constant		
Household size	No people living together	0.155	0.124
Number of earners in a household	Multiplicity of earners in a household	0.264**	0.008
Siblings Educational Cost	Educational expenses of children/siblings	0.539**	0.000
Transportation Cost	Daily transportation cost to commute to the university	0.214*	0.033
Scholarships availed	No. students received a scholarship	-0.078	0.443
Significance of the scholarships	Efficiency of scholarship to fulfill educational expenses	-0.066	0.515
Affordability of course books	Cost of course books	0.344*	0.000
Difficulty affording food	Cost of three meals a day	0.293*	0.003
Affordability of rent	Amount of rent	0.281*	0.005
Affordability of utilities	Cost of utilities	0.273*	0.006
Accommodation cost	Cost of accommodation	-0.099	0.328
Internet cost	Cost of internet	0.135	0.179

Source Field Data 2023

Table 2 shows the linear regression model's maximum components defining socioeconomic factors influencing higher education. The findings reveal that the dependent variable, household income, and the variable under investigation are significant. The funding source indicates a negative and significant relationship between poverty and education. This suggests that a lack of scholarships negatively influences students since scholarships offer funding and help to needy students. Most importantly, scholarships are necessary for supporting studies; they should be substantial enough to help with finance. Furthermore, the number of people earning in the family, transportation costs, and textbook affordability all show a positive and robust association between poverty and higher education.

Regression Study

Variables	**Description**	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficient**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	HH Income	379255.639	84051.769		512	0.00
X1 Sibling's educational cost	Number/price paid	3.528	.719	.343	4.904	0.000
X2 No of people earning	Multiplicity of earners	33180.247	7421.231	.307	4.471	0.000
X3 Supporting scholarship	Scholarships availed	-230701.073	36394.959	-.819	-6.339	0.000
X4 Significance of scholarship	Efficiency of scholarships	-90608.725	16477.558	-.673	-5.499	0.000
X5 Transportation cost	costs of transportation	14.661	4.567	.217	3.210	0.002
X6 Affordability of textbooks	Costs of course books	34882.246	10568.439	.221	3.301	0.001
X7 Financing source	Source of financing studies	-39534.768	15923.111	-.180	-2.483	0.015

Source Field Survey 2023

Discussion

Given the severe economic crisis the nation is experiencing, every governmental and commercial sector finds it difficult to operate. Although the region's poverty level is still the highest, the pressure on human life has increased due to inflation and the economic crisis. People often compromise quality to make products more economical, but this has a downside.

Balochistan is the province's oldest and most esteemed institution, setting the benchmark for high-quality education delivery. In contrast, Balochistan University is experiencing a severe financial issue. Students find acquiring resources and receiving a quality education in this distant, underdeveloped country much more challenging. At the University of Balochistan, students' access to education is hindered by poverty. Students find it challenging to cover the cost of textbooks, course books, tuition, and other educational expenses because many students come from low-income households. Access to resources like technology, literature, libraries, and research materials is restricted, which hinders learning.

Due to financial difficulties and poverty, many students struggle to cover other educational expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and tuition. Students with financial difficulties may take up part-time jobs or drop out of school to support themselves and their families. For students from low-income families, there are no need-based scholarships, financial aid programs, or jobs on campus.

Students Domicile

Variable	Percent
Kalat	16.0
Makran	14.0
Nasirabad	6.0
Quetta	46.0
Sibi	4.0
Zhob	3.0
Rakhshan	11.0
Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

The table above shows the area of belonging, representing the diversity and representation of students hailing from different Balochistan regions of Balochistan. Even though poverty remains a problem, the University of Balochistan strives to provide an accessible and supportive environment for students from all economic backgrounds.

Family Structure

Variable	Percent
Nuclear Family	52.0
Joint Family	46.0
Extended Family	2.0
Total	100.0

Source Field Survey 2023

It is challenging to analyze the relationship between poverty and higher education compared to the family structure variable. Balochistan is the underdeveloped and most culturally/socially conservative province of Pakistan. Most families live in a joint family structure with parents' children and grandchildren because, economically and socially, they depend on each other to support each other during financial crises. The data reveals a strong correlation between family type and how an individual's academic life is affected. Most respondents—52 percent—belong to the nuclear family, followed by the joint family (46%) and the extended family (2%). Stable family environments, resource availability, and parental participation can influence academic achievement. Even while family structure is one factor, a family's supportive and encouraging atmosphere can significantly impact a person's educational path.

Number of People Earning and Monthly Income of the Household

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
No people earning	100	1.00	7.00	2.0800
Income	100	25000.00	1000000.0	128330

Source Field Survey 2023

The variable number of persons earning in a home is critical because this is the foundation of a household's financial independence. The monthly income is influenced by the number of individuals who work to support the household. Each household has a mean income of 128,330pkr/month with an average of 2 earners. A family's income may come from one earner in some families or several earners in others. The number of earners may impact the household's capacity to sustain its budget and pay for its children's education. While looking into ways to help students continue their education, it is critical to consider the whole financial picture.

Financing source for Studies

Variable	Percent
Parents Income	81.0
Scholarships	11.0
Part-time job	8.0
Total	100.0

Source Field survey 2023

To cover tuition and fulfill their expenses, 81% of respondents rely on their parent's income, 11% receive scholarships, and 8% work part-time. Students occasionally rely on their parents' income to support their studies, while this is not always viable for everyone. Students and parents must seek alternate options for distributing financial responsibility, such as scholarships, part-time work, or student loans. Individuals earning potential is also constrained by a lack of opportunity and cultural barriers in Balochistan, especially for females because they do not have part-time job opportunities. Secondly, they cannot work at departmental stores and clothing brands because they are not considered appropriate workplaces.

Educational Costs

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Siblings educational cost	100	2500.00	60000.00	19435.0000
Tuition fee per semester	100	7000.00	48000.00	15957.5300

Source Field Survey, 2023

Students with siblings pursuing education concurrently may experience additional financial strain due to shared household expenses, tuition fees, and other educational costs. The cost of siblings' education might vary depending on factors such as the type of education, school fees, and other pertinent expenses. The educational costs of siblings with an average of 19435Pkr/month. Families must plan and finance adequately to address all siblings' academic needs. This element is also related to overpopulation and family planning, an essential step parents must take to ensure that all children have access to an adequate life free of financial hardship.

Type accommodation

Variable	Percentage
Hostel	34.0
Home	45.0
Rent	18.0
Relatives	3.0
Total	100.0

Source Field Survey 2023

Housing affordability might be especially problematic for students. University accommodation is one of the cheapest and most convenient options for students. Still, it is insufficient to accommodate a large number of students. Also, the hostel lacks basic sanitation facilities, clean water, and nutritious food, which it should have provided for the students. Of respondents' accommodation type, 45% live at home, 34% live in university and private dormitories, 18% live in a rental flat, and 3% live at a relative's residence. The respondents' lodging costs were an average of 4215pkr/month. Housing affordability for university students might vary depending on location and housing market.

Skip meals due to Financial Constraints.

Variable	Percent
Yes	35.0
No	65.0
Total	100.0

Source Field Survey, 2023

Food is a basic necessity of life. The analysis shows that 35% of the students skip meals due to financial constraints, which means that most students cannot afford to purchase three meals a day; instead, they prefer consuming two or one meal a day—the difficulties students face in affording food. University food costs almost 1000pkr/day, which many students cannot afford to spend money on. Avoiding food and saving money will only lead to malnutrition and insufficient immunity against diseases in students.

Supporting grants or scholarship

Variable	Percent
Yes	26.0
No	74.0
Total	100.0

Source Field Survey, 2023

According to the table, 26% of the students surveyed reported receiving support grants or scholarships. On the other hand, a significant majority (74%) of the students stated that they did not receive any support grants or scholarships, indicating that many students are funding their education without such assistance.

Conclusion

Poverty is a significant problem in the region, with limited resources and opportunities available to individuals and families. Since primary to higher secondary education is free nationwide, higher education is necessary to grow as a professional and skilled human resource. The analysis suggests a substantial relationship between poverty and higher education and possible causes and concerns. However, the legislature and law-making bodies failed to remove the educational gap between the lower and upper classes.

The University of Balochistan is at financial risk regarding higher education. As one of the best public educational institutions in the Balochistan province, the university attracts students from various backgrounds, including many from low-income households. As a result, many deserving students face tremendous barriers to obtaining and financing higher education. When tuition fees are paired with other expenses such as housing, study materials, food, and transportation, students and their families face significant financial difficulties.

Furthermore, Balochistan, a sparsely populated province with relatively limited economic development, lacks job opportunities and scholarships that could help students finance their education independently or support their families financially. Consequently, this exacerbates the financial strain on students and their families, making higher education affordability even more difficult. The Government of Balochistan recognizes the socioeconomic realities of its students and develops legislative measures to bridge the gap between poverty and higher education affordability. Various initiatives have been implemented to provide financial aid and scholarships to deserving students. However, given the scale of poverty and limited resources available, not all deserving students can avail

themselves of these opportunities, creating a substantial unmet need for higher education.

This scenario highlights the urgent need for increased investment in Balochistan's higher education and poverty alleviation schemes. By ensuring greater affordability, more students will have the chance to pursue higher education, contribute to their own personal and professional growth, and ultimately uplift the living standards of their communities.

Recommendations

- Consider establishing dedicated scholarships to increase financial aid availability for financially disadvantaged students. These programs can include need-based scholarships and merit-based scholarships to encourage academic excellence.

- Universities collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations to secure additional funding for financially disadvantaged students. Encourage these organizations to sponsor scholarships, provide internship opportunities, or offer financial assistance like BISP, EHSAS program, BEF, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNWFP, and other organizations that deal with Quality Education. Also, to have nutritional and medical facilities as well.

- Encourage the formation of student support networks where financially disadvantaged students can connect with their peers, share resources, and provide emotional support to one another. This can create a sense of community and facilitate information sharing regarding available financial resources.

- Conducting research and data analysis to understand the nuanced challenges faced by students in Balochistan. Use evidence-based findings to inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and targeted interventions that address the root causes of poverty and educational barriers.

- Advocate for policy reforms at the provincial and national levels to prioritize education funding, improve governance and accountability in educational institutions, and address socio-economic disparities. Engage with policymakers, advocacy groups, and civil society to push for sustainable solutions to poverty and educational inequities.

It is essential to note that these recommendations may require the allocation of additional resources and collaboration with external stakeholders. However, implementing such measures can significantly contribute to the betterment of financially disadvantaged students at the University of Balochistan.

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