

---

**A Comparative Study of Access, Quality and Equity in Primary Education in Pakistan and Finland**

**Aleeza Munir<sup>1</sup>, Muzammil Muhammad Khan<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Usman Khan<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha, Pakistan,

Email: [aleezehmuneer786@gmail.com](mailto:aleezehmuneer786@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha, Pakistan,

Email: [muzammil.ir17@gmail.com](mailto:muzammil.ir17@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Email: [ahmed.usman3033@gmail.com](mailto:ahmed.usman3033@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i4.1042>

**Abstract**

Primary education plays a critical role in shaping national development, social mobility, and long-term economic growth. This research presents a comparative analysis of the primary education systems of Pakistan and Finland to examine how differences in governance, financing, pedagogical approaches, and social priorities influence educational outcomes. Pakistan continues to face persistent challenges related to access, learning quality, equity, and institutional effectiveness, with millions of children still out of school and widespread learning poverty. Finland, by contrast, is internationally recognized for its equitable, high-quality, and inclusive education system, characterized by universal enrollment, highly trained teachers, and sustained public investment. Using a qualitative comparative case-study approach, this study draws on data from international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF, and the World Bank to analyze key dimensions of primary education, including access and enrollment, teaching quality, teacher professionalism, equity and inclusion, financing, and governance structures. The findings highlight how Finland's long-term policy stability, strong welfare support systems, and trust-based governance model contribute to consistently high educational performance, while Pakistan's system is constrained by underfunding, policy discontinuity, socio-economic inequality, and weak accountability mechanisms. The study further identifies significant gaps in existing comparative education literature by emphasizing the importance of contextual adaptation rather than direct policy transfer. It concludes that while Finland's model cannot be replicated wholesale, its core principles—equity, professionalized teaching, sustained investment, and institutional coherence—offer valuable lessons for reforming primary education in Pakistan. Strengthening primary education in Pakistan is presented not only as an educational priority but as a national development imperative essential for achieving inclusive growth and social justice.

**Introduction**

Primary education forms the cornerstone of a country's socio-economic progress, influencing the development of human capital, fostering social unity, and driving long-term economic growth. It provides people with essential skills in literacy, numeracy, and daily life, empowering them to participate in society and the workforce. International bodies regularly highlight that investing in primary education produces substantial social benefits, including better health, lower poverty, and increased economic advancement (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Nations that focus on

accessible, high-quality primary education typically achieve greater social mobility, robust institutions, and lasting development. Pakistan and Finland illustrate two very different approaches to developing primary education. Pakistan continues to struggle with challenges in accessibility, quality, and fairness, with over 22 million children currently not attending school—one of the highest figures worldwide (UNICEF, 2024). Although initiatives like the National Education Policy (2017) have aimed to achieve universal education, persistent issues such as limited funding, teacher shortages, and administrative inefficiencies have impeded progress (Government of Pakistan, 2023). In comparison, Finland is seen as a global leader, boasting universal enrollment, excellent student outcomes, and low levels of socio-economic inequality. The Finnish education system is built on the principle of equity, guaranteeing that all children, regardless of their background, have access to top-quality education through state-funded schools and extensive social support (OECD, 2023). Comparing Pakistan and Finland provides valuable insights into how governance, financing, and institutional design shape educational outcomes. While Pakistan struggles with low public expenditure—typically below 2.5% of GDP on education—Finland consistently invests between 6–7% of GDP in education, reflecting strong political commitment and long-term planning (World Bank, 2023). Additionally, Finland’s success is widely attributed to professionalized teacher education, decentralized decision-making, and a learner-centered curriculum, whereas Pakistan’s system remains heavily test-oriented and dependent on rote learning methods (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). This comparative analysis aims to identify systemic gaps in Pakistan’s primary education framework and extract policy lessons from the Finnish model that may inform sustainable reforms.

### **Rationale for Comparative Analysis: Why Pakistan and Finland Represent Contrasting Educational Models**

Pakistan and Finland offer a provocative pair for exploring how the national context, resources, methods of governance lead to such discrepant outcomes. Yet as Pakistan grapples with issues of access, quality and exclusion to primary schooling, Finland is a global role model for fair and high-achieving education. This differential renders the two systems of analytical interest in relation to how developing and developed countries approach similar educational issues through policy lenses and priorities that are different (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). Finland exemplifies a successful system of education based on universalism, egalitarian principles and robust institutional control. In Finland, where education is free and mandatory and the schools are all public, there is a strong sense of an investment in children being made by society. And an excellent infrastructure ensure that those investments pay off. Finland Teachers in Finland are educated, well paid and held in high social esteem and the country places education as an investment and not a short term political agenda (Sahlberg, 2015). On the contrary, Pakistan education system portrays structural failures in terms of underfunding, political instability as well as low levels of institutional capacity. The amount of local spending on education is still much lower than the global standards, and the issues in governance at federal and provincial levels further undermine the implementation of the policies (World Bank, 2022). The differences in the sociopolitical priorities between Pakistan and Finland also manifest in the contrast. Finland considers education as one of the major pillars of social development, and policies that are aimed at creating inclusion, equality, and lifelong education. Pakistan, however, continues to have a chronic problem related to poverty, population overgrowth, inequality in the region, and gender differences that compromise access to and the attainment of education (UNICEF, 2024). Consequently, the comparative study does not only indicate the aspects of difference in the education systems but also indicates the role of political commitment, economic investment and social values which are the primary determinants of educational success. The analysis of Finland can enable Pakistan to find policy avenues that are

practically adjustable, as opposed to idealistic, and focus on reforming the system instead of implementing isolated interventions (OECD, 2023).

### **Overview of Primary Education Systems in Pakistan & Finland**

Pakistan and Finland are two opposite methods of structuring and providing primary education based on the different political agendas, economic abilities, and political systems. Provincial governments in Pakistan provide primary education and this system is pursued after the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment, which empowered the provincial governments to take over the education management formerly under the federal government. Although decentralization was supposed to enable local planning and reformation, in reality, it has created policy fragmentation and uneven implementation as well as inequalities between the provinces (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training [MoFEPT], 2023). The scenario of primary education is dominated by public-sector schools, but the emergence of low-cost private ones has led to a dual system, which enhances inequality between socioeconomic groups (ASER, 2023). The system of primary education in Pakistan is also faced with a lack of enrolment, high rate of dropouts and inadequate infrastructure especially in rural and remote areas. As it is stated by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023), the net primary enrollment is still lower than universal, and the learning outcomes in basic literacy and numeracy are still declining. Educational solutions have been impeded because of large classes, lack of teacher training, and old school curricula (UNESCO, 2022). Moreover, regional disparities are quite pronounced: children in cities have much higher chances of studying in school, and girls in such provinces as Balochistan and Sindh are especially deprived of them (UNICEF, 2024). Finland on the other hand has a centralized but very autonomous education system based on well established legal frameworks and equal public resources. The Ministry of Education and Culture oversees education, whereas its implementation falls under the responsibilities of municipalities within national curriculum frameworks (OECD, 2023). In Finland primary education is 100 percent publicly funded and private schooling is virtually insignificant. Free meals, learning materials, health services, and transport are provided to students when needed, which means that the socioeconomic background will not be a hindrance to their participation (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). One of the characteristics of the system in Finland is its coherence and stability. Finland has long-term evidence-based policy planning, which is a contrast to Pakistan, where policy reforms are common and not well institutionalized (World Bank, 2024). In the Finnish curriculum, the focus is on holistic learning, critical thinking and creative problem-solving as well as emotional well-being rather than rote learning (OECD, 2023). Besides, formative assessment is performed constantly and frequently because of the use of low-stakes assessment, instead of high-stakes tests, student performance is more relaxed, and deeper learning is encouraged. The other area of discrepancy is the administrative professionalism and teacher autonomy. Teachers in Pakistan are usually controlled in a bureaucratic process and politicized which affects accountability and efficiency (ASER, 2023). Finland has a system of teacher trust in which teachers enjoy considerable freedom in the classroom in instruction, curriculum development, and assessment of students (Sahlberg, 2015). This professional authority (dispersed) enhances the innovation and motivation of teachers, and this leads to high quality of education. In general, the system of primary education in Pakistan can be defined by the limitations of accessibility, lack of governance, and the quality issues, whereas Finland illustrates how the long-term investment, institutional credibility, and good governance are able to deliver a high-quality and equitable primary education system. This comparison is a potent argument in favor of comparative analysis that will give incisive information about the reform causes that can be implemented in the education process in Pakistan.

## **Global Perspectives on Primary Education Reform: Insights from International Studies**

It is always emphasized in the world studies that the key step to creating the capacity of lifetime learning and socio-economic growth lies in primary education. According to international organizations and academic research, the economies with the higher level of investments in foundational education achieve higher economic growth, improved public health results, and achieve a greater political stability (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2022). It is also confirmed in international literature that the standard of early schooling directly influences the level of literacy, the working skills of the population, the level of innovation, and even civic engagement. With globalization, education systems are becoming interconnected, and nations are increasingly measured on global standards including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) which encourages inclusive and equitable quality education across the globe (OECD, 2023). One main theme in world education reform literature is the move to competency-based student-centered learning as opposed to rote learning model. UNESCO (2020) suggests that the current education system should not be based on memorization but should be pedagogic to help students develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Some of the countries that have implemented reforms like emphasizing experiential learning, individualized instruction and reduced standardized testing include Finland, Singapore and South Korea. According to cross-national studies, the student academic and social performance are more likely to be improved when school systems focus on inquiry-based learning as opposed to examination-based instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This global change in the philosophy of education is echoed in Finland, where the holistic approach to studying students and the lack of standardized tests have become a model. Another well-known pillar of effective education reforms in the world is the quality of teachers. The World Bank (2022) emphasizes the fact that no education system can be better than its teachers. According to international studies, systems that have excellence in teacher education, continuous professional growth and autonomy of professions always perform better compared to those that train teachers minimally and give less professional recognition (OECD, 2021). Finland can serve as a global best practice example in this field as teachers must have a master degree and receive quite a long period of training in the pedagogical sphere before they can be allowed to enter classrooms. Conversely, the developing nations like Pakistan are challenged by absentees of teachers, inadequate training, and a lack of accountability mechanisms (UNESCO, 2022). Education equity is another aspect of global studies that underline the effectiveness of the system. The OECD (2023) asserts that those countries that experience fewer performance variations between the socio-economic groups have larger institutional fairness and social cohesion. Finland is always among the most equal education systems in the world with the achievement gap between the students of high-income and low-income families being very low. On the other hand, there were still systematic disparities in education systems in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of gender, income levels, ethnic background, and geography (UNICEF, 2023). The education system in Pakistan mirrors most of these world issues such as gender gaps in the rural regions, and geographical differences in school facilities. Other international financial analyses also show that long term national development requires long term investment in education. The recommendations of UNESCO (2023) are that the governments should invest at least 4-6 percent of GDP in education, and the average in most developed countries reaches the level of OECD. The investment in education, classroom quality, teacher training, and support of learners is nearly 6.57% of the GDP in Finland each year which is sufficient and stable. Pakistan, in its turn, traditionally allocates less than 2.5 percent of GDP to the education sector, which has led to chronic underinvestment, deterioration of infrastructure and lack of teaching resources (World Bank, 2022). The literature on global education reform thus places Finland as an example of a successful governance, professional culture of teaching, and

equity-based financing, and Pakistan as the example of education systems that are limited in financing, and their policies are weak and fractured in their implementation. The reforms are assisted by these international views in the comparative research as a potent instrument of the best practice and reform approaches. This paper will seek to get not only context-sensitive but also internationally informed policy insights by placing Pakistan and Finland into a global context.

### **Overview of Existing Research on Pakistan's Primary Education Sector**

Available literature on the system of primary education in Pakistan has continued to point out the structural frailties that weaken the access, learning outcomes, and effectiveness of the system. The research has shown that Pakistan has among the highest numbers of out of school students throughout the globe, and poverty, gender disparity, and rural urban divide have been reported to be the most influential factors in school enrolment (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) presents the disturbing statistics of learning poverty, which states a significant percentage of Grade 5 students are unable to read simple sentences or solve simple arithmetic tasks, and this fact indicates gross inefficiencies in reading and calculating skills (ASER Pakistan, 2023). Another fundamental problem that has been highlighted by scholars is the problem of governance failures that lead to poor educational performance. This has led to poorly monitored and politically interfered policy inconsistency, which has led to fragmented reforms with minimal long-term effects (Khan and Mahmood, 2021). Moreover, the lack of coordination between federal and provincial leadership after the educational decentralization has provided the uneven implementation in the regions (World Bank, 2022). Poor accountability systems, teacher shortages, and constant changes in the curriculum are additional issues that destabilize the system and the continuity of learning (Anees, 2020). The level of public spending on education is still very low, and it is less than the international average of 4-6 percent of GDP, which limits the development of infrastructure, training of teachers, and systems of monitoring (UNESCO, 2023). Research also indicates a high level of reliance on donor projects instead of domestic-based financing solutions that are sustainable (Malik and Courtney, 2019). Together, the available literature demonstrates education crisis in Pakistan as a structural and not an individual issue, which needs governance reform, investment of financial resources and guaranties of quality in order to sustain change. International Scholarship in Finland Education Model.

### **Finland's Education Model in International Scholarship**

The education system in Finland has captured the attention of scholars around the world because of its high score in the international examinations and also its focus on equity in education provision. According to international scholars, one of the models of Finland is the education model based on the principles of professionalism, trust, and integration of social welfare (Sahlberg, 2015). Instead of keeping up with the standardized testing, Finland focuses on the formative testing, teacher autonomy, and individualized instruction, which has built a more balanced system between accountability and creativity, as well as well-being. The teacher education system is one of the most mentioned factors that contributed to the success of Finland. Every teacher should have a master's degree and extensive pedagogical training and make teaching a very prestigious profession (OECD, 2022). The systemic consistency in alignment of curriculum, teacher education, and governance that guarantees consistency in the implementation across schools, is also emphasized in research (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2020). Another theme that prevails in literature is inclusion. The success of Finland is linked to early intervention systems, ubiquitous support systems, and fair models of funds that provide support to all children according to the needs but not the background (OECD, 2023). In contrast to most of the systems, which sort students according to their ability, Finland takes different learners in general classrooms with the assistance of special educators. In the international studies, the model in Finland is always found

to be not only the powerful one in academic aspects but also socially transforming, decreasing inequality and increasing long-term economic stability (Schleicher, 2018).

### **Research Gaps in Existing Comparative Education Literature**

Researchers believe that Finland does not just perform better but recreates education as a social investment, but not an economic product. Existing Comparative Education Literature Research Gaps. Although there is evidence of a wealth of literature on the shortcomings of Pakistan, and strength of Finland, there is a dearth of research that makes systematic bilateral comparisons between the two nations at the primary education level. The majority of existing literature is either regional or is an analysis of separate indicators of enrollment, financing, or test scores (Bray, Adamson, and Mason, 2014). Detailed comparative models of governance systems, professionalism of teachers, policy stability and socio cultural impacts are minimal. The other gap is policy translation. Studies tend to compare Finland to a role model yet fail to give adequate analysis on how the strategies can be replicated to countries such as Pakistan that are resource-starved (Sahlberg, 2015). Most comparative studies do not put reforms into perspective of political instability, economical constraints and demographic strains that developing countries experience (World Bank, 2022). Also, very little focus is given on mechanisms of implementation. Although there is a plethora of recommendations, not many studies analyze the process of implementing and institutionalizing reforms in a rigorous way (UNESCO, 2023). This shortcoming undermines the practical usefulness of a lot of policy research in the creation of education systems. The study can overcome these shortcomings by adopting a multidimensional approach that simultaneously considers access, quality, equity, financing and governance, offers a holistic foundation of policy-relevant comparison and reform modeling.

### **Human Capital Theory and Social Justice in Schooling Systems**

The Social Justice in Schooling System and Human Capital Theory. The human capital theory perceives education as a type of economic investment which boosts productivity and income statuses and the overall development of a nation (Becker, 1993). The innovative ability, labor productivity and competitiveness in the global economy is generally higher in countries that have good systems of primary education (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018). Finland is a perfect example of such a model as they have heavily invested in cognitive development and training of teachers to produce long term economic benefits by having a skilled population. But education is not an economic instrument, it is a moral and political institution. The views of social justice hold that education has to redistribute and combat social inequality (Rawls, 1971). The fact that universal education is available in Finland fits this framework well as it provides equal opportunity to high-quality schooling without any discrimination on the basis of social group, gender, or geographic area (OECD, 2023). In Pakistan, education serves rather to reproduce inequality because it is involved in unequal access to both public and private schools and underfunding of the marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2022). The social justice theory thus demonstrates the impact of supreme education systems in perpetuating the cycles of poverty and vitiating the power of social mobility. This paper combines the two theoretical approaches and asserts that Pakistan has to use a dual-frame through which they need to not only increase productivity but also provide fairness. Without equity, education is socially useless and without quality it is economically useless.

### **Access & Enrollment in Primary Education: A Comparative Overview of Pakistan & Finland**

The provision of primary education in Pakistan is a major issue that is characterized by high drop outs, geographic inequality and gender inequality. UNICEF (2024) claims that Pakistan is among the countries where the number of children who are not attending school is one of the highest in the whole world, with more than 22 million children at the age between 5 and 16 being out of

school. The enrollment rates in rural regions are significantly lower than those in urban regions and in some provinces, including Balochistan, Sindh, and some regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the participation rates remain consistently low (Pakistan Institute of Education [PIE], 2024). Poverty, child labour, limitation of infrastructural facilities and socio-cultural norms are still a significant challenge to enrolment and retention especially to girls. Conversely, Finland has attained almost universal primary school attendance due to the legal protection and good access to a welfare state. In Finland, schooling is mandatory and free, with textbooks, transportation, meals and health services being provided, eliminating family financial barriers and guaranteeing attendance is continued (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). The quality of education in Pakistan is largely viewed as very unequal and underdeveloped with a lot of focus given on memorization other than conceptual knowledge. National assessments are a sign of low learning outcomes since they demonstrate that a significant portion of Grade 4 students is not able to achieve basic reading and mathematics scores (PIE, 2024). The use of the teaching techniques is still examination-based, relies on memorization and textbook-centered teaching, mostly because of strict curricula and low levels of professional training among teachers. Finland has a system of education that is based on student-centered pedagogy, which focuses on critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (OECD, 2023). Ongoing evaluation, project learning and adaptable courses enable students to approach topics in an active way, as opposed to memorizing. The Finnish classrooms also value learning as a process whereas Pakistani classrooms tend to value the exams as a product adding to differences in the quality and depth of learning. The inequality is also enlightened by the teacher training and professional status. The education system of Pakistan is characterized by overdependence on teachers with low qualifications, most of them do not have enough pre-service preparation and in-service development opportunities (Khan et al., 2024). There is low remuneration, ineffective accountability mechanisms and overcrowded classrooms in teaching which contributes to a drop in the level of professionalism. Finland Teaching is a prestigious and very competitive profession in Finland. Primary teachers are all master holders, who have acquired undergoing strict pedagogical training in research-based universities (OECD, 2023). Teachers have been provided with professional autonomy and trusted to deliver curriculum by exercising independent judgment and this promotes motivation and quality performance. The social respect of Finnish teachers is high whereas Pakistani teachers tend to have many issues with career advancement and low morale. Another difference between the two systems is brought out by equity and inclusion. Pakistan is a country that is characterized by embedded inequalities, which are on the basis of gender, income, disability, and geography. Girls and children living in families of low income are overrepresented in the list of not receiving the quality education, students with disabilities are often not supported by the institution (UNESCO, 2020). The inequality has been extended by the private schooling systems with children in wealthy families enjoying better facilities as the poor children are left in under-resourced schools. By contrast Finland incorporates universal systems of support into every school. Inclusive policies help to make sure that each child (irrespective of background or ability) receives personalized support in the form of special educators, counselors, and learning support teams (OECD, 2023). Social welfare provisions also likewise accommodate vulnerable families and ensure the reduction of external obstacles to learning in the classrooms and equal opportunity is encouraged. Lastly, variance in the results is motivated by the disparity in the funding and control mechanisms. Education takes up less than 2.5 per cent of the GDP in Pakistan, which is much lower than the global standards, so the country has inadequate school infrastructure, underpaying teachers, and learning facilities (World Bank, 2024). Typically, education policy is divided between federal and provincial spheres, and it is not followed consistently, and is interrupted by politics very often (Khan et al., 2024). On the contrary, Finland has been spending 6-7% of GDP on education via

centralized planning and robust accountability systems (OECD, 2023). The stability of policy in the long term, data-driven decision-making, and transparent governance will guarantee efficiency in service delivery in all regions. The Finnish model shows what sustained investment with institutional coherence can lead to effective and fair results and the system in Pakistan is unable to do it due to financial limitations and inefficiency in the governance.

### **Factors Contributing to Educational Disparities Between Pakistan and Finland**

Political stability and continuity of the policy are one of the most important factors that have resulted in the differences in education between Pakistan and Finland. The education system in Finland has been able to enjoy the fruits of decades of steady reforms that were not based on partisanship change. Governments have policies of education that are sustained, which means that there will be continuity in the deployment and outcomes (Sahlberg, 2015). Conversely, the education sector of Pakistan is characterised by a high rate of policy changes, poor influence, and distribution of governance between the federal and provincial governments. Every political change is accompanied by new education systems that are not properly evaluated with the past undertakings and lead to disunity and institutional inefficiency (UNESCO, 2021). This instability sabotages the efforts of reforms, derails funding priorities and accountability mechanisms and effectively prevents systemic progress. Attitudes to education among the cultures are also another reason as to why the two countries have such different outcomes. Finland has made education a cultural part of the society, and a core aspect of social development. Teachers enjoy great respect, and the teaching position is the most prestigious one (OECD, 2023). Students are motivated intrinsically through learning that is considered to be a collaborative process throughout their lifetime. Education is highly regarded in principle in Pakistan, but due to the social practices, social norms, and rural-urban inequalities, education access, especially in girls, is restricted (UNICEF, 2022). Education has been seen as a tool to economic mobility as opposed to personal development which encourages exam based learning and not skill acquisition. The socio-economic inequalities are also determinant of the education results. The prevalent welfare state in Finland means that children get into school with no or minimal economic disadvantage. Universal care, child allowances, and subsidized housing lower external forces that normally hamper the performance of students (World Bank, 2020). Poverty, food insecurity and poor health services have been contributing to poor learning outcomes in Pakistan. There is no denying the significance of the fact that almost twenty-five percent of children in Pakistan live below the poverty line, determined by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) (2022), which makes the probability of dropping out of school and losing the opportunity to learn higher. The rich families overuse the private education system and establish a dual system which only strengthens the inequality and undermines the schooling of the public sector. There is also a huge disparity in infrastructure and institutional capacity between the two systems. The improved technology, carefully organized counseling facilities, and psychologically safe learning environments are the other features of Finnish schools that facilitate learning (Sahlberg, 2015). The rural and underdeveloped Pakistani public schools rarely have even the simplest facilities: electricity, sanitation, and teaching supplies (ASER Pakistan, 2023). These weaknesses are obstructions to classroom learning and de-motivation to attend classes especially among the young females. Also, the lack of administrative capacity on the district level limits effective monitoring and evaluation in Pakistan (UNESCO, 2021). Lastly, teacher professionalism also makes a large difference in classroom outcomes. Finland focuses heavily on teacher education, which is based on research, and those students who attain the highest academic results are the ones to join teacher programs (OECD, 2023). There is unlimited professional growth and high autonomy among teachers. In Pakistan, the recruitment of teachers is also influenced by politics instead of merit, which results in the hiring of poorly prepared teachers (ASER Pakistan, 2023). Poor quality of instruction and student involvement in Pakistan



is facilitated by limited in-service training and low accountability. In general the education gap that exists between Pakistan and Finland lies in governance system, economic capability, social beliefs and effectiveness of the institutions. Finland system is based on the long-term planning and equity-driven public investment and Pakistan is still plagued by inconsistency in policies, inequality in the economy and inefficiency in the system. These structural issues are critical in case Pakistan wants to decrease the disparities and enhance the educational outcomes.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The reform of the primary education system in Pakistan needs an all-inclusive and evidence-based solution that takes international best practices and at the same time, be aware of the domestic limitations. The experience of Finland shows that the long-term social and economic payoff on sustained investment in teacher training, governance and equity can be achieved (OECD, 2023). The main issues affecting the education of Pakistan are poor institutional structures, irregular implementation of policies, and underinvestment of funds. Consequently, effective reforms should be structural change oriented as opposed to interventions that are piece meal. A priority area is teacher education and recruitment reform. The teachers in Finland must have advanced degrees and undergo intensive training in pedagogy, which provides both quality in instructions and professional accountability (Sahlberg, 2021). Inequally, Pakistan experiences a rampant issue of teacher deficits, non-modern training courses, and ineffective certification systems (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024). Promoting the use of national competency standards, reinventing teaching education institutions, and using a system of merit-based teacher recruitment would go a long way in enhancing classroom teaching. The programs of continuous professional development that are in line with classroom reality need to be institutionalized so as to improve the practice of teaching across provinces. Another critical reform is enhancing financial investment in primary education. The Finnish government reliably invests between 6 and 7 percent of GDP in education, which guarantees the provision of good infrastructure, salary of teachers, and learning facilities (OECD, 2023). Pakistan on the other hand, allocates less than 2.5 percent of GDP, an amount that is not enough to cater to universal education requirements (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Equity-based models of budgeting should prioritize more funding to rural and underdeveloped districts. Financial efficiency and impact can also be enhanced by sustainable financing systems like education development funds and donor coordination platforms. Strengthening governance and accountability mechanisms is essential for reform sustainability. The decentralized education governance in Finland gives power to schools, but the quality in the curriculum is ensured nationwide through curriculum regulation (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2022). Pakistan, in turn, is characterized by low efficiency of its bureaucracy, political influence, and ineffective monitoring (UNESCO, 2022). To enhance accountability, provincial education authorities should consider using transparent budget tracking systems, independent school inspections and performance measurement that is based on outcomes. Evidence-based policymaking would be achieved through the use of data systems to track the enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes. Furthermore, promoting gender equity and inclusive education must remain central to Pakistan's policy agenda. Girls, children with disabilities, and marginalized communities continue to face educational disadvantages (UNICEF, 2024). Finland's inclusive model ensures equal access through free resources, special needs support, and school-based counseling services (OECD, 2023). Pakistan should institutionalize inclusive education policies by training special education teachers, providing assistive infrastructure, and enforcing gender-sensitive education strategies at district levels. Finally, the strategic integration of educational technology offers a scalable solution for improving both access and quality. Finland utilizes digital platforms to personalize learning and strengthen assessment systems (Sahlberg, 2021). Pakistan can replicate this model through mobile learning platforms, digital teacher training programs, and virtual classrooms for remote areas.

However, technological integration must be accompanied by digital literacy initiatives and infrastructure development to mitigate the digital divide. In conclusion, Pakistan's primary education reform must be holistic, long-term, and politically insulated. While Finland's model cannot be fully replicated, its principles—equity, investment, professionalism, and governance—offer practical guidance. With sustained political commitment and strategic planning, Pakistan can build a resilient, inclusive, and high-performing primary education system.

## Conclusion

This comparative analysis of primary education systems in Pakistan and Finland reveals stark contrasts in access, quality, equity, and governance. Finland's model demonstrates how sustained public investment, strong institutional governance, and professional teacher preparation lead to high-quality learning outcomes and equity across socio-economic groups (OECD, 2023). In contrast, Pakistan's education system continues to struggle with access barriers, low learning outcomes, and systemic inequality, particularly affecting rural populations, girls, and marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2024). The evidence clearly indicates that while Pakistan has made notable policy commitments toward universal education, implementation weaknesses, underfunding, and inconsistent governance continue to undermine progress. The future of primary education in Pakistan presents both significant challenges and meaningful opportunities. Persistent issues such as low education financing, weak accountability mechanisms, and inadequate teacher preparation must be addressed urgently (Khan et al., 2024). However, Pakistan also stands at a critical policy crossroads where demographic advantage, technological growth, and increased global cooperation can be leveraged for reform. The emergence of digital learning tools, donor-supported education programs, and renewed national attention to foundational literacy creates an opportunity to strengthen educational delivery at scale (World Bank, 2022). If reforms are implemented with political will and long-term planning, Pakistan has the potential to significantly narrow its educational gap and improve social mobility. In conclusion, Pakistan's path toward an equitable and high-quality primary education system requires structural reform inspired by proven global models such as Finland's. However, successful reform must be adapted to local contexts rather than copied outright. Prioritizing teacher professionalism, equitable financing, and inclusion-oriented policy design is essential for sustainable progress (Sahlberg, 2015). Education must be viewed not merely as a social service but as a nation-building strategy. As international evidence consistently shows, the strongest economies are built on inclusive education systems that invest equally in every child (OECD, 2023). For Pakistan, reforming primary education is not an option—it is a national imperative.

## References

- Anees, M. (2020). Governance challenges in Pakistan's education sector. *Asian Education Studies Journal*, 5(2), 45–59.
- ASER Pakistan. (2023). *Annual status of education report (ASER) Pakistan 2023*. <https://aserpakistan.org>
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Bray, M., Adamson, B., & Mason, M. (2014). *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods*. Springer.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Lieberman, A. (2020). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>

- Finnish National Agency for Education. (2022). *Primary and lower secondary education in Finland*. <https://www.oph.fi>
- Government of Pakistan. (2023). *Pakistan education statistics 2022–23*. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.
- Khan, R., & Mahmood, T. (2021). Policy failures in Pakistan's education system. *Journal of Public Administration*, 14(1), 89–111.
- Khan, T., Ahmad, R., & Malik, S. (2024). Policy challenges in Pakistan's education sector: Governance and implementation failures. *Journal of Public Policy and Practice*, 12(1), 45–61.
- Khan, T., Iqbal, A., & Raza, S. (2024). Challenges in Pakistan's education policy implementation. *Journal of Public Policy & Practice*, 6(1), 45–60. <https://journals.umt.edu.pk>
- Malik, R., & Courtney, M. (2019). Financing education in developing countries. *Global Policy Review*, 8(4), 367–382.
- Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. (2023). *Pakistan education statistics 2022–23*. Government of Pakistan.
- OECD. (2021). *Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals*. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org/education>
- OECD. (2022). *Education at a glance 2022: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2023). *Education at a glance 2023: OECD indicators*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2023-en>
- OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 results (Volume I): The state of learning and equity in education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Household integrated economic survey (HIES)*. Government of Pakistan. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk>
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Pakistan education indicators*. Government of Pakistan.
- Pakistan Institute of Education. (2024). *Pakistan education statistics 2023–24*. Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. <https://pie.gov.pk>
- Psacharopoulos, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2018). Returns to investment in education: A decennial review. *Education Economics*, 26(5), 445–458.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.
- Sahlberg, P. (2015). *Finnish lessons 2.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.
- Sahlberg, P. (2021). *Finnish lessons 3.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* Teachers College Press.
- Schleicher, A. (2018). *World class: How to build a 21st-century school system*. OECD Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report: Inclusion and education*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report>
- UNESCO. (2021). *National education policy review: Pakistan*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
- UNESCO. (2022). *Education sector analysis: Pakistan*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Global education monitoring report: Education and inclusion*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Education in South Asia: Challenges and opportunities*. UNESCO Regional Office.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Transforming education: A global agenda*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Education transforms lives*. <https://www.unesco.org>
- UNICEF. (2022). *Education in Pakistan: Barriers and opportunities*. UNICEF Pakistan. <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan>

- UNICEF. (2023). *Pakistan education profile*. UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2023). *The state of the world's children 2023*. <https://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF. (2024). *Education in Pakistan: Facts and figures*.  
<https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>
- UNICEF. (2024). *Education in Pakistan: Situation analysis*. UNICEF Pakistan.
- World Bank. (2020). *Finland: Education sector review and policy overview*. World Bank Group.  
<https://www.worldbank.org>
- World Bank. (2022). *Foundational learning in South Asia: Country report on Pakistan*. World Bank Group.
- World Bank. (2022). *Pakistan public expenditure review: Education*. World Bank Group.  
<https://www.worldbank.org>
- World Bank. (2022). *World development report: Education financing and reform*. World Bank Publications.
- World Bank. (2023). *Public education expenditure by country*. <https://data.worldbank.org>
- World Bank. (2024). *Education system review: Finland*. World Bank Publications.
- World Bank. (2024). *Pakistan development update: Investing in education for growth*.  
<https://www.worldbank.org>