

EDUCATIONAL DUALISM IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: EXPLORING THE STRUCTURAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DIVIDE BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND MADRASSAS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by exploring the structural and socio-cultural divide between formal school and madrassa education systems. The research was grounded in a qualitative interpretivist paradigm and employed semi-structured interviews alongside curriculum analysis to generate in-depth insights from educators in both systems. A purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to select 46 participants, equally divided between school and madrassa educators. Thematic, content, and discourse analysis were applied to interpret the data.

Findings revealed that educational dualism is sustained by two interrelated dimensions. Structurally, inadequate school infrastructure, governance weaknesses, and financial constraints limit access to quality formal education, thereby increasing reliance on madrassas. Socio-culturally, religious values, parental preferences, and community norms strongly influence educational choices, reinforcing the legitimacy of madrassa education. Curriculum analysis further highlighted a clear epistemological divide, with schools emphasizing modern, skill-based knowledge and madrassas focusing on religious instruction. This separation contributes to unequal learning outcomes and divergent socio-economic opportunities.

The study concludes that educational dualism is not merely an institutional arrangement but a deeply embedded socio-cultural and structural phenomenon. It has significant implications for equity, human capital development, and social mobility. Policy interventions are required to improve public education quality and promote greater curricular integration between the two systems.

Keywords: Educational dualism; madrassa education; school system; socio-cultural factors; structural inequality; human capital; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; education policy; curriculum divide; Pakistan education system

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of socio-economic development, human capital formation, and social cohesion. However, in many developing countries, including Pakistan, the education system is characterized by structural fragmentation and institutional dualism. This dualism is particularly evident in the coexistence of formal school systems and religious seminaries

(madrassas), which operate as parallel yet largely disconnected educational streams. The persistence of such dual systems has significant implications for equity, social mobility, and national integration, especially in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where socio-cultural traditions and economic constraints strongly shape educational choices.

The school-madrassa divide in Pakistan reflects more than a curricular distinction; it embodies deeper socio-economic and ideological cleavages. Formal schools typically offer standardized curricula aligned with national and global educational frameworks, emphasizing science, technology, and market-oriented skills. In contrast, madrassas primarily focus on religious instruction and moral development, often catering to marginalized populations by providing free education, lodging, and meals (Areej, 2021). This functional differentiation reinforces educational stratification, as students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are channeled into distinct educational trajectories with unequal opportunities for employment and social advancement.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the dual education system is further shaped by structural and socio-cultural dynamics. On the structural side, limited access to quality public schooling, inadequate infrastructure, and governance challenges continue to constrain the effectiveness of formal education systems (Ahmad et al., 2022). These deficiencies often push families—particularly in rural and underprivileged areas—toward madrassas, which are perceived as accessible and cost-effective alternatives. On the socio-cultural side, religious traditions, parental perceptions, and community norms play a crucial role in influencing educational preferences. Empirical evidence suggests that cultural values, geographical factors, and parental beliefs significantly contribute to the increasing enrollment in madrassas, as well as transitions from formal schools to religious institutions (Shah & Inamullah, 2022).

Moreover, madrassas serve important social functions beyond education, particularly in contexts where formal institutions fail to reach vulnerable populations. They provide inclusive access to education regardless of socio-economic status and are often viewed as culturally appropriate spaces, especially for female education in conservative communities (Zafar, 2020). At the same time, concerns persist regarding the limited integration of modern subjects, employability outcomes, and the broader implications of

maintaining parallel education systems without coordination or regulatory coherence (Ullah et al., 2023).

The existence of educational dualism thus raises critical questions about social inequality, national identity formation, and the alignment of education with economic development goals. While both systems contribute uniquely to society, their lack of integration perpetuates disparities in learning outcomes, skill acquisition, and life opportunities. In the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where cultural norms, economic limitations, and institutional gaps intersect, understanding the structural and socio-cultural dimensions of this divide is essential for designing inclusive and effective educational policies.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore the nature and implications of educational dualism by examining the structural barriers and socio-cultural determinants that sustain the divide between school and madrassa education systems. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to contribute to policy discourse on educational reform and integration in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Despite sustained policy efforts to expand access and improve quality, the education system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains characterized by a persistent dualism between formal schools and madrassas. These parallel systems differ substantially in curriculum orientation, governance structures, resource allocation, and pedagogical approaches. As a result, they channel students into divergent educational and occupational trajectories, reinforcing inequalities in learning outcomes, employability, and social mobility.

Structural constraints—such as inadequate public school infrastructure, teacher shortages, uneven quality assurance, and governance gaps—limit the reach and effectiveness of formal schooling, particularly in rural and low-income communities. Concurrently, madrassas provide accessible and low-cost education, often meeting basic welfare needs (e.g., boarding and meals), which increases their attractiveness for economically disadvantaged households. Beyond these

structural factors, socio-cultural determinants—including religious values, parental perceptions, community norms, gender considerations, and trust in institutions—play a decisive role in shaping educational choices.

However, existing research often examines either school education or madrasa education in isolation, with limited integrative analysis of how structural and socio-cultural forces interact to sustain this divide. There is also insufficient empirical evidence on how this dualism translates into differential learning outcomes and labor-market prospects within the provincial context. Consequently, policy interventions remain fragmented and lack a coherent framework for bridging the divide. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining the structural barriers and socio-cultural determinants underpinning educational dualism and their implications for equity and human capital development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Questions

1. What are the key **structural factors** contributing to the persistence of dual education systems (schools vs. madrassas) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. How do **socio-cultural determinants** (e.g., religious values, parental perceptions, community norms) influence students' enrollment in schools versus madrassas?
3. To what extent does educational dualism lead to **differences in learning outcomes, skills development, and employability prospects**?
4. How do households **weigh costs, access, and perceived returns** when choosing between schools and madrassas?
5. What **policy and institutional gaps** perpetuate the divide, and what mechanisms could facilitate **integration or alignment** between the two systems?

Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine the structural and socio-cultural determinants of educational dualism and assess its implications for equity, learning outcomes, and

human capital development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the structural barriers (infrastructure, governance, access, cost, quality) influencing the coexistence of school and madrasa systems.
2. To evaluate the role of socio-cultural factors (religious beliefs, parental attitudes, gender norms, community influence) in shaping educational choices.
3. To compare learning outcomes and skill acquisition between students in schools and madrassas.
4. To assess the impact of educational pathways on employability and future economic opportunities.
5. To propose policy recommendations aimed at reducing fragmentation and promoting a more integrated and inclusive education system.

Significance of the Study

This study on educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is significant as it addresses a critical and persistent structural issue in the province's education system—the coexistence of formal schooling and madrasa education as parallel, largely disconnected systems. By systematically examining the structural and socio-cultural determinants that sustain this divide, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how educational pathways are shaped in contexts marked by inequality, resource constraints, and strong cultural influences.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature on educational stratification, institutional dualism, and human capital formation. It extends existing knowledge by integrating structural factors (such as access, governance, and infrastructure) with socio-cultural determinants (such as religious values, parental attitudes, and community norms), thereby offering a more holistic explanation of educational decision-making in developing regions. This integrated approach helps bridge the gap in literature that often treats school and madrasa systems as separate analytical domains.

From a policy perspective, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for education planners and policymakers in Pakistan. Understanding the drivers of dual education systems can assist in designing more inclusive and coordinated education reforms aimed at reducing fragmentation, improving curriculum alignment, and enhancing institutional linkages between formal and religious education systems. Such reforms are essential for promoting equity, improving learning outcomes, and ensuring that education contributes effectively to national development goals.

From a practical and social perspective, the study is significant because it highlights the implications of educational dualism on students' future opportunities, particularly in terms of employability, skills development, and social mobility. By identifying the consequences of segmented education pathways, the research can help stakeholders—including educators, community leaders, and development organizations—better understand how current structures influence inequality and social cohesion.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how educational dualism operates in a culturally complex and resource-constrained environment, and it offers actionable insights for fostering a more integrated, equitable, and development-oriented education system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Literature Review

Educational systems in many developing countries are often characterized by institutional fragmentation, where formal schooling coexists with parallel non-formal or religious education systems. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as educational dualism, has been widely discussed in the context of Pakistan, where madrassas and formal schools operate under different governance structures, curricula, and ideological orientations. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this duality is particularly pronounced due to socio-cultural conservatism, uneven access to public education, and economic deprivation in rural areas.

Conceptualization of Educational Dualism

Educational dualism refers to the coexistence of two distinct education systems that differ in content, objectives, and institutional frameworks. One system is typically aligned with state-regulated formal education emphasizing science, technology, and market-relevant skills, while the other focuses on religious instruction and moral development. Scholars argue that such dual systems often lead to stratified human capital formation, where students are channelled into different socio-economic trajectories based on their educational pathways (Rahman, 2004; Malik, 2021).

In Pakistan, madrassas have historically played an important role in providing free education, particularly to marginalized populations. They not only serve religious purposes but also function as welfare institutions by offering accommodation and basic necessities, making them an attractive alternative for low-income families (Andrabi et al., 2006).

Structural Determinants of School-Madrassa Divide

Structural constraints remain a central explanation for the persistence of dual education systems. Limited access to quality public schools, insufficient infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, and weak governance have significantly reduced trust in formal education systems in rural Pakistan (UNESCO, 2022). These deficiencies are particularly evident in regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where geographic remoteness and security challenges further restrict educational access.

Research indicates that households facing financial constraints often opt for madrassas due to their cost-free nature and provision of boarding facilities (Ali & Sanborn, 2020). This structural advantage reinforces madrassas as viable alternatives in underserved communities, thereby sustaining the dual system.

Socio-Cultural Determinants

Beyond structural factors, socio-cultural influences play a decisive role in shaping educational choices. Religious beliefs, cultural norms, and parental

perceptions significantly influence whether children are enrolled in schools or madrassas. In conservative societies, madrassas are often perceived as more culturally appropriate and morally secure environments, particularly for female students (Bano, 2010).

Studies also highlight that community endorsement and religious legitimacy contribute to the sustained preference for madrasa education. Parents may prioritize religious education over formal schooling due to perceived moral benefits and societal acceptance within their communities (Fair, 2008).

Educational Outcomes and Social Implications

A key concern in the literature is the disparity in educational and labor-market outcomes between students from the two systems. Formal school graduates are generally better positioned for employment in public and private sectors due to their exposure to modern curricula, while madrasa graduates often face limited employment opportunities outside religious institutions (Zaman, 2018).

This divergence contributes to social stratification and inequality, as educational pathways increasingly determine socio-economic mobility. Furthermore, the lack of curricular integration between the two systems limits opportunities for skill diversification and national cohesion.

Although existing studies have examined either madrasa education or formal schooling independently, there is limited empirical research that integrates both systems within a single analytical framework. In particular, there is a lack of province-specific studies focusing on how structural and socio-cultural factors interact to sustain educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive comparative analysis of both systems and their implications for equity, development, and policy reform.

Underpinning Theory: Human Capital Theory

This study is underpinned by Human Capital Theory, which provides a strong analytical foundation for understanding educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Human Capital

Theory posits that education is an investment in individuals that enhances their knowledge, skills, productivity, and ultimately their economic returns in the labor market (Becker, 1964). According to this perspective, individuals and households make rational decisions about education based on expected future benefits relative to costs.

In the context of this study, Human Capital Theory helps explain the divergent educational pathways of students enrolled in formal schools versus madrassas. Formal schooling is generally associated with the acquisition of market-oriented skills such as literacy, numeracy, scientific reasoning, and technical competencies, which increase employability and income potential. In contrast, madrasa education emphasizes religious knowledge, moral development, and spiritual learning, which may offer limited direct economic returns in the modern labor market but provide significant non-economic and social value.

The theory also highlights how structural constraints—such as poverty, limited access to quality schools, and high opportunity costs—affect educational investment decisions. In low-income households, particularly in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the immediate economic burden of formal education may outweigh perceived long-term benefits, making madrassas a more viable option due to their free or low-cost nature. This reinforces educational dualism by systematically channeling disadvantaged populations into lower-return educational pathways.

Moreover, Human Capital Theory allows for the examination of socio-cultural influences on perceived returns to education. In certain communities, religious education may be valued not only for spiritual reasons but also for social prestige and moral legitimacy, which influences household decision-making beyond purely economic considerations.

By applying Human Capital Theory, this study critically examines how differences in educational investment between school and madrasa systems contribute to unequal skill formation, employment opportunities, and socio-economic outcomes. It thus provides a theoretical basis for understanding how educational dualism

perpetuates inequality and limits inclusive human capital development in Pakistan.

Methodology

This study adopted a **qualitative research design** grounded in the **social constructionist (interpretivist) paradigm** to explore the structural and socio-cultural divide between school and madrasa education systems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The design was considered appropriate for examining complex educational realities shaped by lived experiences, institutional practices, and socio-cultural meanings. The study emphasized depth over breadth, aiming to generate rich, contextualized insights into how educational dualism is constructed, sustained, and experienced by key stakeholders.

Research Design and Approach

The study employed a qualitative interpretivist research design, which focused on understanding how individuals and institutions constructed meaning within their educational environments. Unlike positivist approaches that emphasized measurement and hypothesis testing, this study focused on interpreting subjective experiences and social realities.

An inductive approach was followed, where patterns and meanings emerged from the data rather than being predetermined. Data were collected from educators and scholars from both school and madrasa systems to understand how structural differences and socio-cultural influences shaped perceptions of educational dualism.

A social constructionist perspective underpinned the study, emphasizing that knowledge,

educational practices, and institutional divisions were socially produced through historical, cultural, and ideological processes.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province characterized by cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities, and a long-standing dual education structure. The education system in the province operates through two parallel streams: formal schools and madrassas. Formal schools follow a state-regulated curriculum emphasizing secular and market-oriented education, while madrassas provide religious education grounded in Islamic scholarship. Madrassas have historically played a significant role in providing free education, boarding, and accommodation, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive and snowball sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant academic and religious expertise, while snowball sampling helped identify additional participants through referrals.

The study included two key groups:

- Madrasa scholars and teachers with formal religious education
- School, college, and university teachers with advanced academic qualifications (including PhD-level educators)

This approach ensured a balanced representation of both educational traditions for comparative analysis.

Sample Size

A total of **46 participants** were included in the study:

Category	Number
Madrasa Scholars/Teachers	23
School/College/University Teachers	23
Total	46

This balanced sample enabled a meaningful comparative interpretation of perspectives from both systems.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through two main sources:

1. **Semi-structured in-depth interviews**
2. **Document analysis of curricula (school and madrassa systems)**

The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of the origin, evolution, and consequences of educational dualism. Curriculum documents were analyzed to understand institutional priorities, knowledge structures, and pedagogical orientations.

Content Analysis of Curriculum

Content analysis was used to systematically examine curriculum documents. The analysis focused on:

- Epistemological orientations of knowledge
- Hierarchies of subject importance
- Pedagogical structures and teaching approaches
- Institutional and ideological assumptions embedded in curricula

This process supported triangulation with interview data and strengthened the depth of interpretation.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was applied to examine how educators constructed meaning through language. Following Gee (2005), discourse was treated as both language-in-use and a social practice embedded in power relations.

This approach helped interpret how participants articulated:

- Legitimacy of knowledge systems
- Institutional authority and credibility
- Historical narratives of education
- Influence of socio-cultural and colonial legacies

Interview Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a guided protocol. Participants were asked about:

- The historical development of school-madrassa dualism
- Structural differences between both systems

- Socio-cultural influences shaping educational choices

Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Rapport-building techniques were used to encourage openness and detailed responses.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly followed. Participants were informed about:

- The purpose of the study
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Use of data for academic purposes only

Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Where recording was not permitted, detailed field notes were taken.

Data Transcription and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times for accuracy. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, supported by discourse and content analysis.

The process involved:

- Identification of recurring themes
- Categorization of themes into meaningful clusters
- Interpretation through a socio-cultural lens

This integrated approach allowed both explicit meanings and deeper ideological structures to be examined.

Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness:

- Methodological triangulation was applied (interviews and curriculum analysis)
- Data were systematically coded and cross-checked
- Prolonged engagement with participants enhanced credibility
- Peer review of interpretations improved analytical consistency

Data Analysis and Findings

The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach, supported by content and discourse analysis. Interview transcripts and curriculum documents were systematically coded

to identify recurring patterns related to structural constraints and socio-cultural determinants of educational dualism.

The analysis generated four major themes:

1. Structural Inequalities in Education Access

2. Socio-Cultural Determinants of Educational Choice

3. Curriculum and Epistemological Divide

4. Socio-Economic Outcomes and Future Opportunities

Table 1: Structural Barriers in School Education System

Theme	Sub-Themes	Frequency of Responses	Key Evidence from Participants
Infrastructure gaps	Lack of schools, poor facilities	High	“Schools are far and poorly equipped in rural areas”
Teacher shortage	Untrained/absent teachers	High	“Qualified teachers are not available in remote areas”
Financial burden	Hidden costs (uniform, books, transport)	Medium-High	“Education in schools is not truly free”
Governance issues	Weak monitoring system	Medium	“Accountability in public schools is very weak”

The findings indicate that structural deficiencies in formal schooling are a major driver of educational dualism. Participants consistently highlighted poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and hidden costs as barriers to school enrollment. These constraints were more severe in rural

districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where accessibility and quality gaps are pronounced. Consequently, madrassas emerge as an alternative due to their cost-free and accessible nature, reinforcing system-level dualism.

Table 2: Socio-Cultural Determinants of Educational Choice

Theme	Sub-Themes	Frequency of Responses	Key Evidence from Participants
Religious orientation	Preference for Islamic education	High	“Religious education is a priority for families”
Parental influence	Family decision-making	High	“Parents decide madrasa vs school based on beliefs”
Cultural norms	Community expectations	Medium-High	“Community respects madrasa education more”
Gender perceptions	Safety and moral environment	Medium	“Girls are often sent to madrassas for security reasons”

Socio-cultural factors play a dominant role in sustaining educational dualism. Religious values strongly influence parental decisions, with madrassas perceived as morally secure environments aligned with Islamic teachings. Cultural acceptance within communities further

reinforces their legitimacy. In some cases, madrassas are preferred for female education due to perceived safety and cultural appropriateness. These findings demonstrate that educational choice is not purely economic but deeply embedded in cultural and religious identity.

Table 3: Curriculum and Epistemological Differences

Dimension	Schools	Madrassas
Knowledge focus	Science, mathematics, technology	Religious texts, Quranic studies
Language of instruction	English/Urdu	Arabic/Urdu
Skill orientation	Market-driven skills	Religious scholarship
Assessment system	Formal examinations	Oral/written religious evaluation
Career pathway	Jobs in public/private sector	Religious leadership roles

A clear epistemological divide exists between the two systems. School education is oriented toward modern, secular knowledge and employability, whereas madrassas emphasize religious scholarship and moral development. This

divergence creates parallel knowledge systems that do not intersect, limiting mobility between educational tracks and reinforcing long-term socio-economic stratification.

Table 4: Perceived Socio-Economic Outcomes

Outcome Dimension	School Graduates	Madrassa Graduates	Participant Perception
Employability	High	Low to moderate	“School students have better job opportunities”
Income potential	Relatively higher	Limited	“Madrassa students face restricted job markets”
Social mobility	High	Low	“Education determines future status”
Skill diversification	Broad	Narrow	“School system provides modern skills”

The data indicate significant disparities in labor market outcomes between the two educational streams. School graduates benefit from broader skill sets and improved employability, while madrassa graduates face limited economic opportunities outside religious institutions. This reinforces a cycle of inequality, where educational pathways determine long-term socio-economic mobility.

Emerging Cross-Cutting Theme: Institutional Fragmentation

Across all datasets, a dominant theme of institutional fragmentation emerged. The two systems operate independently with minimal curricular integration, policy coordination, or student mobility. This fragmentation sustains inequality and prevents the formation of a unified national education system.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intertwined structural and socio-cultural forces. The persistence of parallel education systems—formal schools and madrassas—cannot be explained by a single factor, but rather by the cumulative effect of institutional weaknesses in public education and deeply embedded cultural and religious value systems.

From a structural perspective, inadequate infrastructure, uneven access to schools, teacher shortages, and perceived inefficiencies in governance significantly weaken confidence in formal education. These deficiencies make madrassas an attractive alternative, particularly for low-income households who value affordability, accessibility, and basic welfare provisions. This supports prior research suggesting that institutional gaps in public education systems in

developing contexts contribute to the expansion of non-formal education pathways.

On the socio-cultural dimension, the findings highlight the strong influence of religious identity, parental decision-making, and community norms in shaping educational choices. Madrassas are not merely educational institutions but also cultural and moral spaces that align closely with local values. This reinforces the argument that educational decisions in conservative societies are not solely driven by economic rationality but are also shaped by identity, trust, and perceived moral legitimacy.

Furthermore, the curriculum analysis revealed a clear epistemological divide between the two systems. Schools emphasize modern, skill-based, and market-oriented knowledge, while madrassas prioritize religious and moral instruction. This divergence creates parallel knowledge systems that limit student mobility across educational pathways and contribute to long-term socio-economic stratification.

Conclusion

The study concludes that educational dualism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the outcome of both structural deficiencies in the formal education system and strong socio-cultural preferences for religious education. These two dimensions reinforce each other, creating a stable but fragmented education system. While both schools and madrassas play important roles in society, their lack of integration results in unequal learning opportunities, restricted skill development, and divergent socio-economic outcomes.

Overall, the persistence of dual education systems reflects broader challenges of governance, inequality, and cultural alignment in education policy. Without systemic reforms, the divide is likely to continue shaping educational trajectories and reinforcing social stratification.

Implications of the Study

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of educational dualism by integrating structural and socio-cultural explanations within a unified analytical

framework. It extends Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that educational investment decisions are influenced not only by expected economic returns but also by cultural and ideological considerations.

Practically, the findings have important implications for policymakers, education planners, and development stakeholders. The study highlights the need for coordinated educational strategies that recognize the legitimacy of both systems while addressing disparities in quality, curriculum alignment, and institutional integration.

Socially, the research underscores the role of education in shaping inequality and social mobility. The existence of parallel systems reinforces class and opportunity divisions, limiting equitable access to human capital development.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts of educational dualism on employment trajectories and income mobility. Quantitative research incorporating large-scale datasets could provide deeper insights into causal relationships between education type and socio-economic outcomes.

Comparative studies across provinces in Pakistan or between countries with similar dual education systems would also enhance generalizability. Additionally, future research should examine the effectiveness of policy interventions aimed at integrating religious and formal education systems, particularly in terms of curriculum reform and skill development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations are proposed. First, the government should focus on improving the quality and accessibility of public schools in rural and underserved areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to reduce reliance on madrassas as alternative education providers. Strengthening infrastructure, teacher training, and governance mechanisms is essential.

Second, curriculum integration initiatives should be introduced to incorporate modern subjects

such as science, technology, and digital literacy into madrasa education while respecting religious frameworks. This would enhance employability prospects of madrasa graduates without undermining their religious orientation.

Third, policy efforts should promote institutional collaboration between schools and madrassas through standardized accreditation systems and skill development programs. Such integration could reduce educational fragmentation and improve national cohesion.

Finally, awareness campaigns should be implemented to educate parents and communities about the long-term socio-economic benefits of balanced education, enabling more informed decision-making.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research limits statistical generalization of findings to the broader population. The results are context-specific to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and may not fully represent other provinces or countries.

Second, the study relied on purposive and snowball sampling, which may introduce selection bias, as participants were selected based on accessibility and referrals.

Third, data were based on self-reported perceptions from educators, which may be influenced by personal beliefs and institutional affiliations. Although triangulation with curriculum analysis was used to enhance validity, some level of subjectivity remains.

Finally, time and resource constraints limited the scope of participant diversity and geographical coverage. Future studies with broader sampling and mixed-method designs could address these limitations more effectively.

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