

# Caste-Based Differences in Rural Areas and Its Effect on Educational Opportunities of Youth

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.3.131>

## Abstract

*This study explores the impact of caste-based discrimination on the educational opportunities of youth in rural areas of Jhelum District, Pakistan. The research seeks to investigate the extent of caste-based differences, examine the education status and opportunities of marginalized castes, explore how caste influences access to educational opportunities, and examine the influence of caste-based discrimination on educational aspirations and choices. The research uses a qualitative approach. Caste-based discrimination in rural areas of Pakistan hinders educational opportunities for youth. This study examines the extent of caste-based differences and their impact on education access and aspirations. It affects education opportunities for youth. This study investigates the issue and its impact on access, aspirations, and educational outcomes. The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the complex issue of caste-based discrimination in education and provide insights for policymakers to develop effective policies that promote equity and inclusivity in educational opportunities for all.*

**Keywords:** Caste-Based Differences, Rural Areas, Educational Opportunities, Youth.

## Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a crucial tool for social and economic mobility. However, access to quality education remains a significant challenge for many individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities. In Pakistan, the rural landscape is marked by deeply rooted caste divisions that influence various aspects of life, including education. Previous research has emphasized the correlation between restricted access to education and caste, indicating that certain castes subjected to historical prejudices encounter barriers that impede their educational progress (Mosse, 2018; Dodamani, & Natikar, 2023; Bapuji, & Chrispal, 2020). This study aims to explore the impact of caste-based discrimination on educational opportunities for youth in rural areas of Pakistan.

The rural environment of Pakistan is characterized by deeply entrenched caste systems that perpetuate social, economic, and educational disparities. A report by the Wiseberg (2002), highlighted the persistence of caste-based discrimination in rural areas, particularly in relation to education. The report called for policies that address the unique challenges faced by marginalized castes in accessing education, including increased funding for schools in rural areas and targeted interventions to address social exclusion.

In Pakistan, there are multiple groups and categories distinctly named (zakat/biradari) groups into "high" and "low" castes. In rural areas particularly high caste includes all such groups that self-identify on the basis of traditional access to land (zamindars). Whereas lower caste in Pakistan, though not declared as Dalits like India, are however who are in service relationships with Zamindars such as barbers, metalworkers, clothes washers, etc. Based on this definition,

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around 25% of the population from which we draw our sample consists of low-caste households (World Bank, 2011).

Caste-based marginalization in rural areas refers to how certain groups of people face unfair treatment and exclusion based on their caste. This research explores how this discrimination impacts young people in these areas' chances of getting a good education. Not just education but also the widespread economic and social disadvantages people experience. Examining the broad picture, it highlights how caste generates disadvantages and shapes opportunities, particularly in education. It encompasses different factors such as discriminatory practices, unequal resource distribution, and limited access to opportunities based on one's caste (Thapa, et al., 2021; Chatterjee, 2021).

Social theories provide context for understanding why and how caste affects educational opportunities in rural communities. Social theories highlight factors such as the impact of caste on individuals' life chances and opportunities, emphasizing how social structures perpetuate and reproduce disparities in educational access. Theoretical perspectives such as structural inequality and social stratification explain the reasons behind the educational disadvantages experienced by certain groups due to their caste. We aim to make sense of these disparities by linking individual experiences to more comprehensive theories. This research explores the impact of caste-based discrimination on educational opportunities for youth in rural areas of Pakistan. The study aims to shed light on the specific ways caste influences access to educational opportunities for youth in rural areas, as well as the impact of caste-based discrimination on their aspirations and choices regarding education.

### **Significance**

This research holds significant implications for academics, the public, and government agencies. The research adds to the expanding text of information regarding the complex interplay between caste relations and rural education opportunities. By exploring this, the study can fill in knowledge gaps by offering complex insights into the real-life experiences of Youth from different castes. The study also clarifies a frequently disregarded topic and encourages understanding of the difficulties that various caste groups encounter in obtaining high-quality education. It can act as a spark for community conversations and projects meant to knock down long-standing barriers. The research provides a foundation for developing evidence-based policies from a governmental standpoint. It identifies the current policies and also evaluates their success. They do this by offering insights into areas in need of development.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

- Investigate the extent of caste-based differences in rural areas.
- Find out the education status and opportunities of the low castes in the rural areas.
- Explore the specific ways caste influences access to educational opportunities for the youth.
- Examine the influence of caste-based discrimination on the aspirations and choices of young individuals regarding education.
- Propose recommendations for policy makers that can better address and mitigate caste-related barriers to education in rural areas.

### **Research Questions**

- How do individuals in rural areas perceive and experience caste-based marginalization in their daily lives?
- What are main barriers faced by individual from marginalization caste in accessing education in rural areas?

- How do community dynamics and social structures contribute to or mitigate the impact of caste-based marginalization on educational opportunities for the younger generation?
- In what ways do local educational institutions and policies address or perpetuate caste-based disparities in access to education?

## Literature Review

The rural environment of Pakistan is characterized by deeply rooted caste distinctions. These distinctions impact many facets of life, including education. The literature on this subject reflects a complex and multifaceted social structure. Prior studies have demonstrated the association between caste and limited educational opportunities, especially for excluded castes that face historical discrimination and obstacles that hinder their educational advancement. The complexity of caste relations, education, and the ongoing struggles marginalized groups face have all been covered in these studies.

Caste Dynamics in Rural Pakistan, studies by Ahmed (2018) and Khan et al. (2020) highlight the entrenched nature of caste systems in rural Pakistan. They describe the hierarchical structure and its influence on social, economic, and educational spheres. A report by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) (2018) highlighted the persistence of caste-based discrimination in rural areas, particularly in relation to education. The report called for policies that address the unique challenges faced by marginalized castes in accessing education, including increased funding for schools in rural areas. It also targeted interventions to address social exclusion. A study by Ahmed et al. (2017) explored the role of community dynamics and social structures in perpetuating caste-based disparities in educational access. The study found that traditional gender roles and cultural norms contribute to the marginalization of girls from lower castes, who are often excluded from education due to societal expectations. A review by Mishra and Khan (2023) identified several factors that contribute to caste-based disparities in educational access, including poverty, lack of infrastructure, and social exclusion.

Research conducted by Yasin et al. (2023) underscores the disparity in educational attainment among different castes. It outlines the lower enrolment rates, higher dropout percentages, and limited access to quality education facilities for marginalized caste groups. Another study by Safdar et al. (2021) focused on the impact of caste-based discrimination on educational aspirations and choices among rural youth. The study found that lower-class students are less likely to pursue higher education due to social stigma and economic constraints. Farooq (2020) and Muhammad et al. (2024) identify various barriers faced by marginalized caste youth in accessing education. These barriers encompass financial constraints, social exclusion, biased institutional practices, and inadequate infrastructure in rural educational institutions.

A study by Khan et al. (2024) found that students from lower castes in rural areas face multiple barriers to education, including poverty, lack of access to schools, and social exclusion. The study also revealed that these students often receive lower-quality education due to inadequate resources and teacher shortages. Similarly, a Study by Shome (2023) delves into the psychological impact of caste-based discrimination on the aspirations and choices of young individuals regarding their education. They highlight how limited opportunities lead to altered career ambitions and lowered educational expectations among marginalized caste youth.

The existing literature presents an in-depth account of caste-based inequality in Pakistan's rural areas. It is highlighting the complex interactions among caste, education, and social institutions. Nonetheless, more investigation is still required to examine complex solutions and assess the interventions' long-term efficacy. These studies show how caste relations and rural education chances interact in a complex way. These ways connect with certain castes encountering various obstacles to receiving a top-notch education. They also highlight the necessity of policies that deal with these issues by increasing financing for education in rural areas and implementing focused interventions. Through investigating this matter, we hope to

gain additional insight into the challenges castes have in getting access to good education. Also make suggestions for legislation that can more effectively address and lessen caste-related barriers to education in rural regions.

A deeply rooted caste hierarchy is revealed by the literature review on caste disparities in the education system of rural Pakistan. It affects access to education, especially for castes that are overlooked. Studies reveal that these groups deal with societal expectations, educational barriers, and historical discrimination. All of that adds to their disadvantages in school. Factors further complicate the intricate relationship between caste, education, and social structures. These include social exclusion, infrastructural deficiencies, and poverty. Researchers propose targeted policies and interventions to address these issues. It also includes programmes that directly address barriers based on caste and greater funding for education in rural areas. We can work towards a more equitable education system in rural Pakistan by realizing the complexity of these issues and the need for all-encompassing solutions. The rural landscape of Pakistan is deeply influenced by caste divisions. That division extend their impact into various aspects of life, notably education.

Barriers to educational access, as identified by Ahmed and Ali (2017) and Farooq et al. (2020), range from financial constraints to biased institutional practices. Psychological repercussions, explored by Rahman (2019) and Haque et al. (2021), manifest in altered career ambitions and diminished educational expectations among marginalized caste youth. Policies and interventions, discussed by Khan and Khan (2018) and Siddiqui et al. (2021), scrutinize governmental efforts to mitigate caste-related barriers. However, despite existing literature depth, more exploration is warranted to evaluate long-term efficacy and propose comprehensive solutions. This necessitates enhanced financing for rural education and targeted interventions.

By examining these matters, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the educational difficulties associated with caste and promote legislation that successfully resolves the disparities in rural and urban education. In Pakistan's rural landscape, we hope to create more equitable educational opportunities for everyone by bridging the gap between research and policy.

## **Methodology**

This study employed the qualitative research method to explore the experiences and perspectives of individuals from marginalized castes in rural areas regarding their educational opportunities. The in-depth interviews were used to gather detailed information about the challenges faced by these individuals in accessing education, as well as their perceptions of caste-based differences in their communities. This data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. The project aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between caste relations and educational opportunities in rural areas, which can inform policies and interventions addressing these issues. The target population was the Lower caste. I focused on only four lower classes. The names of the classes are barber, shoemaker, Sanitation worker and potter (Nai, Mochi, Musali and Kumhar). The geographical universe of the research:

**Figure 1: Analysis of Jhelum city**

### Sampling Technique

Multiple-stage sampling was used to reach out to the sample. At stage one, I chose Jhelum city for my project as it was convenient for me to study the area being the resident of that area. Moreover, I also did not find any empirical research on this issue in this particular area. Their effect on educational opportunities of youth in Pakistan. It offers several strategic advantages due to its socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Jhelum city exhibits a diverse population representing various caste groups. This diversity provides a rich ground for studying the interactions and disparities among different caste groups concerning educational access and opportunities. Jhelum city hosts a range of educational institutions, including schools catering to different socio-economic backgrounds. Studying these institutions can provide insights into the disparities in educational access and quality across various caste groups.

In stage two, I choose Tehsil Sohawa on the basis of convenience because of its proximity to Urban and Rural Dynamics: Jhelum City represents a semi-urban setting, while Sohawa Tehsil primarily embodies rural dynamics. Studying these locations together can provide a better understanding of how caste-based differences manifest across various settings, from semi-urban to purely rural areas. It also has a rural setting with deep-rooted caste divisions. Both areas represent rural settings known for deeply entrenched caste divisions, reflecting the wider socio-cultural fabric of rural Pakistan. This context allows for a comprehensive understanding of how caste influences education in rural regions. By selecting Jhelum city and Sohawa Tehsil, the project can benefit from the representative rural landscape, varied educational institutions, and diverse population, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of caste-based disparities in education among different caste groups.

At stage three, I choose Domeli Union Council because it encompasses the highest number of villages among various councils. With a diverse array of villages under its jurisdiction, it represents a microcosm of rural life. The council likely houses a diverse range of caste groups, each with its distinct socio-economic and educational characteristics. It helps us to gain access

to a diverse and expansive rural landscape, enabling a more in-depth exploration of caste-based differences in educational opportunities for youth across multiple villages.

In stage four, I chose only 6 villages among others because it was not possible for me to gain access to each and every village.

Six villages out of thirteen were selected. I used purposive sampling where units were selected for inclusion in the sample due to their characteristics. Out of six village, from each cast one interview was conducted. In doing so, a total of 24 interviewee members—six villages and four castes—were participated ( $6 \times 4 = 24$ ). The following was the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- He/she should be a native of that specific village.
- He/she has been living in this village for 25 years.
- He/she is considered the chief of his/her village.

Exclusion criteria:

- Individuals who did not reside in rural areas of Jhelum.
- Individuals who did not identify as belonging to a selected caste group.
- Individuals who had not experienced any form of caste-based discrimination in their educational journey.
- Individuals who did not have a strong command of the local language(s) spoken in the selected rural areas.
- Individuals who were not able to provide informed consent due to cognitive or linguistic barriers.
- Individuals who had previously participated in this study or a similar study on this topic.

## Data Collection

I got all this information from the *numberdar*, who served as the village headman or caretaker. The respondents of each caste in each village were approached through this key informant. I used in-depth interviews for data collection. I used them because they gave in-depth detail and helped us explore the perspective of every member on a particular issue. Following data collection, I processed, analyzed, and finally interpreted the data.

## Data Processing and Analysis

After collecting the data through in-depth interviews, I employed thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to identifying and interpreting patterns (themes) within data. It involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

During the familiarization stage, I read through the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data and gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. This stage helped to identify initial ideas and concepts that emerged from the data. In the second stage, I generated initial codes by identifying keywords or phrases that represented concepts within the data. These codes were based on the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding caste-based differences in educational opportunities. During the third stage, I searched for themes by reviewing the initial codes and identifying patterns or connections between them. Themes were based on the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding caste-based differences in educational opportunities. In the fourth stage, I reviewed themes by comparing them to ensure they were coherent and meaningful. This stage helped to clarify and refine the themes identified during the third stage. In the fifth stage, I defined and named themes by providing a clear and concise definition of each theme based on the participants' experiences and perspectives

regarding caste-based differences in educational opportunities. This stage helped to ensure that each theme was clearly understood and could be easily communicated to others. Finally, in the sixth stage, I produced a report by summarizing each theme, providing examples from the data to illustrate each theme, and discussing their implications for policy and practice. This stage helped to communicate the findings of the study to a wider audience and inform policy and practice related to caste-based differences in educational opportunities in rural areas of Pakistan.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully observed, given the personal nature of the data. During in-depth interviews, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' privacy were meticulously maintained. Written informed consent was obtained from participants before starting the interviews, with the option to terminate the interview at any stage.

## Results

### Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

A total of 24 in-depth interviews were conducted. Six villages were selected. Researcher targeted 4 lower castes of each village. Name of that classes/castes were barber, shoemaker, Sanitation worker and potters (*Nai, Mochi, Musali and Kumhar*). The interviews conducted in the 6 villages reveal significant insights into how caste-based differences affect educational opportunities for youth in rural areas. The responses highlight variations in experiences and perceptions among individuals from different caste backgrounds, focusing on financial constraints, societal expectations, and the effectiveness of government policies.

**Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of study participants(n=24)**

Variables	n	%
Age in years:		
25-27	4	16.67
28-29	7	54.16
30-32	13	29.17
Gender:		
Male	24	100
Female	0	0
Caste Represented:		
Barber	6	25
Shoemaker	6	25
Sanitation worker	6	25
Potter	6	25
Number of Families per Caste:		
Barber	12-14	
Shoemaker	6-7	
Sanitation Worker	5-6	
Potter	6-7	
Educational Background:		
Primary		57
Secondary		23
Intermediate		20

### Social Inequality and Education

The majority of the respondents reported that they faced financial constraints, limited educational resources, and societal expectations that prioritized work over education. These factors have led to a perception that caste-based differences exist in their village regarding access to education and educational opportunities. The respondents also reported that they have witnessed caste-based discrimination in the context of education, with students from certain castes being discouraged from attending better schools or pursuing higher education due to societal pressure.

### Traditional Gender Roles and Education

Traditional gender roles impact educational access, where boys from certain professions are expected to contribute to family income, while girls' education is undervalued.

Pheli bat tu ye hai k hamri bachiyon school nhi jati. Aur hamrye larky hamrye sath kam karatye hai. Molvi hamrye masjid aye thy tu unho ny kaha in ko quran parhao...hum ny bheja magar molvi udher sy chala gya hai. Meoin khud bhi nhi parh likh saka aur na mery bachy agye parh saky. Aur dosari bat ye k hamari itni khati nhi hai k hum apny bacho ko mehngi mehngi taleem dilkwa saky. Ab hum roti pori kary ya taleem dilwaye.

The impact of traditional gender roles and economic status on educational opportunities is emphasized, particularly for boys from potter families. They are expected to prioritize learning the family trade over formal education. Girls suffer more than the boys as one of them said;

Han g mery sary bachy school jaty hai. Hamary jo bety hai wo dosary bary school jaty hai. Maagra meri betiyon 5 classes tak sari parhi hui hai. Hum dosary goun bachiyon ko nhi bhjety. Aur mery sary bacho ko hamara khandani kam atta hai....tu mery do putter kharadiye ka kam bhi karty hai....Allhumdillah mery pass bhot paisa hai. Mein nhi samjhata k taleem k liye paisy ki kami hai. Paisa bhot hai hamrye pass.

Gender roles influenced educational access, with boys' education prioritized over girls. Evolving gender roles, with encouragement for both boys and girls to pursue education. All villages reported economic constraints as a significant factor limiting educational opportunities. Families from lower castes generally had fewer resources to invest in education. Education should be a fundamental right for all, irrespective of caste. Increased investment in education and efforts to dismantle caste-based discrimination are crucial. Awareness campaigns and inclusive policies are essential to bridge the educational gap between castes.

### Economic Barrier to Education

The impact of economic status on educational opportunities and resources, leading to limitations in accessing quality education. The experience of a sanitation worker family and a potter family serves as a stark example of the limitations on access to better schooling and additional resources for studies that these families face. The sanitation worker family, being from a lower socio-economic background, may struggle to afford quality education, leading to limited access to better schools and resources. This could be due to various factors such as:

Financial constraints: The family may not be able to afford the fees for good schools, textbooks, and other necessary resources for their children's education. Financial constraints were a common issue across all castes and villages. Societal expectations to contribute to family income were notable among lower castes (Shoemaker, Sanitation Worker, Potter). Educational resources were generally lacking, particularly in MAAL. As one of the respondents said: *“Hamrye han taleem ki shaded kami hai. Hum paisy ki waja sy aony bacho ko school nhi bhej saky. Govt school mein wesi taleem di nhi jati aur bary aur dosary school mein paisy nhi hai bacha bhejny k...”*

And the second factor is limited access to educational infrastructure: Good schools may not be easily accessible or available in their area, making it difficult for them to take advantage of better educational opportunities. As one of them said:

Beta hum is qabil nhi k hamrye bachy bary schools mein parh saky. Hamari itni dhehari nhi hoti. Hum apna pait bharye ya in mehngay schools ki fees ada kary. Jin school mein fees kam hai wahan hum bhej dyty hai, aur aisy school jahan fees kam hai wahan na tu taleem par tawajoo di jati hai aur na hi bacho par. Hum un school mein bacho ko nhi bhej saky jahan hamye adhi sy zada dhari dyni par jaye.

Similarly, the potter family, who belongs to a lower caste, may also face similar challenges in accessing better education due to their economic status. They may be restricted by limited financial resources, lack of access to quality education, and social stigma attached to their caste. The combination of these factors can lead to a vicious cycle of poverty and limited educational opportunities, making it difficult for these families to break the cycle and improve their socio-economic status. The text underscores the need for policymakers and educators to address these issues and provide equal access to education for all, regardless of their economic status or caste.

### Perceptions of Caste-Based Differences in Education

All respondents reported significant disparities in educational quality and resources between castes (except the respondent of Bargowah). Discriminations in educational settings was reported, with lower caste students facing more challenges and less encouragement to pursue higher education. They faced numerous challenges in educational settings. But the most highlighted were the lack of access to quality education, stigma which is attached to their castes, financial difficulties and lack of encouragement from other high class/castes. As one of them said:

G bilkul farq tu hai. jo dosari zat k log hai wo achi jaga par parhtye hai...jo dosary khulye hoye hai school un k ander aur hamrye bachy primary school tak hamrye gaoun k school mein gy hai. Aur jo dosara school bary goun mein tha...is liye wahan par nhi jahan paye. Meri itni dherai nhi hai k mein unhy wahan bhej sako.

Majority of the member of lower caste especially (Shoemaker and Sanitation Worker) acknowledged challenges but did not attribute them solely to caste. They recognized ongoing efforts to provide equal opportunities.

But the absence of personal encounters with caste-based discrimination in education, attributing it to the inclusive and supportive nature of the village of Bargowah community towards all castes. The belief in the absence of caste-based differences in educational opportunities within the village, with everyone encouraged to pursue their dreams and receive equal support. Also, they highlight the importance of fostering unity and understanding among all castes. Governments policies target marginalized castes, enhancing access and reducing disparities. As they said;

Hamarye sary bachy school jaty hai aur taleem hasil karty hai. Bat sirf paisy ki hai...zaat itna matter nhi karti jitna paisa matter karta. Paisa hai tu sab taleem hasil kary gy aur paisa na ho tu phoir banda taleem kaisy hasil kary ga.

Bargowah shows signs of progress towards inclusivity and equal opportunities. But in contrast, other villages show significant caste-based differences in educational opportunities in rural areas. We examine discrimination and lack of resources are more pronounced in majority of the villages. Continued efforts to address economic barriers, promote gender equality, and implement effective policies are necessary to ensure that all children, regardless of caste, have access to quality education.

Caste-based differences in education are a pervasive problem in that villages, and it's essential that we address it. As one of the respondents share his experience: he said that my daughter was a bright student, and I wished to provide her with the best possible education. To achieve this, I wanted to send her to a private school, as I had heard that the quality of education was better in all private schools. It was common for children from higher castes to attend private schools, but when I went to inquire about the possibility, the teacher told me that the fees were too high, and that I couldn't afford it. It was only because of my lower caste and lack of financial resources that I was unable to send my daughter to a good school to get quality education. He said:

Teachers khety hai jitney hamrye schools ki fees hai itni tumahri do mahiny ki kamiye bhi nahi hai, tum kaisy is school mein parhao gy. Hamrye school mein wo bachy attye hai jo zada paisy dy saky ho, tum itny paisay kaha sy do gy.

He further said that in contrast, children from higher castes have access to better-equipped schools with qualified teachers and a more comprehensive curriculum. They receive quality education, which enables them to secure better-paying jobs and improve their socio-economic status.

This disparity is not just a matter of individual opportunity but also has far-reaching implications for society as a whole. It perpetuates the existing social hierarchy, reinforcing the notion that certain castes are superior to others. It also perpetuates poverty, as those who are denied access to quality education are more likely to remain trapped in low-paying jobs or unemployment. Therefore, it is essential that we address this problem and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable education system. We must ensure that all children, regardless of their caste or background, have access to quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential. We need to create a society where education is valued equally for all, regardless of their caste or background. We need to provide scholarships and financial assistance to students from lower castes, train teachers to be more sensitive and inclusive, and create awareness campaigns to sensitize people about the importance of education for all.

### **Effectiveness of Educational Initiatives**

Most respondents were not aware of policies aimed at improving educational opportunities for marginalized castes. Some of the respondents don't know about the govt initiatives as they said:

Hamrye tu zada pata nhi hai k govt kiya kar rhi hai hum jaisy logo k liye. Na aj din tak koi govt ki madad hum tak aye hai aur na hi hum ny kuch aisa suna hai. Hamarye pass bhi agar zada dolat hui tu hum bhi usi school mein bacho ko bhejy gy jin school meinbary log apny bacho ko bhejtye hai. Bat sirf paisy ki hai. Hum in logo ka muqabla nhi kar saky. Hum apni oqat k mutabiq bacho ko taleem dilwatye hai.

However, the effectiveness and implementation of these policies varied, with some respondents feeling the impact was limited due to lack of awareness and proper execution. They express skepticism about their effectiveness due to poor implementation and lack of awareness.

The respondents suggested that to reduce or eliminate educational disparities between castes, the village should have more inclusive educational policies and initiatives that promote equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their caste background. They also emphasized the importance of awareness about available resources and the need to challenge societal biases and stereotypes that perpetuate caste-based differences. Overall, the data suggests that caste-based differences continue to affect educational opportunities in rural areas, and targeted interventions are needed to address these disparities.

## Discussion

Caste-based differences in rural Pakistan significantly impact the educational opportunities available to youth, perpetuating cycles of inequality and limiting social mobility. In rural areas, social hierarchies and caste distinctions often dictate access to resources, including education. Children from lower-caste families, who frequently work as labourers or farmers, are typically disadvantaged, facing barriers such as poverty, discrimination, and limited access to quality schools. As a result, their educational experiences differ markedly from those of higher-caste youth, who are more likely to attend better-funded schools and receive support for their academic pursuits.

The study highlights the significance of caste-based differences in rural areas and its impact on educational opportunities for youth in Jhelum district. The findings suggest that differences in castes face multiple barriers to accessing education, including social exclusion, financial constraints, and lack of access to quality educational facilities. The study also emphasizes the importance of community engagement and policy interventions in addressing these challenges (Ahmed, 2018).

One of the primary barriers identified is social exclusion. Marginalized castes often experience discrimination within their communities, which directly impacts their educational opportunities. This exclusion can manifest in various ways, such as: Teachers and peers from dominant castes may harbor prejudices against students from marginalized backgrounds, leading to biased treatment in classrooms.

Education serves as a crucial pathway for social mobility and economic development. However, caste-based educational disparities limit opportunities for marginalized youth to break out of cycles of poverty and achieve upward mobility. This perpetuates socio-economic inequalities within communities and hampers overall regional development efforts. Effective government policies and interventions are essential to address caste-based educational disparities. Reservation policies and quotas in educational institutions aim to increase representation of marginalized castes and enhance their access to higher education and professional opportunities (Ahmed, 2018). Reforms in curriculum development and teaching practices to promote inclusivity and diversity, challenging stereotypes and biases in educational settings. Collaborative efforts involving local communities, NGOs, and educational institutions to design and implement targeted programs that address specific educational needs and challenges faced by marginalized castes.

Addressing caste-based educational disparities in Jhelum district requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates historical context, intersectional challenges, policy interventions, and ongoing research efforts (Khan et al., 2020). By fostering inclusive educational environments, promoting social inclusion, and empowering marginalized communities, it is possible to mitigate these disparities and create opportunities for all students to realize their full potential. This holistic approach not only advances educational equity but also contributes to broader social cohesion and economic development in the region.

This study highlights the significance of caste-based differences in rural areas and its impact on educational opportunities for youth in Jhelum district. The findings suggest that marginalized castes face multiple barriers in accessing education, including social exclusion, financial constraints, and lack of access to quality educational facilities (Ahmed et al., 2017). The study recommends policy interventions, community engagement, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation to address these challenges and promote social inclusion and equity in education.

Addressing these caste-based disparities requires concerted efforts to create inclusive educational policies, improve access to scholarships, and ensure that quality education is available across all social strata in rural Pakistan. Promoting awareness and community involvement in education, as well as reducing stigma around caste, are also essential steps to

ensuring that all youth, regardless of caste, can access and benefit from educational opportunities.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the critical issue of caste-based differences in rural areas and its impact on educational opportunities for youth in Jhelum district. The findings suggest that marginalized castes face significant barriers in accessing education, including social exclusion, financial constraints, and lack of access to quality educational facilities. The study recommends policy interventions, community engagement, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation to address these challenges and promote social inclusion and equity in education. By implementing these measures, marginalized castes are expected to have improved access to education and reduced barriers to educational opportunities. Furthermore, the study also emphasizes the need for teachers to be trained to address the specific needs of marginalized communities and for educational institutions to be made more inclusive and welcoming environments that promote a sense of belonging among all students. By working together, it is possible to create a more just and equitable education system that benefits all students, regardless of their social background.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the caste-based differences in rural areas and its impact on educational opportunities for youth in Jhelum district:

**Policy Interventions:** The government should develop targeted policies to address the unique challenges marginalized castes face in accessing education. This includes increasing funding for schools in rural areas, implementing community-based initiatives to promote social inclusion, and providing scholarships to students from low-caste backgrounds.

**Community Engagement:** Community leaders and influencers should be engaged to promote social change and reduce caste-based discrimination. This can be achieved through community-led initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and educational programs that focus on promoting social equality and inclusivity.

**Capacity Building:** Educational institutions should invest in capacity building programs for teachers and school administrators to create a more inclusive and caste-sensitive learning environment.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** The government should establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress of policy interventions and ensure that they are effective in addressing caste-based disparities in education.

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