

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN CONTEXTS OF CHILD POVERTY: A SCOPING REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH GAPS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18162001>

Received
28 October 2025

Accepted
21 November 2025

Published
31 December 2025

ABSTRACT

Despite global commitments to provide all children with equal and fair education, educational inequalities continue to be a major obstacle to improving learning outcomes for children living in poverty. Children impacted by poverty are disproportionately marginalized from educational systems or subjected to substandard schooling due to intersecting obstacles, including gender norms, disability, geographic isolation, conflict, and constrained household resources. This scoping paper compiles national, regional, and global evidence on educational equity and inclusion in the context of child poverty, aiming to delineate current knowledge, pinpoint significant trends, and underscore critical deficiencies in the evidence base. Utilizing academic literature, policy reports, and program evaluations, the paper examines the influence of poverty on educational access, participation, learning experiences, and outcomes for marginalized children, including those out of school and those facing learning poverty. The synthesis identifies consistent patterns of exclusion associated with structural inequalities, inadequate system capacity, and poorly targeted interventions, while also highlighting deficiencies in evidence concerning intersectionality, implementation efficacy, and the long-term effects of inclusive education policies. The paper also looks at how existing evidence has shaped the design of policies and programs. It points out that there are gaps between high-level promises to include everyone and how those promises are put into practice. The paper suggests priority areas for future research based on the gaps that have been found. These include better ways to measure exclusion, stronger research on implementation, and evaluations of equity-focused interventions that take the context into account. The paper ends by talking about what policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can do about the problem. It stresses the need for evidence-based strategies that deal with the root causes of educational exclusion and help create more fair and open education systems as a way to cut down on child poverty.

Key words: Child poverty, Educational equity, Educational inclusion, Evidence synthesis, Marginalised children, Scoping review

INTRODUCTION

Equity and inclusion in education are major topics of conversation in global education, especially when it comes to child poverty and social inequality. In the last twenty years, a lot of progress has been made in making formal

education more accessible around the world. However, this progress has not led to equal participation or learning outcomes for all children. Many children are still not allowed to go to school or go to schools that don't give

them good learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2020). Poverty continues to be one of the most persistent factors that affects educational disadvantage. It affects access to school, the quality of instruction, and learning achievement in many different situations.

Children living in poverty around the world face many barriers that make it hard for them to go to school. These include not having enough money, not having enough good schools, not getting good public services, and being socially isolated. These obstacles are frequently exacerbated by gender, disability, ethnicity, geographic isolation, and exposure to conflict or displacement (UNICEF, 2021). Consequently, educational systems often perpetuate existing inequalities instead of alleviating them. Research shows that kids from low-income families are more likely to start school late, drop out early, repeat grades, and finish school without learning basic reading and math skills (World Bank, 2018).

International frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stress that quality education that is fair and open to everyone is necessary for sustainable development and reducing poverty (United Nations, 2015). Even though this is the case, there are still differences in access to and outcomes of education both between and within countries. The idea of educational equity stresses the importance of giving resources and support based on need, while the idea of inclusion stresses the importance of bringing marginalized groups into mainstream education systems. These methods work together to fix structural inequalities that make it harder for poor kids to get an education.

There has been a lot more research on educational equity and inclusion, but the evidence is still spread out across different fields, areas, and methods. Many studies concentrate on particular populations or interventions, failing to provide a holistic understanding of how poverty influences educational exclusion and learning outcomes on a large scale. Consequently, a scoping review is essential to synthesize current knowledge, discern patterns and deficiencies, and establish a basis for subsequent research and policy formulation in this domain.

Significance

Many people agree that educational equity and inclusion are important ways to cut down on child poverty and encourage long-term social and economic growth. Education is very important for determining job opportunities, participation in the job market, health outcomes, and civic engagement. When schools don't help kids who are poor, the gap between rich and poor kids gets bigger over time (OECD, 2019). So, fixing unfairness in education is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a smart way to invest in people.

From a policy point of view, it's important to know how poverty affects access to education, participation, and learning outcomes in order to make good decisions. Governments and development actors are putting more and more emphasis on making decisions based on evidence. However, evidence that is scattered and not consistent can make it harder to design and carry out interventions that focus on fairness. Policies may ignore marginalized groups or not deal with the root causes of exclusion if there isn't a clear summary of the research that is already out there.

Scoping papers are very important for research projects like DARE-RC that want to reduce child poverty. They help by showing what evidence is already out there, what gaps there are, and how to prioritize research. This paper synthesizes national, regional, and global literature to enhance the understanding of the robustness of evidence and the necessity for further investigation. The results are meant to help researchers, policymakers, and practitioners come up with inclusive education strategies that meet the needs of kids living in poverty.

Problem Statement

Despite worldwide promises to provide fair and inclusive education, kids who live in poverty still have a hard time getting into schools and getting the same results as other kids. Access alone has not led to sustained participation or meaningful learning for marginalized populations, even though enrollment rates have gone up in many areas (UNESCO, 2020). Structural inequalities, inadequately funded schools, and ineffective execution of inclusive education policies perpetuate enduring

disparities in educational opportunities. Current research frequently focuses on singular aspects of inequality, such as gender or disability, without adequately exploring the intersection of poverty with various forms of disadvantage. Furthermore, evidence regarding the efficacy and execution of equity-oriented interventions is inconsistent across various contexts. Numerous studies prioritize access indicators over learning quality, hindering comprehension of learning poverty among children who are enrolled yet fail to attain fundamental competencies (World Bank, 2019). This fragmented evidence base limits policymakers' capacity to formulate targeted, scalable, and effective interventions to combat educational exclusion associated with child poverty.

Objectives

- To map existing global and regional evidence on educational equity and inclusion in contexts of child poverty
- To identify key trends and patterns in how poverty affects educational access, participation, and learning outcomes
- To highlight evidence gaps and research priorities to inform future research, policy formulation, and programmatic action

Research Questions

- What evidence exists on educational equity and inclusion for children living in poverty at global and regional levels?
- How does child poverty influence educational access, participation, and learning outcomes?
- What gaps remain in the existing evidence base, and where is further research most urgently needed?

Gaps

The current literature demonstrates numerous enduring deficiencies. First, evidence is not evenly spread out across regions, and there isn't much synthesis of findings from low-income and unstable areas. Second, intersectional analyses that investigate the interplay between poverty, gender, disability, and geographic disadvantage are still in their infancy. Third, a lot of research puts more emphasis on access than on the quality of learning, which means that we don't know enough about how learning

poverty affects enrolled children. Finally, there isn't much research that looks at how well inclusive education policies work in practice, which makes it harder to make decisions based on evidence. These gaps show how important it is to put together all the evidence in one place so that future research and policy work can be based on it. These gaps in evidence are especially important in countries like Pakistan, where child poverty and lack of access to education are still big problems.

Literature Review

Educational Equity and Child Poverty

A lot of research shows that there is a strong link between child poverty and unequal education. There are many ways that poverty affects education, such as not having enough money to pay for school, not having access to early childhood education, being sick and not eating well, and not having a good place to learn (World Bank, 2018). Kids from poor families are more likely to miss school, have lower attendance, and do worse in school than kids from richer families (Faisal, et al., 2023).

Educational equity frameworks stress the importance of fixing these differences by giving resources based on need instead of equally. Comparative studies, on the other hand, show that education systems often don't make up for socioeconomic disadvantage, which leads to gaps in achievement that last (OECD, 2019). In many cases, schools in poor areas don't have enough qualified teachers, learning materials, or infrastructure, which makes it harder for them to help students who need extra help.

Inclusion and Marginalized Populations

The research on inclusive education talks about how some groups, like girls, kids with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and people who have been forced to move, are left out. Poverty makes these exclusions worse by making it harder to get help and making people more likely to be discriminated against (UNICEF, 2021). Studies show that children from marginalized groups are more likely to be out of school and less likely to be in good learning environments.

Many countries have adopted policies for inclusive education, but evidence shows that

implementation is still weak because of a lack of resources and institutional capacity (UNESCO, 2020). Because of this, inclusion is often just a policy goal for children living in poverty, not a reality.

Learning Poverty and Educational Quality

Recent studies underscore that mere access to education is inadequate to rectify educational disparities. Learning poverty characterized by the inability to read and comprehend a basic text by the conclusion of primary education—disproportionately impacts children residing in poverty (World Bank, 2019). Too many students in a classroom, teachers who aren't trained well, and not enough time for lessons are all linked to poor learning outcomes.

Learning poverty has serious long-term effects, such as lower levels of education and fewer job opportunities. Even though more people are aware of this problem, there is still not enough evidence on what works to help marginalized children learn better, especially in places with few resources.

Policy and Implementation Evidence

Policy analyses reveal a growing acknowledgment of equity and inclusion in national education strategies. However, evidence shows that there are still big gaps between policy promises and actual actions (OECD, 2020). Evaluations of educational programs indicate that targeted interventions can enhance access and learning outcomes; however, issues concerning scalability, sustainability, and contextual adaptation persist (Faisal, et al., 2024). Implementation research is notably restricted, hindering comprehension of the practical functioning of inclusive education policies. This gap is particularly significant in nations like Pakistan, where substantial numbers of children are still not enrolled in educational systems and the prevalence of learning poverty remains elevated (Makhdum & Mian, 2012). It is therefore necessary to combine existing evidence in order to set research priorities and help make policies and programs work better.

Educational Inequality and Child Poverty in Pakistan

The education system in Pakistan shows deep and long-lasting inequalities that are linked to child poverty, differences between regions, and uneven public investment. Even though the constitution says everyone has the right to an education, access to schools is still very unequal based on income, province, gender, and whether you live in a city or a rural area (Government of Pakistan, 2018). Kids from poor families are much less likely to go to school, finish primary school, or move on to secondary school. This keeps the cycle of poverty going from one generation to the next. Empirical evidence demonstrates that poverty-related obstacles, including direct educational expenses, child labor, and household instability, persist in hindering sustained educational engagement (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023).

Differences between provinces make educational inequality even worse. Enrollment and completion rates differ significantly among provinces, with children in Balochistan and rural Sindh facing the least access and the worst learning outcomes (World Bank, 2020). The 18th Constitutional Amendment led to fiscal decentralization, which made provinces more responsible for education. However, because of differences in administrative capacity and funding, equity-focused reforms have not been put into place consistently. Studies indicate that decentralization has not inherently resulted in enhanced educational inclusion for disadvantaged children, especially in underprivileged areas (Aslam & Kingdon, 2021).

Gender, Poverty, and Educational Exclusion

Gender-based disparities persist as a significant characteristic of educational inequality in Pakistan, especially within impoverished households. Girls from low-income families face multiple barriers that are linked to poverty, cultural norms, safety concerns, and early marriage. This makes it harder for them to enroll and more likely for them to drop out than boys (UNESCO, 2021). Evidence consistently demonstrates that poverty exacerbates gender disparities in education,

with the most disadvantaged girls facing the highest levels of exclusion.

Research indicates that although gender equality has progressed in certain urban regions, rural and marginalized communities remain disadvantaged (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023). There are policies in place to improve girls' education, but they aren't very effective because they are hard to put into action and don't focus on the right groups. The literature underscores the necessity for equity-oriented strategies that consider both economic and social limitations encountered by girls in impoverished settings, rather than singular gender-specific interventions.

Learning Poverty and Quality of Education in Pakistan

Recent evidence shows that the education system in Pakistan is very bad, especially for kids from poor families. A lot of kids who go to school can't learn basic reading and math skills, according to both national and international tests (World Bank, 2019). The quality of schools, the skills of teachers, and the state of the classroom all have a big effect on learning poverty. These are usually the worst in rural and low-income areas.

A lot of poor kids go to public schools that don't have enough resources, which makes it harder for them to learn because there aren't enough teachers, there are too many students, and there aren't enough teaching materials (Andrabi et al., 2020). These systemic problems show that educational inclusion in Pakistan can't just be understood in terms of access; it also needs to address differences in the quality of learning (Makhdam & Mian, 2012). Still, there isn't enough evidence about what works to help poor kids learn better, and the evidence that does exist isn't very clear.

Policy Commitments and Implementation Challenges

Pakistan has made policy commitments to provide fair and inclusive education through national education frameworks and provincial sector plans. The literature, however, points out big differences between what policies say they would do and what they actually do. Weak monitoring methods, poor data disaggregation, and insufficient attention on marginalized

groups impede the implementation of equity-oriented reforms (Government of Pakistan, 2018).

There is still not much study in Pakistan that focuses on implementation, especially when it comes to how inclusive education policies work in schools and communities. Current research frequently focuses on policy formulation rather than analyzing the adaptation of interventions to local contexts or their sustainability over time (Faisal, et al., 2024). This divide makes it harder to know what works, for whom, and in what situations. Evidence synthesis is crucial for shaping future research objectives and directing more effective policies and programs to mitigate educational exclusion associated with child poverty.

Methodology

This study utilizes a scoping review methodology to integrate current information regarding educational fairness and inclusion in the context of child poverty. A scoping review is an appropriate methodological approach given the breadth, complexity, and interdisciplinary nature of the topic, as well as the study's objective of mapping the existing evidence base, identifying key themes, and highlighting gaps rather than assessing intervention effectiveness or establishing causal relationships. The design is in line with well-known scoping review methods that stress transparency, methodical searching, and narrative synthesis to help set research priorities and find policy-relevant insights (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020). This method is especially useful for evidence-based projects like DARE-RC, which want to improve research and decision-making about how to reduce child poverty.

The main tool for this study is a structured framework for extracting and synthesizing evidence that was created to systematically gather relevant information from the sources that were included. The framework is meant to keep track of bibliographic information, geographic focus, population characteristics, study goals, methodological approaches, key findings, and limitations related to educational equity and inclusion. The instrument also shows how studies think about poverty, equity, and inclusion, as well as how well they deal with issues like learning outcomes, access,

participation, or implementation. Using a standardized extraction tool makes sure that all sources are the same and makes it easier to compare different types of evidence, such as peer-reviewed studies, policy reports, and institutional publications.

Data collection entails a methodical examination and analysis of existing literature sourced from various origins to guarantee thorough representation of pertinent evidence. Established databases that are often used in education and social policy research are used to find academic literature. Grey literature, on the other hand, comes from international organizations, development agencies, and government repositories. The search strategy uses pre-set keywords that have to do with child poverty, educational equity, educational inclusion, marginalized groups, children who are not in school, and learning poverty. To ensure relevance and rigor, inclusion criteria prioritize studies that explicitly investigate the relationship between poverty and educational access, participation, or learning outcomes. To get a wide range of evidence and points of view, both qualitative and quantitative studies are included. Documents that do not directly pertain to education or child poverty, or that lack significant empirical or analytical substance, are excluded.

The sample for this scoping review comprises published and publicly accessible documents that fulfill the inclusion criteria. The unit of analysis is the body of literature itself, not individuals or institutions. The sample comprises peer-reviewed journal articles, global and regional reports, national policy documents, and program evaluations that examine educational equity and inclusion concerning child poverty. The sample size is intentionally large to show how spread out the evidence is in this area. The main focus is on global and regional literature, but country-specific evidence, including studies about Pakistan, is included to put the findings in context and show how they fit into the bigger picture of global issues. A purposive sampling method is employed to choose pertinent documents for the review. This method makes it possible to deliberately include sources that are directly related to the study goals and the DARE-RC focus on the

importance of evidence and its usefulness for policy. In scoping reviews, purposive sampling is suitable because the aim is not statistical representativeness but rather thorough coverage of pertinent evidence domains. To improve the sample's strength, efforts are made to include literature from a variety of geographical areas, methodological traditions, and institutional sources. This makes sure that the synthesis shows a lot of different points of view and lowers the chance of favoring one discipline or region over another.

The synthesis process entails qualitative thematic analysis of the extracted data. After evidence extraction, studies are categorized based on recurring themes pertaining to educational equity, inclusion, poverty-related obstacles, learning outcomes, and policy implementation. Patterns and discrepancies among studies are discerned, and results are synthesized narratively to emphasize prevailing trends, areas of agreement, and points of dispute within the literature. This qualitative synthesis method makes it possible to combine different types of evidence and helps find research gaps and areas that need more attention. Quantitative results from individual studies are presented descriptively without aggregation or statistical meta-analysis, aligning with the objectives of a scoping review.

This study's reliability is bolstered by the implementation of transparent and replicable methodologies. Using clear rules for who can and can't be included, as well as a standard tool for extracting data, makes the review process more consistent. Writing down search strategies, screening choices, and data extraction protocols makes methodological transparency even stronger. Scoping reviews don't usually include tests of inter-rater reliability, but following established methodological frameworks makes the results more reliable. The review process is systematic, so other researchers can use the same methods to repeat or build on the analysis.

Validity is tackled with a few different strategies that are meant to make the synthesis more credible and trustworthy. The thorough search strategy and the use of different kinds of evidence support content validity. This makes sure that the review covers all of the existing research on educational equity and inclusion in

situations where children are poor. Using widely accepted definitions and conceptual frameworks about equity, inclusion, and poverty from international organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank makes construct validity stronger. The use of reliable and peer-reviewed sources makes the evidence base even more credible. External validity, defined as the generalizability of findings across various contexts, is bolstered by the incorporation of studies at global, regional, and national levels. The review synthesizes evidence from various settings to identify patterns that transcend specific contexts, while also recognizing contextual variation. Adding literature that is specific to Pakistan helps put the findings in context without making them less useful in other situations. Internal validity is preserved by meticulously considering the study's scope and limitations, with findings analyzed in the context of the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the included sources.

This study has very few ethical concerns because it only uses secondary data from sources that are open to the public. There are no human participants, and no primary data is being collected. Even so, ethical research practice is upheld by accurately representing original sources, citing them correctly, and avoiding misinterpretation or overgeneralization of results. The synthesis seeks to accurately represent the evidence and recognize the limitations present in the current literature.

In general, this methodological approach allows for a thorough and policy-relevant synthesis of evidence on educational equity and inclusion in situations where children are living in poverty. The study systematically maps existing research, identifies gaps, and highlights areas for future investigation, thereby establishing a solid foundation for research prioritization and evidence-informed decision-making in accordance with the objectives of the DARE-RC programme.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis compiles patterns identified in the reviewed literature to encapsulate the scope, focus, and attributes of existing evidence regarding educational equity

and inclusion in the context of child poverty. The analysis utilizes peer-reviewed studies, global and regional reports, and national policy documents to discern prevailing themes concerning access, participation, learning outcomes, and systemic obstacles. Instead of looking at datasets from individual studies, the descriptive analysis puts together results from many studies to give an overview of trends in the evidence base.

The literature reviewed consistently correlates educational inequity with socioeconomic disadvantage. Research indicates that children in poverty are disproportionately represented in out-of-school populations and are more inclined to attend under-resourced schools when enrolled (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Descriptive evidence demonstrates that barriers associated with poverty function at various levels, encompassing household limitations, deficiencies in school resources, and overarching governance issues within the system. These barriers are not the same in all situations, but they do show the same patterns in low- and middle-income countries.

The literature also shows that indicators related to access, like enrollment and attendance, are much more important than learning outcomes.

Access continues to be a significant issue, especially for marginalized groups; however, an increasing amount of evidence underscores the widespread occurrence of learning poverty among children who are enrolled in school yet do not attain essential skills (World Bank, 2019). Descriptive findings indicate that learning poverty is disproportionately prevalent among children from low-income households, rural regions, and marginalized communities.

Gender and disability consistently manifest as prevalent factors of exclusion within the descriptive evidence. Girls from low-income families have even more problems because of money problems and social norms. Children with disabilities are still one of the most excluded groups in the world (UNESCO, 2020). National and international reports consistently show that there are differences between provinces and between rural and urban areas in Pakistan. Poorer areas have lower enrolment rates, higher dropout rates, and worse learning outcomes (World Bank, 2020).

Table 1: Key Themes Identified in the Reviewed Literature

Theme	Description	Evidence Focus
Access to education	Enrollment, attendance, and school participation	High
Learning outcomes	Literacy, numeracy, learning poverty	Moderate
Poverty-related barriers	Household income, child labor, nutrition	High
Gender inequality	Girls' enrollment and retention	Moderate
Disability inclusion	Access to inclusive learning environments	Low
Policy implementation	Translation of equity policies into practice	Low

Table 1 shows that the current evidence base is mostly focused on barriers to access and poverty, while disability inclusion and policy implementation get less attention. This imbalance shows that research needs to shift its focus to the quality of learning and the effectiveness of implementation.

Inferential Analysis

In this scoping review, inferential analysis entails deriving evidence-based conclusions from patterns identified across various studies, rather than performing statistical hypothesis testing. The analysis delineates relationships between child poverty, educational exclusion, and learning outcomes that are consistently documented in the literature by comparing findings across various contexts and populations.

The studies reviewed indicate a significant correlation between household poverty and educational disadvantage. It is assumed that children from low-income families are more likely to be excluded because of direct costs, opportunity costs, and less access to good schools (World Bank, 2018). These associations are bolstered by evidence demonstrating that poverty-related disparities endure even in scenarios where overall enrolment rates have increased, signifying that mere expansion of access is inadequate to attain equity.

Stages of Educational Exclusion Linked to Child Poverty

Household Poverty
 ↓
 Limited School Access
 ↓
 Irregular Attendance
 ↓

Poor Learning Conditions

↓
 Learning Poverty

↓
 Early Dropout / Exclusion

This figure shows the steps that child poverty takes to lead to educational exclusion. It shows that being poor not only makes it harder to get into school at first, but also makes it harder to keep going, learn, and do well in school. The transition from restricted access to educational resources illustrates how disadvantages compound over time, thereby elevating the risk of premature dropout and prolonged exclusion from educational systems.

Inferential patterns also arise concerning learning outcomes. The literature demonstrates that children residing in poverty are considerably more susceptible to experiencing learning poverty, even while attending school (World Bank, 2019). This implies that poverty affects not only access but also the circumstances of learning, encompassing teacher quality, classroom resources, and instructional time. The conclusion derived from these findings is that inclusive education strategies must encompass both accessibility and the quality of learning to be effective.

Comparative evidence indicates that equity-focused policies are more effective when supported by targeted resource allocation and robust implementation mechanisms. Research on policy reforms indicates that inadequate governance, insufficient oversight, and a lack of data disaggregation diminish the effectiveness of inclusion-focused strategies (OECD, 2020). In Pakistan, analogous conclusions are derived from sector analyses, suggesting that decentralization has not uniformly resulted in

enhanced outcomes for marginalized children owing to inconsistent provincial capacity (World Bank, 2020).

Table 2: Inferred Relationships Between Poverty and Educational Outcomes

Dimension	Inferred Relationship	Supporting Evidence
Poverty and access	Higher poverty → lower enrollment	UNESCO (2020)
Poverty and learning	Higher poverty → higher learning poverty	World Bank (2019)
Gender and poverty	Poverty amplifies gender gaps	UNICEF (2021)
Policy strength	Strong implementation → improved equity	OECD (2020)

Table 2 shows that studies have found the same kinds of relationships over and over again. The evidence indicates that poverty serves as a primary catalyst for educational exclusion and

suboptimal learning outcomes, whereas the efficacy of policy is dependent on implementation capacity.

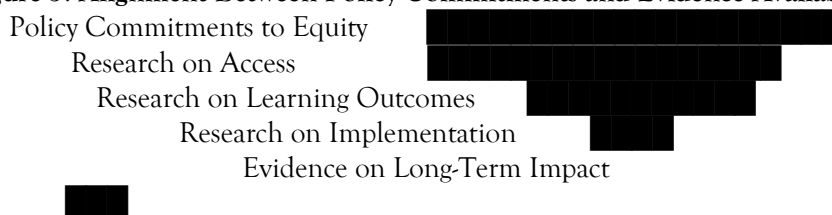
Figure 1: Conceptual Distribution of Evidence Focus in Reviewed Studies



Figure 1 shows how much the reviewed literature focuses on important thematic areas. The graph shows that there are a lot of studies on barriers to education and poverty, but not enough on disability inclusion and policy implementation. This distribution underscores the necessity for future research to focus on overlooked domains, specifically implementation processes and inclusive learning environments. The descriptive and inferential analyses together show that the evidence we have about educational equity and inclusion is not evenly spread out across themes and groups of people. A significant body of research elucidates the correlation between poverty and educational access; however, there is a paucity

of studies investigating the quality of learning and the efficacy of implementation. This disparity constrains policymakers' capacity to formulate interventions that encompass the entire range of educational disadvantage. The analysis indicates that educational exclusion due to poverty is multifaceted and cannot be remedied through interventions limited to a single sector. To work, responses need to be integrated and include things like improving access, the quality of learning, and targeted help for groups that are often left out. In Pakistan, where child poverty, regional disparities, and educational deprivation persist as substantial challenges, the ramifications of these findings are especially pronounced.

Figure 3: Alignment Between Policy Commitments and Evidence Availability



This graph shows how policy promises of educational equity don't match up with the evidence that supports them. There are strong commitments at the policy level, but most of the evidence is about outcomes related to access. There is much less research on how to put these policies into action and what their long-term effects will be.

This misalignment shows that decisions are often based on incomplete evidence, which shows that we need more implementation-focused and long-term research to support effective and long-lasting equity-oriented education reforms.

In general, the data analysis shows how important it is to move research and policy focus away from metrics that measure access and toward metrics that measure learning outcomes and implementation processes. This scoping review lays the groundwork for future research prioritization and evidence-based decision-making aimed at reducing child poverty through more equitable and inclusive education systems by identifying patterns and gaps in the current evidence base.

Findings

The results of this scoping review demonstrate that child poverty consistently influences educational equity and inclusion across global, regional, and national contexts. The evidence reviewed shows that poverty is still a major cause of educational exclusion, affecting both access to school and learning outcomes for children who are already at risk. In various contexts, children living in poverty are overrepresented in out-of-school populations and are more inclined to attend under-resourced schools that restrict substantial learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

One important finding is that there is an imbalance in the current evidence base. A lot of the writing is about indicators related to access, like enrollment and attendance. There is less writing about learning quality and outcomes. Expanded access has been realized in numerous contexts; however, evidence consistently indicates that children impacted by poverty frequently finish their education without obtaining essential literacy and numeracy skills, thereby perpetuating widespread learning

poverty (World Bank, 2019). This pattern shows that education reforms that focus on access don't do enough to fix deeper forms of inequality.

The results show that educational exclusion is not just one thing. Poverty often intersects with gender, disability, geographic location, and social marginalization, exacerbating disadvantage. Girls from impoverished households encounter increased risks of dropping out due to economic pressures, domestic obligations, and societal expectations, whereas children with disabilities continue to be among the most underserved populations in global education systems (UNESCO, 2020). Nonetheless, the evidence concerning these intersecting dimensions is inconsistent, with disability inclusion and intersectional analyses receiving insufficient empirical scrutiny.

Another important finding is about how policies are put into action. Although numerous nations have implemented education policies focused on equity and inclusion, evidence indicates a continual disparity between policy intentions and actual practices. Weak governance, limited administrative capacity, and inadequate monitoring systems undermine the effectiveness of inclusive education strategies (OECD, 2020). Studies often record policy intentions without assessing the implementation of interventions at scale or their adaptation to local contexts.

In the context of Pakistan, the literature reviewed corroborates these global trends while emphasizing challenges unique to the context. Evidence shows that there are still differences between provinces, between rural and urban areas, and between income groups. Children from poor families have lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and worse learning outcomes (World Bank, 2020; UNICEF Pakistan, 2023). Learning poverty is still a big problem, especially in public schools that don't have enough resources and serve low-income areas. Even though policies recognize fairness and inclusion, problems with putting them into practice and differences in provincial capacity still slow progress.

Discussion

The results of this scoping review bolster current theoretical and empirical insights regarding the nexus between education and child poverty, while also highlighting significant deficiencies in the existing evidence base. The enduring link between poverty and educational exclusion highlights the necessity to transcend limited definitions of access in favor of more holistic strategies that tackle learning quality, system capacity, and structural inequality. Increased enrollment has been a major goal of global education efforts, but the evidence shows that just having access to education isn't enough to break the cycle of poverty that passes from one generation to the next (World Bank, 2018). The prevalence of access-oriented research illustrates historical priorities in education policy and underscores a significant deficiency in comprehending children's experiences in school after enrollment. Learning poverty is a big problem, especially for kids who live in poverty. It calls for more focus on the quality of instruction, the skills of teachers, and the resources available at the school level. If these issues aren't dealt with, education systems could make exclusion worse by making learning outcomes worse instead of better (World Bank, 2019).

The literature's narrow emphasis on intersectionality diminishes the efficacy of equity-focused strategies. Although gender and disability are commonly identified as aspects of exclusion, there is a paucity of studies that systematically investigate the interplay between these factors and poverty in influencing educational outcomes. This gap makes it harder for policymakers to come up with targeted solutions that address the complicated problems that marginalized children face. The lack of research that focuses on disabilities is especially worrying because children with disabilities are more likely to be poor and not go to school (UNESCO, 2020).

Another important area of concern is how policies are put into action. The evidence indicates that formal commitments to equity and inclusion frequently exceed the institutional capacity to effectuate substantial change. Weak monitoring systems, not enough data disaggregation, and not enough research on how to put things into practice make it

harder to make decisions based on evidence (OECD, 2020). These problems are especially bad in decentralized education systems, where different levels of administrative capacity can make regional differences worse.

In Pakistan, the discussion of findings emphasizes the significance of global evidence while reinforcing the necessity for context-specific research and policy interventions. Ongoing child poverty, disparities among provinces, and educational deficiencies highlight the inadequacies of current reforms in addressing marginalized groups. National and provincial policies recognize the significance of equity and inclusion; however, the absence of implementation-oriented evidence limits their efficacy. These problems are very similar to the goals of programs like DARE-RC, which stress the need for better evidence systems to guide action.

In general, the discussion shows that education research and policy need to be changed to focus on integrated, equity-centered approaches that deal with both access and learning quality. To come up with effective ways to reduce child poverty through education, we need to strengthen the evidence base by doing implementation research, intersectional analysis, and better measuring of learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This scoping review combines what is already known about educational equity and inclusion in situations of child poverty. It gives a full picture of important trends, gaps, and what they mean for research and policy. The results show that poverty is still a major cause of educational exclusion and poor learning outcomes, even though access to schooling has improved around the world. Educational disparities endure across various dimensions, such as gender, disability, and geographic location, perpetuating overarching trends of social and economic inequality.

The review points out big problems with the evidence base, especially the focus on access over learning quality and the lack of focus on policy implementation and intersectional disadvantage. These gaps make it harder for policymakers and practitioners to come up with and implement effective interventions on a

large scale. To stop poor people from being excluded from school, we need to use strategies that are based on evidence and take into account access, learning outcomes, and system capacity.

In the context of Pakistan, the findings highlight the imperative of tackling enduring inequalities and educational deprivation among children from impoverished families. There are policy promises to fairness and inclusion, but they don't have much of an effect because it's hard to put them into action and there isn't enough evidence to show what works in practice. To support more fair and open education systems, it is important to strengthen the national evidence base through systematic synthesis and targeted research.

In conclusion, this scoping review establishes a foundational evidence base to guide future research priorities, policy formulation, and programmatic initiatives aimed at alleviating child poverty. The study enhances the strategic and effective utilization of evidence to promote educational equity and inclusion by mapping existing knowledge and pinpointing significant gaps.

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