How Fair and Aspiring Are the Education Practices at Higher Secondary Schools in Pakistan: Mapping Learners' Transition to Higher Education and Social Mobility

Muhammad Ilyas[1], Muhammad Uzair-ul-Hassan[2] and Iram Parveen[3]

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Abstract

Globally, higher education is considered a tool for social mobility. Pakistan, as a developing country, faces the massive challenge of a low induction proportion of youth in higher education institutions as compared to the existing proportion in the population. Fair education that obligates the provision of a learning environment in which all students are valued and treated fairly and equally irrespective of personal circumstances, is thought to lead every learner to a smoother and fairer transition to higher education, paving the way to social mobility. Thus, the study intended to explore how fair and aspiring education practices at higher secondary schools in Pakistan may ensure higher education transition and social mobility of the learners. The study informants comprised public higher secondary school teachers and principals. The study employed a mixed-method sequential explanatory design in which a multistage sampling technique was used to locate the study participants. Quantitative data were collected from teachers (n=550) via a self-developed questionnaire, whereas qualitative data were collected from higher secondary schools' principals (n=20) through interview protocols. Results showed that while the teachers' self-reports declared their teaching practices as fair, inclusive and aspiring, the qualitative responses of principals negated this finding by showing dissatisfaction and disagreement with teachers' fair teaching practices in schools. The principals highlighted teachers' negative behaviors in classrooms, lack of teachers' feedback, lack of concerns for students, inequitable learning resources, and the lack of support that helps in students' transition to higher education, thus diminishing their opportunities to acquire higher education and social mobility.

Keywords: Fair Education, Higher Secondary Schools, Student Aspiration, Social Mobility.

Introduction

Education is a global economic and social driver. In this way, the development of a higher secondary school education system is essential to have a strong country's economic growth. The higher secondary education system serves as the foundation for building human capital for knowledge-based economies worldwide. According to Greening (2017), the optimization of the human capital product in any country directly depends on learners' entry into higher education with knowledge, skills, and attitude to become valuable family and community members. Major and Machin (2018) elaborated that fair education creates a positive learning environment where teachers and students work together effectively in groups to become socially mobile. In essence, a fair education system produces a balanced and inclusive society that is equitable, egalitarian and more productive. Owens and Croix (2020) illustrated that

[1]*PhD Scholar, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.*
[2]*Associate Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Sargodha. Email: uhassan74@gmail.com*
[3]*Assistant Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.*

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schools are considered agencies as well as engines for arranging and developing social mobility among students. This is connected with the learning of students at school. In fact, students' learning experiences inspire them to achieve their goals. According to Payne (2017), schools that consider students' educational aspirations have a favorable impact on their achievement. Yet, it requires fair practice on the part of the teacher because teachers' fair practices improve students' desires and future expectations in the classroom. Following the Erasmus Program of Educational Equity of 2019-2027, fair education is a fundamental right that ensures every child's attainment of full potential. Exley (2019) postulates that fair education relies on teachers' dealing with students in a classroom or inside any educational institute. It is also tied with teacher-student relationships within academic institutions where the relationship depends on making fair interactions. Haveman et al. (2006) argued that the elite strata of society are becoming more effective at passing on their privileged status to their children. Such people use their contacts and cultural capital to secure college places and unpaid internships.

Nonetheless, Reeves stresses that these individual choices damage collective society. In essence, it is unfairly diminishing any opportunities for non-elites. Hassan et al. (2019) explained that fair education is the process of providing fair or equitable instruction, interaction between student and teacher, and assessment in the school's system to meet learning objectives. Boateng (2016) mentioned that fair education is the process of equitable evaluations carried out by the teacher in the classroom to improve the students' aspiration for success. Therefore, Barrow (2021) said that fair education is an apparatus of properly utilizing teaching disposition and resources to accomplish intended objectives. Laing et al. (2019) reported that fair education is obligatory in educational institutions because it brings desired results and good education among students. Undoubtedly, education has a vital role in the nation's social, moral, political, and economic development. Ilaltdinova et al. (2018) pointed out that quality education stems from fair teaching and learning. Wolf et al. (2016) elaborated that fair education practices are the ways of interacting and accessing activities inside and outside of the classroom efficiently and effectively. Hoskins and Barker (2017) conceptualize students' aspirations as improving student-teacher relationships, increasing cooperation, and inspiring students' satisfaction in an institution to achieve set goals and objectives successfully. Noticeably, fair education practices are subject to the relationship between students and teachers in higher secondary schools, which is a trajectory to achieve the social mobility goals of an educational institution.

Li (2021) explained that school teachers occupy the most central position in imparting fair education to students. Therefore, a fair learning environment in schools can become a source for more students' mobility. So, schools have to perform dual functions; They have not only to improve the students' performance but also need to provide fair learning opportunities. Dumberry (2018) illustrated that teachers in school are the most significant actors who can play a vital role in boosting the students' aspirations for higher education transition. Williams (2016) stated that teachers are aspirators for their students. Therefore, they must generate an atmosphere where students can learn enthusiastically. According to Tam (2014), a fair education system deals with stakeholders like students, teachers, school heads, administrative units, etc., which is in absolute demand and significantly to a great extent.

The concept of fair education has assumed massive importance in students' transition to higher education because of these factors. Yet, outcomes and results per expectation depend upon the teachers' fair educational practices inside the classroom. Fair education practices are the fundamental requirements for enhancing quality education standards; they pave the path in the right direction to face modern world challenges and changing scenarios. Such practices and students' aspirations are considered significant for building social mobility in students. Therefore, higher secondary school teachers play an influential role through fair education practices to fulfil their obligations. Significantly, teachers need to conduct teaching

responsibly and mentor students on a regular basis. Teachers often do not consider students' diverse cognitive abilities and disability as they are not adequately trained to teach fair education practices at the HSS level. As a result, students face grave inequalities in learning and do not sufficiently have aspirations for higher education transition because of not being educated enough. Several research studies have shown that fair and equitable practices in schools are strongly related to teachers' fair attitudes toward the learning process. For instance, the findings of Hassan et al. (2019) support that a fair school teacher is an essential component of a fair education system in educational institutions. So, it can be confirmed that educational practices that promote more fairness in public HSS differ from one academic to the other. However, in Pakistan, there are no accepted criteria for fair educational practices for school teachers, hence the need to do the work on it.

Fair education aims at equalizing learning opportunities. Teachers' practices of fairness in the classroom expand and equalize learning opportunities, so a new avenue emerges, enabling an average student to climb up the ladder of social mobility. According to Major and Machin (2020), fair education is associated with value judgments students make in the classroom. The question of where you draw the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable becomes a matter of judgment. This study examined the overarching value of justice, which is at the core of all concerns about social mobility. It demonstrated how this connects to students' expectations in a just educational system that guarantees their entry into higher education and ensures their future social mobility.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To examine fair education, students' aspirations for higher education and social mobility through teachers' perspectives
2. To explore principals' views on fair education, students' aspirations for higher education, and social mobility.

Research Methodology

The study aimed to examine how public higher secondary school teachers' fair education practices influenced the aspirations of students in the province of Punjab. Questionnaires from teachers and interviews with school principals were conducted to catch the enriched essence and develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Some authors refer to this process as confirmation, disconfirmation or corroboration (Klenke, 2016). A mixed method parallel design was used for the study, where data from teachers and school principals were collected simultaneously as the data collection from either of the participants did not influence each other. Quantitative data from teachers were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas the qualitative data from school principals were analyzed through thematic analysis.

The population constituted teachers and Principals of respective higher secondary schools in Punjab province. The study's accessible population was 5510 teachers and 179 principals of respective higher secondary schools in divisions Faisalabad and Sargodha.

Table 1: Profile of the research study accessible population

		HSS			Teachers		
Division	District	*M*	*F*	*Total*	*M*	*F*	*Total*
Faisalabad	Faisalabad	24	37	61	1033	1122	2155
	Chiniot	3	3	6	110	80	190
	Toba Tek Singh	5	10	15	177	280	457
	Jhang	9	7	16	314	278	592
Sargodha	Sargodha	20	22	42	555	549	1104
	Khushab	7	6	13	199	183	382
	Mianwali	5	10	15	220	150	370
	Bhakkar	6	5	11	162	98	260
Population=N		79	100	179	2770	2740	5510

Source: SIS (https://sis.punjab.gov.pk/dashboard)

Sampling Procedure

Multistage sampling technique was employed as follows:

In stage 1, 25 % (2 out of 8) divisions were selected from province Punjab. In stage 2, 50% of districts (4 out of 8 districts) were selected; districts Faisalabad and Chiniot from division Faisalabad, while districts Sargodha and Mianwali from division Sargodha. In stage 3, 10 males and 10 female HSS from each sampled district were selected (4 x 20=80 HSS). In stage 4, 6 male & female teachers from each higher secondary, a total of 550 teachers (male= 317 & female=233) were selected from all higher secondary schools accordingly. Simple random sampling technique by Balloting was used in all the stages to choose the sample of this study. Overall, total teacher respondents were 550 teachers (male= 317 & female=233), whereas 80 Principals of HSS were interviewed. Qualitative data were collected from all available principals (heads) of sampled higher secondary schools; 80 principals were selected and interviewed in the qualitative phase of this study.

The demographical details of the teachers' sample are given below:

Table 2: Teachers' sample's demographics

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	317	57.6
	Female	233	42.4
	Total	550	100.0
Teachers' education	PhD	10	1.8
	M.Phil.	234	42.5
	M.A/ MSc	306	55.6
	Total	550	100.0
Teaching experience	1 year to 3 years	97	17.2
	4 years to 7 years	25	4.40
	8 years to 11 years	106	19.1
	12 years to 15 years	122	22.2
	More than 15 years	206	37.1
	Total	550	100.0

Table 2 shows that male teachers comprised bigger proportion of sample as compared to females. Teachers' education-wise distribution shows that major sample of teachers were having masters and MPhil degrees, while lesser teachers had earned PhD degree. This fluctuation embarks upon the fact, that in Pakistan, least eligibility for teaching in schools is a graduate level, while government does incentivize teachers on attaining post-graduate degrees as well. The distribution of teacher' experience revealed that on majority, the sample comprised of highly experienced teachers with more than 17 years of teaching experience at schools, while teachers having less teaching experienced also formed part of the sample, but they were few as compared to heavily experienced teachers.

In the qualitative phase of this study, 20 higher secondary school principals were interviewed. Most of the higher secondary school principals were working in rural areas, and most had 1-12 years of experience as head. Most of the higher secondary school teachers were male, and their age was 30-50 years. Many Principals had M.Phil. level of education as well as few school teachers who had earned Ph.D. degree, were working as Principal. The majority of higher secondary schools' principals were working on regular basis.

Research Instruments of the Study

Quantitative instrument for teachers comprised eighty-four (84) items. The questionnaire items were constructed on the basis of previous researches and literature. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Table 3: List of Indicators and Variables

Sr#	Variables	Indicators	Indicator No	Scale
1	Demographic variables of students	14	1-14	5-PointLikert Scale
2	Fair student and teacher interaction	15	15-29	
3	Fair teachers' instruction	20	30-50	
4	Fair assessment of students	14	51-65	
5	Students' aspiration	14	66-80	
6	social mobility	7	81-88	
Total		84		

Validation of Research Tools

For validation of scale, opinions of 11 subject matter experts were taken who rated the item as essential, useful, necessary and not necessary. The items' content validity ratios (CVR) ranged from 36.36 to 100, while the scale's total content validity index (CVI) was 0.75. It included 64 statements in total.

Quantitative Data Analysis of Teachers' Responses on Questionnaires

Perceptions of higher secondary school teachers and students were gathered about fair education practices in higher secondary schools (HSS), the statistical analysis to which is shown below:

Table 4: Descriptive statistical analysis of teachers' perception of Fair Student-Teacher Interaction in Classroom

Sr.#	Practice	SDA %	DA %	SD+D %	N %	A %	SA %	SA+A %	*Mean*	*S.D*
1	Teachers equally treat all the students.	0.2	26.7	26.9	5.1	58.5	9.5	68	3.50	.993
2	Teacher calls the students by their names when they enter the classroom	12.9	45.6	58.5	16.4	19.1	6.0	25.1	2.60	1.12
3	Teacher engages their students through eye contact in the classroom.	0.2	5.8	6	9.6	70.9	13.5	84.4	3.92	.688
4	Teacher engages their students through body language in the classroom.	0	14.0	14	12.9	66.9	6.2	73.1	3.65	.795
5	Teacher engages their students through gestures in the classroom.	4.0	30.5	34.5	9.5	50.5	5.5	56	3.23	1.07
6	Teachers' acknowledge the comments of the students in the classroom.	0	26.7	26.7	9.6	58.9	4.7	63.6	3.42	.935
7	Teacher acknowledges the questions of the students in the classroom.	0.2	13.3	13.5	4.9	33.3	28.4	61.7	3.96	.938
8	Teachers help out the students in the classroom.	0.2	12.5	12.7	8.2	47.6	31.5	79.1	3.98	.957
9	e of their parent's socio-economic status.	0	13.5	13.5	5.3	58.4	22.9	81.3	3.91	.902
10	Teacher deals with their students irrespective of caste.	0	12.9	12.9	4.5	58.7	23.8	82.5	3.93	.893
11	Teacher deals with their students irrespective of their family background.	0	13.3	13.3	0.7	55.6	30.4	86	4.03	.918
12	Teacher deals with their students irrespective of their creed.	0.2	4.4	4.6	5.5	63.5	26.5	90	4.12	.706
13	Teacher thinks students' socio-economic status matters in their learning process.	0.2	13.3	13.5	4.5	75.3	6.7	82	3.75	.774
14	Teacher tries their level best to talk more politely with students.	0.2	14.9	15.1	5.5	57.5	22.0	79.5	3.86	.933
15	Teachers consider students equal whether they are average or bright.	4.4	23.3	27.7	5.3	50.5	16.5	67	3.52	1.145
	Overall	1.51	18.1	19.6	7.13	56.4	16.9	73.3	3.69	3.69

N=550

Table 4 shows overall perceived percentage of teachers' responses on fair student-teachers' interaction in classroom, 19.6% teachers were disagreed with unfair practices in classroom while 7.13% teachers were not in state of decision, whereas 73.3% teachers agreed that students

and teachers' interaction in classroom was fair in nature. This implies that majority of the teachers perceived student-teacher interaction as fair and inclusive.

Table 5: Descriptive statistical analysis of Teachers' Perceptions of fair Instruction in Classroom

Sr.#	Values	SDA %	DA %	SDA+ SD	N %	A %	SA %	SA+A %	*Mean*	*S.D*
1	Teacher creates a conducive environment of discussion in the classroom.	0.4	40.7	41.1	1.1	55.3	2.5	57.8	3.19	1.021
2	Teachers use a variety of visual aids to support students learning.	0	33.3	33.3	21.1	44.0	1.6	45.6	3.14	.906
3	Teacher uses local language in the classroom.	12.5	31.3	43.8	4.7	50.4	1.1	51.5	2.96	1.167
4	Teacher arranges a team of students for educational activities.	4.2	29.1	33.3	12.5	52.7	1.5	54.2	3.18	1.01
5	Teacher arranges the students into peers for their academic achievement.	4.4	20.0	24.4	12.9	56.5	6.2	62.7	3.40	1.014
6	Teacher deals randomly in classroom discussions.	0	4.7	4.7	8.4	73.1	13.8	86.9	3.96	.640
7	Teacher uses cooperative learning strategies in the classroom.	4.0	9.3	13.3	4.9	68.4	13.5	81.9	3.78	.932
8	Teacher uses the heterogeneous style of learning.	0.4	28.4	28.8	0.9	60.2	10.2	70.4	3.51	1.022
9	Teacher use clarifying techniques in the classroom question-answer session.	0.2	5.1	5.3	5.1	73.1	16.5	89.6	4.01	.661
10	Teacher use students' feedback to find the effectiveness of instruction.	1.1	12.9	14	8.9	63.6	13.5	77.1	3.75	.883
11	Teacher gives his students specific oral feedback in the classroom.	0	9.8	9.8	21.3	67.5	1.5	69	3.61	.682
12	Teacher gives his students written feedback in the classroom.	0.2	58.4	58.6	13.3	26.7	1.5	28.2	2.71	.913
13	Teacher provides extra help to the students in the classroom.	0	22.2	22.2	4.9	66.9	6.0	72.9	3.57	.900
14	Teacher use teaching materials that reflect the students' interest.	0.2	22.5	22.7	5.1	54.4	17.8	72.2	3.67	1.020

15	Teacher provides supplemental materials to support students who have difficulty in understanding the course contents.	0.4	21.3	21.7	8.9	56.2	13.3	69.5	3.61	.976
16	Teachers' teaching technique enhance students' comprehension.	0.2	4.4	4.6	12.7	64.0	18.7	82.7	3.97	.711
17	Teacher creates advanced opportunities for students who understand course content easily with minimal effort.	0.2	29.5	29.7	10.0	47.1	13.3	60.4	3.44	1.055
18	Teaching strategy of the teacher varies, based on students' needs in the classroom.	0.2	33.3	33.5	1.6	58.5	6.4	64.9	3.38	1.020
19	Teachers take suggestions from students before the start of the lesson.	4.2	54.5	58.7	16.9	23.5	0.9	24.4	2.62	.918
20	Teacher assigns homework according to student's ability.	0.5	38.0	38.5	5.5	45.8	10.2	56	3.27	1.094
	Overall Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviation of scores	1.67	25.4	27.07	9.04	55.4	8.5	63.9	3.44	0.93

N=550

Table 5 shows perceived percentage of teachers' responses on fair instruction in the classroom, 58.6% teachers were disagreed that in classroom teachers don't give written feedback to their students. While 58.7% of teacher were disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers take suggestions from students before the start of the lesson teacher. It shows unfair teachers practices in the classroom. Overall, 63.9% of teachers agreed to fair instructional practices in the classrooms.

Table 6: Descriptive statistical analysis of Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Fair Assessment

Sr.#	Values	SDA %	DA %	SDA +DA %	N %	A %	SA %	SA+ A %	*Mean*	*S.D*
1	Teacher regularly monitors students' understanding of instruction.	0.7	30.0	30.7	0.4	59.3	9.6	68.9	3.47	1.043
2	Teacher identifies students' previous knowledge before instruction in the classroom.	0.5	25.5	26	8.7	59.5	5.8	65.3	3.45	.952

3	Teacher share life experiences to connect classroom learning to students' lives.	0	9.1	9.1	13.5	67.5	10.1	77.6	3.78	.743
4	Teacher use 'wait time' to get students' responses.	0.4	9.3	9.7	13.3	73.6	1.5	75.1	3.69	.673
5	Teacher mentions the criteria before task completion in the classroom.	0.2	12.5	12.7	14.0	60.5	12.7	73.2	3.73	.845
6	Teacher incorporates students' feedback to access their performance in the classroom.	0.2	12.5	12.7	5.5	71.8	10.0	81.8	3.73	.793
7	Teacher asks higher-order questions equitably from the students.	4.9	30.7	35.6	16.7	38.5	9.1	47.6	3.16	1.109
8	Teacher assigns homework that reflects individual student's needs.	0.5	32.9	33.4	5.5	60.0	1.1	61.1	3.28	.957
9	Teachers provide support the students who have difficulty in assignments.	0.2	24.4	24.6	13.1	56.7	5.6	62.3	3.43	.926
10	Teachers assess each student's interests (e.g., plans, areas of talent, and passion).	0.4	26.2	26.6	17.3	50.9	5.3	56.2	3.35	.937
11	Teachers assess each student's learning profile characteristics (e.g., preferred learning modality, grouping orientation)	0.2	9.1	9.3	9.1	67.8	13.8	81.6	3.86	.768
12	Teachers assess at the end of the lesson to determine knowledge acquisition.	0.2	17.3	17.5	9.3	60.0	13.3	73.3	3.69	.915
13	The content of the exam is announced on time in classroom.	0.2	4.7	4.9	4.4	76.9	13.8	90.7	3.99	.623
14	Teacher only examines test material that has been taught in class.	3.8	5.1	8.9	0.4	73.3	17.5	90.8	3.95	.851
	Overall	0.886	17.807	18.693	9.371	62.593	9.229	71.822	3.611	0.867

N=550

Table 6 shows overall perceived percentage of teachers' responses on fair assessment practices in the classroom; where 60% teachers showed disagreement on fair assessment practices in classroom; while 9.4% of teachers were not in state of decision, whereas 34.8% of teachers were agreed that the teachers' assessment of students in classroom is fair. From most of the

responses, the results are a clear indicative of unfair assessment practices by teachers in higher secondary schools.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistical analysis of teachers' perceptions of higher education aspiration of students at the intermediate level

Sr.#	Values	SDA %	DA %	SDA+DA %	N %	A %	SA %	SA+A %	*Mean*	*S.D*
1	Students want to be among the very best in our subject.	3.3	25.6	28.9	4.5	59.6	6.9	66.5	3.41	1.04
2	Students have the aspiration to study material that is relevant to our future	7.3	47.3	54.6	8.9	34.2	2.4	36.6	2.77	1.07
3	Students have strong aspirations in the classroom that our teachers will recognize our contributions.	3.3	21.5	24.8	1.3	68.2	5.8	74.0	3.52	.99
4	Students in the classroom have a desire to become outstanding in the school.	3.3	21.3	24.6	4.2	64.2	7.1	71.3	3.51	1.08
5	Students have a desire to be recognized for their accomplishments in the classroom.	7.3	20.5	27.8	4.4	57.6	10.2	67.8	3.44	1.13
6	Students desire to learn shows they want to become a leader in the subject field.	3.3	17.3	20.6	12.9	55.8	10.7	66.5	3.53	1.00
7	Students desire to learn shows that they devote energy to getting position 1st in class.	0.2	20.7	20.9	5.5	66.2	7.5	73.7	3.60	.903
8	Students desire to become a leader in the classroom is important for teachers.	0.4	3.8	4.2	0.7	80.5	14.5	95.0	4.05	.580
9	Students have aspiration for the future direction from the teachers in the classroom.	3.8	8.7	12.5	5.5	71.3	10.7	82.0	3.76	.895
10	Students' desire of learning shows they want to reach the highest level of education in their subject.	3.5	8.7	12.2	8.7	66.7	10.4	77.1	3.74	.885
11	Students in the classroom desire additional learning in their occupational area of interest.	3.5	9.1	12.6	8.7	76.4	2.4	78.8	3.65	.815
12	Students always have a desire for knowledge about recent advances in their subject.	3.8	28.9	32.7	4.4	56.4	6.5	62.9	3.33	1.07
13	Students have a desire that they attend meetings in schools to advance their knowledge.	0.7	16.7	17.4	17.5	54.4	10.7	65.1	3.58	.916
14	We want to be among the very best in our subject.	0.7	8.5	9.2	8.5	67.6	14.5	82.1	3.87	.788
	Overall percentage, mean and standard deviation	3.17	18.5	21.7	6.84	62.8	8.59	71.3	3.55	0.94

N=550

Table 7 shows the overall perceived percentage of teachers' responses on students' higher education in the classroom; where 21.67% of teachers showed disagreement on students' higher education aspiration in the classroom; while 6.84% of teachers were not in the state of decision, whereas 71.3% of teachers were agreed that the students' higher aspiration in the classroom.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistical analysis of Teachers' Perception of learners' Social Mobility Aspiration

Sr.#	Values	*SD %*	*DA %*	*SDA+DA %*	*N %*	*A %*	*SA %*	*SA+A %*	*Mean*	*S.D*
1	Students can change social status through higher secondary education	0.7	0.2	0.9	1.5	68.2	29.5	97.7	4.25	.564
2	The Higher secondary education helps students to understand the society	0	4.0	4.0	0.2	56.5	39.3	95.8	4.31	.677
3	Knowledge imparted in higher secondary education plays a significant role in students' development.	6.4	0	6.4	4.0	72.4	17.3	89.7	3.94	.885
4	If the teacher teaches differently, Student's status can really be changed.	0	0	0	0	70.4	29.6	100	4.30	.457
5	Fair education opportunities in colleges / higher secondary schools pave the way for social development of students	6.4	0	6.4	0	59.8	33.8	93.6	4.15	.944
6	Students have better career than their parents in the future	0	6.4	6.4	0.2	64.5	28.9	93.4	4.16	.722
7	All students, no matter what their socio-economic status, can significantly change their position in higher secondary education.	0.2	0.2	0.4	10	65.1	24.4	89.5	4.21	1.80
	Overall	1.96	1.54	3.5	2.3	65.3	28.9	94.2	4.19	0.86

N=550

Table 8 shows the overall perceived percentage of teachers' responses to students' aspirations for social mobility at higher secondary school level education; where 3.5% of teachers showed disagreement on students' higher education aspiration in the classroom; while 2.3% of teachers were not in the state of decision, whereas 94.2% of teachers agreed that the students aspire for higher education and social mobility in schools.

Qualitative Data Analysis of School Principals' Responses

For the qualitative portion, we have organized theme wise elaboration:

Feedback in the Classroom

The first theme emerged as 'Feedback in the classroom' from the principals' response which is shown in the following table:

Table 9: The Theme, Categories, and Frequencies of Higher Secondary Schools' Principals Regarding 'Feedback in the Classroom

Theme	Categories	Frequencies
1- Feedback in the classroom	Consistency	20
	Appreciation	11
	Encouragement of low performance	09
	Satisfaction with students' ability	18

Most of the principles stated that teachers should set up suitable methods for observing and getting feedback to solve students' problems in the classroom. "Teachers should set up a good way to hold students accountable and act effectively when students have problems," mentioned one of the principles. "Teachers don't spend enough time in their classrooms, and if they don't pay attention, they can't change things for their students," pointed out another principal. "Students might be able to be heard if teachers give them an hour to talk in the discussion forums" (HSSP10) argued. Another principal added, "Teachers should give students time and space to talk about their problems in the classroom so they can be resolved" (HSSP14). Similarly, another principal argued that, "In the classroom, there needs to be a strong feedback system so that daily tasks can be checked and strong steps can be taken" (HSSP3).

Teachers' appreciation plays a significant role in the learning process. Teachers who appreciate the students' efforts aspire to do more work. They take an interest in learning. Students make more progress in the learning process. Teacher appreciation also strengthens the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. One of the principals stated, "when teachers appreciate the student's work, their engagement level increases: "if teachers do not appreciate the student's efforts, they don't, and motivation for learning. Another principle stated, "inspiring teachers always inspire the students by igniting the students' imagination and install the love of learning in students' behavior"(HSSP14). Another principal revealed that "teaching is an act that gives optimism to the student, and teacher appreciation is an excellent source for students' optimistic thinking; if teachers appreciate the student's work, students' learning can be e improved"(HSSP4).

Equitable Learning Resources

The theme emerged as 'Equitable learning resources' from the principals' response which is shown in the following table:

Table 10: The Theme, Categories, and Frequencies of Higher Secondary Schools' Principals Regarding 'Equitable Learning Resources

Theme	Categories	Frequencies
2-Equitable learning resources	Curriculum concern	14
	Fair assessment	17
	Updated information and knowledge	18
	Career aspiration mentoring	15
	Differentiated classroom instruction	20

Most of the principles highlighted on curriculum adaptation. For instance, one of them elaborated that curriculum should be according to the needs and abilities of students (HSSP3). Similarly, another reflected that curriculum should be adjusted according to the needs and the skills of students so that students will enjoy learning process (HSSP7).

Most of the principals showed deep concern over 'access to information and knowledge. In the 21st century, knowledge is considered as a part of economy. Information and knowledge that are up-to-date are essential for a student's success. In developing countries, it is hard to get authentic information and knowledge. Students have less chance of success because they don't have easy access to knowledge and information. If our education system doesn't give everyone an equal opportunity to learn, then we can't change our youth. One principal said, "Our curriculum isn't up-to-date, and students' levels of knowledge and formation aren't in line with global standards. Because of this, our students have less chance of moving up in society and succeeding in the future." Another principal argued that, "In our education system, the knowledge and information imparted to the students are not playing any meaningful role in their practical life. There is a massive lack of technical and vocational workers—this lack of skilled work results in students' fewer chances of social mobility" (HSSP 20). Another principal stated, "Most students face the problem of 'information overload.' Mostly students have misinformation about their subject.

Many of the principals expressed concern that our students are less aware of 'future opportunities.' One principle indicated, "the parents of students with low socioeconomic status prefer those colleges and schools with fewer fees. Due to this reason, students have a low quality of education. Unfortunately, in our country quality of education has a connection with the number of expenses. Ultimately the students from humble social backgrounds have slight chances of being socially mobile and less chance of progress in their future life.

Another principle identified by uttering that "the students do not have an awareness of their career and planning." it is a problem that many students face. They do not know how to select their major. They do not know which subject is best for their future. What is the scope of their subject? What are the opportunities in the future for these subjects? What will be in the future after studying this subject? Ultimately, they spend a lot of time on studies, but in the end, they face failure to get a position in society. So, career aspiration is an essential part of education. Our teachers and our administration must consider some vital career guidelines and counseling arrangements for the students in our education system.

Support that Helps Students' Transition

The theme emerged as 'Equitable learning resources' from the principals' response which is shown in the following table:

Table 11: The Theme, Categories and Frequencies of Higher Secondary Schools' Principals Regarding the Support that Helps Students Transition

Theme	Categories	Frequencies
3-Support that helps students' transition	Seminars	11
	Students' Interests	18
	Acknowledgment of students' desire for learning	10
	Open communication with students	14
	Opportunities in jobs and fields	12
	Selection of major/ subjects that best fit for future	20
	Help students navigate their transition to university life	16
	Help to avoid the procrastination	14

Most school principals showed their concern that seminars at the level of higher secondary classes are the best way to convey the importance of higher education and social mobility. Students of higher secondary school will be aware of the benefits of higher education in their future lives. The lack of seminars is the leading cause of students' disengagement towards higher education. One of the HSSPs stated that "students acquire the knowledge of a particular field through seminars". Another principal mentioned that "students interact with the experts from the specific field through seminars and workshops." Many principals stated that teachers do not take care of students' interests in the classroom. If teachers consider the interest of students during the teaching process, their engagement level can be increased. Acknowledgement of students' desire for learning, open communication with students, opportunities in jobs and selection of significant subjects which could be best fit for the future were the primary suggestions from most of the principals. Teachers' efforts and help result in navigating students' transition to university life, and it prevents the students from procrastination in learning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study uncovers that teachers often need to work on creating a conducive classroom atmosphere for student engagement, neglecting to implement cooperative learning strategies, clarify doubts effectively, or seek student feedback on instructional strategies. Furthermore, the teaching approach needs to be diversified to cater to the student's needs at the individual level, and there needs to be more support for students struggling with assignments. These findings resonate with similar studies conducted globally, such as Michael's (2016) study in Andhra Pradesh, India, Alonge et al.'s (2019) study in Nigeria, and Bernstein's (2021) study in Canada, all highlighting the adverse effects of unfair teaching practices on students' motivation, satisfaction, and academic performance. The finding highlights the importance of fostering an open and inclusive classroom atmosphere where students feel valued, understood, and supported. This involves not only the adoption of fair and transparent teaching practices but

also the active involvement of students in the learning process, encouraging feedback, and promoting a culture of mutual respect and collaboration.

One of the significant findings was the need for students to be aware of career choices and opportunities in education. Schools need to work on helping students select subjects according to learners' aptitudes and market demands, fulfilling the needs of the 21st century.

Comparing the results of data analyzed from teachers and school heads reveals a striking contrast: Teachers' responses reveal fair educational practices on the one hand, whereas school principals' responses reveal teachers' instructional practices as unfair and inequitable. However, teachers' partial satisfaction with their routine teaching methodologies is indicative of unfair and dishonest practices at schools. Combined interpretation of quantitative data from teachers and qualitative data from school heads underscored the discrepancy between teachers' self-assessments and principals' perceptions and observations of fair education at schools.

A highlight of the study was teachers' perception of students' aspirations for higher education and aspirations for social mobility. Teachers' responses revealed a heightened state of students' aspirations for higher education and higher social mobility, which are in contrast to school heads' perceptions about students' aspirations for higher education and social mobility, where they highlighted lacking mechanisms for the fulfilment of student's educational needs, career awareness and aptitude development. Here a question arises: How can a school education system struggling in such crucial aspects inspire the learners for higher education and higher social mobility when data from UNESCO also reveal that only 4% of the youth get inducted into higher education institutions, which is indeed a very meagre proportion of young learners entering in higher education, as compared to their actual proportion in Pakistan's population. Inequities in education are always known to diminish learners' aspirations for higher education and social mobility.

Rationally, the schools, which are unfair and inequitable for students, lack all the goodness and quality to inspire students for higher education and higher social mobility; however, depending on the empirical findings of the study, further research studies are required where phenomenon needs to be inquired from students' perspectives to get more profound understanding. If the results of the future findings of the study based on students' perspectives complement the findings of the current study, it would be further contributory to explore how students remain aspired for higher education and higher social mobility despite experiencing inequitable education. Hassan (2016) explained that Pakistani schools are non-inclusive and inequitable for invisible and marginalized learners in society. Our study provides valuable insights into the critical need for reform in higher secondary education, advocating for practices that not only enhance the academic performances of students but also foster higher aspirations and holistic development among students. By addressing these issues, educators and policymakers can significantly contribute to shaping a more equitable, empowering, and practical education for students in Pakistan's society.

School education needs to be more equitable and fair for higher secondary school students, manifested in less fair teacher-student interactions, teachers' instructional practices, and assessments. Lowered students' aspirations for higher education and social mobility. This lacking in higher secondary schools points towards inadequacies at the policy, management and teaching levels that fail to inspire students towards higher education attainment and strive for higher social mobility. The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for reforms in educational practices at the higher secondary level. These reforms should prioritize the establishment of a more democratic and inclusive classroom environment, where fairness and equity in teacher-student interactions, instructional methods, and assessment practices are paramount. Engaging teachers in professional development programs that focus on equitable teaching strategies could bridge the gap between their perceptions and student experiences.

Additionally, involving students in the decision-making process regarding their education could lead to a more engaged and motivated student body.

In summary, the study illuminates the critical need for a shift in the educational approach at the higher secondary level. By fostering an environment of fairness, inclusivity, and student-centered learning, educators can significantly enhance student aspirations and engagement, laying a strong foundation for their future academic and social endeavors.

Lastly, we recommend the following based on our discussion and conclusions for administrative authorities, higher secondary school management, and future researchers:

1. School administrative authorities need to develop programs for school heads and teachers to enhance their understanding and implementation of fair educational practices at schools.
2. School management needs to maintain an open channel of communication with teachers and students and work on building and enhancing students' confidence so that they can comfortably communicate their concerns with school management.
3. School management should create opportunities for students to identify and develop aptitudes for subjects so that they can determine their unique potential as individuals.
4. There is a need to work to develop students' latest knowledge and skills, which are at par with market demands and in accordance with 21st-century skills.
5. School authorities need to run awareness programs at the school, tehsil, and district levels to inform parents, teachers, and students about the need for continuing higher education and prepare them for higher social mobility.
6. Monitoring systems for ensuring fair education for students should be developed.
7. Teachers must be educated and made aware of the importance of considering students' backgrounds in assessments to promote fairness in evaluations and feedback.
8. A qualitative study with teachers' populations needs to be conducted to investigate the phenomenon deeply and understand potential sources of students' aspirations for higher education and social mobility.
9. Conduct additional studies with students as a population to understand their perspectives and experiences of fair education, aspirations for higher education, and social mobility.
10. Further studies are required to understand parents' take on the phenomenon under study.

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