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**Socioeconomic Perspective and Analysis of the Linkage of Education and Child Labor in Pakistan: Challenges and Prospects**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the complex socioeconomic linkage between education and child labor in Pakistan, highlighting the persistent challenges and potential strategies for reform. Despite constitutional guarantees for free primary education, Pakistan remains one of the world's top countries for child labor, with economic deprivation, cultural norms, and systemic inequalities driving children into exploitative work environments. The paper argues that child labor not only deprives children of educational opportunities but also perpetuates intergenerational poverty, undermining national economic growth and social cohesion. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as human capital theory and conflict theory, the study identifies key barriers, including patriarchal structures, caste-based discrimination, and inadequate educational infrastructure, which discourage school enrollment. The analysis reveals that families often prioritize immediate economic gains from child labor over long-term educational benefits, exacerbated by poor-quality schooling and societal attitudes. However, the study also outlines prospects for change, emphasizing the need for integrated policy interventions. Recommendations include financial incentives for education (e.g., scholarships), vocational training programs, and community awareness campaigns to shift perceptions about child labor. The paper stresses the importance of legal reforms, increased education budgets, and collaboration with NGOs to address root causes. By aligning Pakistan's youth bulge with future labor market demands through education and skill development, the study advocates for a holistic approach to break the cycle of poverty and*

*exploitation. Ultimately, it calls for urgent action from policymakers, civil society, and international stakeholders to ensure equitable access to education and safeguard children's rights.*

**Keywords:** *Child Labor, Education, Socioeconomic Barriers, Pakistan, Policy Reform, Poverty Cycle.*

## **Introduction**

Child labor and education may initially appear to be unrelated topics, but upon closer examination, a clear and significant link exists between these two critical issues that cannot be overlooked. Their complex interplay is best understood from a socioeconomic perspective, which emphasizes the underlying factors that intertwine those (Ahad et al., 2021). The available evidence indicates that children engaged in the informal economy typically perform various tasks for minimal or insufficient remuneration. These activities do not merely provide a means of survival for these children; they have broader implications that can tragically trap them in perpetual cycles of low-skilled, low-wage employment. This unfortunate situation invariably diminishes their potential participation in educational attainment in the future, thereby perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of poverty that is incredibly difficult to escape. The issue of child labor is a subject of intense debate and concern within society; it is not just a problem faced by the victims alone. The ramifications extend to society as a whole, making this a matter of vital importance for everyone involved.

Children who are subjected to labor in arduous conditions may face serious physical harm as a direct result of their work, and the toll it takes on their health can be devastating. More than just physical injuries, they are often deprived of fundamental opportunities to play, learn, and socialize, which are essential for their overall growth and development (Greenbaum et al.2023). This harsh reality punishes them for their lack of resources and options, forcing them to remain entrenched in their challenging circumstances without any clear escape. Furthermore, the progressive engagement in longer working hours or hazardous conditions significantly endangers children's development in profound ways. The risks they face do not only adversely affect their immediate well-being but also have long-term consequences on their overall growth, psychological health, and prospects for a better future.

On a broader scale, child labor presents severe risks for society itself. It means not only jeopardizing the potential for immediate relief but also for future economic growth due to a lack of educated and capable citizens (El Wali et al., 2021). As a direct

consequence, the nation may face spiraling unemployment rates and a workforce that is tragically underdeveloped. Child labor impacts various social dynamics, reducing social cohesion and undermining community welfare. Thus, the enduring impact of child labor resonates far beyond the individual level, highlighting the urgent and pressing need for comprehensive solutions that address both educational access and the socioeconomic factors contributing to this deeply entrenched issue. It calls for a collective response that engages all segments of society to create a more equitable and just future for all children.

According to statistics, Pakistan has the twelfth highest number of child laborers in the entire world, a fact that highlights a deeply rooted societal issue (Akram et al., 2024). The study of this challenging aspect, which relates to children and the broader context of development within the country, not only incurs significant empirical costs but also assumes vital importance in official and governmental quarters. A comprehensive analysis of this situation will not only reveal the magnitude of the problem but will also determine the relevance of necessary policy changes that can provide a much-needed impetus to shift the focus towards effective social development initiatives (Razavi et al.2021).

In relation to Pakistan, a detailed examination of this particular issue, therefore, in the often subconscious arena of development, aims to identify and advocate for a significant policy shift (Habib, 2024)t. Ultimately, the purpose of this essay is to critically engage with and empirically validate both the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches surrounding this matter, in an effort to effectively distinguish and unpack the challenges and prospects that exist in the complex relationship between education and child labor.

The presence of children in the labor force has long been considered a substantial obstacle to achieving educational and economic development, and child labor itself has been the focal point of social policy initiatives in numerous developing countries for an extended period of time (Zafar et al.2022). The elimination of child labor is not merely a desirable goal but is now widely regarded as a matter of urgency for both industrialized nations and developing countries alike. Moreover, the education of working children is increasingly being put forward as a significant poverty reduction strategy, necessitating immediate action and concerted efforts from policymakers, NGOs, and community organizations alike.

### **Historical Context of Education and Child Labor in Pakistan**

The intricate connection between education and child labor has evolved into a remarkably complex and multifaceted field of research and action that spans across diverse sociopolitical domains and various contexts (Uddin et al.2023). Well-orchestrated and strategically implemented educational policies have played an immensely significant role in not only increasing but also sustaining the prevalence of ordinary daily semi-subsistence labor practices that countless children are subjected to across the globe. Current trends concerning child labor persist robustly and may have even worsened in recent times, predominantly due to the historically re-emerging regional and global economic-political agendas that characterize this particular era we find ourselves navigating. The formal history that is fundamentally shaping the key elements of modern educational reforms can be traced back to the significant and tumultuous events that unfolded during the remarkable period of the Division of India in 1947. This pivotal moment had a profound and far-reaching impact on the provinces that were once governed by the British Empire, particularly in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Punjab area, where critical developments were taking place.

At the same time, to the west of NWFP and extending into the vast region of Sindh, there existed Baluchistan, where various independent governments were established and implemented that were ostensibly not directly governed by British authorities (Iqbal et al., 2021). However, despite the seemingly independent operations of these provinces, they were still ultimately under the overarching control of British paramountcy, leading to a highly detailed and stringent system of micro-management of their internal and external affairs. The colonial framework created an environment rife with inconsistency and unreliability, which severely impacted educational systems and labor practices alike. This historical backdrop is vital to understanding the ongoing challenges faced in addressing the intertwined issues of education and child labor that continue to affect contemporary society. Without examining this complex historical relationship, one cannot fully grasp the depth and intricacies of the issues at play, which require thoughtful consideration and active engagement to foster meaningful change.

### **1. Colonial Education Heritage and Policy, Monoculture**

The provinces were initially established under the implementation of colonial powers to effectively maintain a system of monoculture that favored economic advancement by positioning these areas as non-competitive primary produce suppliers (Suarez & Gwozdz,

2023). After the initial stages of production were completed, the outputs were then passed on to a centralized industry where various items were meticulously prepared to ensure continued financial returns on investments aimed at economic value addition. Consequently, the colonial authorities enforced an educational system that was not only economically reliable but also designed to be non-intellectually competitive, particularly upon the children of these regions. This meant that the educational and labor policies were specifically tailored to secure the economic interests of imperial England within South Asia from the year 1757 onwards. Interestingly, post-independence educational reform directions, however, have not significantly altered or transformed to present any radical and meaningful change for all of Sindh and Pakistan's far-flung and underdeveloped semi-urban centers, which also includes the Arabic and Koranic Madaaris that have been pivotal in shaping the local educational landscape.

### **Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding the Linkage between Education and Child Labor**

Due to the intricate and complex relationship that exists between education and child labor, as well as the inter-reliance of various factors that contribute to this pressing issue, several significant theories have been developed over time in order to explain why parents often prioritize having their children engage in labor to earn money rather than investing in their education by sending them to school (Abdullah et al.2022). When families find themselves living in an economically disadvantaged society, the parents, along with the broader community which functions as a vital organ of the socioeconomic structure, tend to understand and recognize the considerable economic value that each and every child can potentially contribute. In this context, education is regarded as being valuable primarily based on its utility. One of the key theories that can provide a framework to help explain this phenomenon is the concept known as "Human Capital." Additionally, there is the theory of "Structural-Functionalism," which posits that society is composed of several integrated parts that function collectively to perform specific roles and maintain stability. This perspective claims that the reality of societal operation is determined by the different components of society working in equilibrium with one another. In this view, the presence of issues such as poverty, high infant mortality rates, and numerous other problems present within the region are often seen as mere signs of a society that is functioning according to its established norms, since part of society inevitably shall perform roles that are considered "ascribed" based on various social factors.

Another theory of "conflict" can provide a comprehensive and nuanced explanation for the myriad of issues faced in various intricate situations that are characterized by a particularly volatile society. This volatility can often lead to significant upheaval and struggle among individuals and groups that occupy different positions within that society (Nashwan et al., 2023). The underlying causes of such volatility frequently result from a multitude of interconnected factors, which can broadly include global phenomena such as widespread poverty that affects millions of people in diverse communities worldwide. This widespread poverty can create an environment of desperation and hopelessness, making it difficult for individuals to thrive or achieve a decent standard of living. Additionally, deep-rooted caste prejudices can permeate the very fabric of social interactions within communities, reinforcing social hierarchies that favor certain groups over others.

Moreover, pervasive financial jealousy can incite feelings of resentment and anger among differing social classes, creating an environment where conflict is often inevitable. Severe political repression may further exacerbate these tensions by stifling free expression and actively promoting dissent against established authority (De2024). Numerous other destabilizing elements, including systemic discrimination and inadequate access to education, can also create unrest and turmoil, undermining the stability of societies as a whole. Conflict theory inherently emphasizes the critical understanding of social changes, as well as the rigorous examination of various complex issues that actively hinder the way of social existence. It seeks to understand how these dynamics play out in real life, particularly focusing on the interests of different groups involved in conflicts.

All these elements exist in an effort to retain and sustain the existing status quo, which tends to disproportionately benefit powerful and privileged groups over others, often at the expense of marginalized communities that lack access to essential resources and opportunities. Furthermore, this theory posits that society evolves and progresses not as a direct result of harmony, consensus, or the interrelatedness among its myriad components, but rather through the inevitable clashes, disruptions, and challenges that repeatedly arise during the course of varied and complex social interactions. In other words, the advancement of society occurs specifically because of the presence of "productive" elements or competitive tools within it that drive progress and change, while fostering innovation through a continuous process of trial and error.

Conversely, societal harm primarily arises due to a variety of destabilizing factors, such as widespread unrest fueled by economic disparity and the disabling conditions that often accompany it in times of severe conflict. All these theories collectively simplify the multifaceted and intricate issue of child labor, viewing it as a critical factor that exists within the elaborate and complex web of social relations binding individuals together within their respective communities. This particular situation is dynamic, behaving differently depending on a variety of significant aspects that are context-dependent. These aspects include the specific context of time and space, prevailing cultural norms that dictate behavior, ethnic identities that significantly shape individual experiences and perceptions, social class distinctions that influence opportunities and access to resources, national boundaries that restrict movement and migration, and other critical characteristics that come into play. Each of these factors intricately affects the overall understanding of the complicated issues, posing challenges in diverse global contexts and indicating that solutions must be as nuanced as the problems themselves.

#### **Current Status and Trends of Education and Child Labor in Pakistan**

This paper meticulously analyzes and delves deeply into a remarkably broad and extensive array of the most recent statistics, while also carefully examining the emerging trends that are intricately related to education and child labor, all within the broader and more complex socio-economic context of Pakistan (Ahad et al., 2021). The apparent and seemingly high enrollment rate in schools, when strategically juxtaposed with the concerning high prevalence of child labor that is observed across various sectors of society, can engender considerable confusion and uncertainty for policymakers. These diligent policymakers are striving to devise and implement highly effective strategies that carefully address these intertwined and pressing issues, which significantly affect the lives of countless individuals, families, and communities. Through the insightful lens and perspective of both the poverty and elite models of the theory of change, it is suggested that a substantial portion of the existing research, which seeks to explore the determinants of these two critical issues, does not adequately pay sufficient attention to the broader web of interrelated factors at play.

These factors may be intricately interconnected, influencing outcomes across various domains of society, which is something that requires robust and careful consideration in policy formulation and implementation. Such influential factors could be linked with

common underlying causes that lead to both high enrollment and high child labor rates, or may merely reflect directionality effects that could substantiate causal development through a wide range of essential structural adjustments and supportive interventions. These necessary adjustments could encompass vital areas such as institution building, crucial transitions within the family tenure system, alongside significant systemic educational reforms, modifications in labor policies, and a multitude of other multidimensional aspects that surely warrant extensive consideration and thorough investigation.

It is truly essential to fully recognize and understand that the complex interplay of these various and often conflicting elements is not only significant but also profoundly crucial for grasping the myriad complexities surrounding education and child labor in the contemporary and ever-evolving landscape of Pakistan (Niedlich et al.2021). Ultimately, this comprehensive understanding will lead to more informed and effective policy decisions, innovative and forward-thinking strategies, as well as impactful initiatives that can have a lasting and transformative effect on the future well-being, health, and prospects of children in Pakistan, thereby ensuring a more equitable and prosperous future for all segments of society, regardless of their socio-economic background. The study rigorously emphasizes that without addressing the intricate relationships among these issues, any efforts aimed at improving educational outcomes and reducing child labor may remain only partially effective, highlighting the pressing need for a holistic approach that meticulously considers the diverse influences impacting children's lives today, ensuring a brighter and more hopeful future for generations to come.

### **Challenges Faced in Combating Child Labor through Education in Pakistan**

Despite the formal requirement of free and compulsory primary education in Pakistan, a number of significant factors continue to place children at considerable risk of entering the labor market prematurely (Albanesi & Kim, 2021). Families that are facing various forms of economic constraints often consider a child's potential income to be more immediately important than the indirect benefits that education might offer in the long run. Consequently, these families are often compelled to prioritize sending their children to work instead of school. The perceived importance of education varies widely across different districts, communities, and industries within the country. While education might be critically important for upward economic mobility and a better standard of living in some areas and among certain social



groups, it does not hold the same level of significance in other regions and social strata. As revealed in multiple discussions with local workers, references to genuinely useful job opportunities and the prospects that come with educational attainment are often made mockingly or, at best, viewed as nothing more than wishful thinking.

Furthermore, the social dynamics within families also play a crucial role in this context. Caste can serve as a considerable obstacle to education, limiting opportunities and access for many children. Community norms, cultural traditions, and longstanding practices are also vital determinants that influence attitudes toward education (Sain, 2023). Moreover, individual teachers tend to assign a specific role to every student, often investing them with labels of capability and expectation that the students feel powerless to reject. These ingrained prejudices directly affect both the level of students' interest in their studies and their overall satisfaction with the educational experience they are receiving.

A substantial lack of good-quality educational infrastructure at the primary level further discourages families from viewing education as an attractive option for their children, especially in light of challenging economic conditions. In addition to this, there is a dire shortage of non-human resource materials, such as schools and vital infrastructure, which are either inadequate or completely unavailable in many areas (Musambachime, 2022). Ironically, only about one fourth of families consider better education to be a primary aim of sending their children to school. For the remaining families, sending children to school is merely one of the multiple intended outcomes of the educational project, but it is not necessarily the only or even the most pressing goal. The perception of very limited learning gains from both non-formal and formal schooling has also contributed to a growing lack of interest in schooling. Moreover, there exists a prevailing sense that better utilization of children in homes, particularly in catering to their day-to-day needs and contributing to household chores, presents another compelling reason for prioritizing work over education.

### **Prospects and Strategies for Improving Education and Combating Child Labor in Pakistan**

In light of Pakistan's changing demographic structure, with a notably bulging youth population and the anticipated future job requirements and demand in both formal and informal employment sectors, it is increasingly clear that it would be optimal for the country to cultivate a well-educated and skilled workforce (Idrees et al.). This is essential if Pakistan is to catch up with future economic progress on both a national and international

scale. Understanding the complete picture of the current status of educational deficiencies throughout the country is of utmost importance. This understanding paves the way for the identification of child labor, its primary definitions, observable reasons, and associated complexities which become all the more significant. The cultural and economic implications of child labor encompass all forms of work executed by children who do so in vulnerable conditions, which ultimately deprives them of their fundamental human right to a quality education, and consequently, significantly hinders their opportunity for progress in life.

While Pakistan stands as a signatory to various international conventions aimed at protecting children from exploitation, it remains crucial for policymakers in Pakistan to take a more comprehensive approach by considering broader administrative reforms necessary to address the entrenched underlying causes of child labor. To do this, it becomes imperative to develop long-term policy reforms that are sustainable and effective. One of the key areas that should be emphasized is the provision of incentives to improve access to education. Financial mechanisms, such as scholarship programs and other forms of financial support, could be effectively implemented to inform and motivate families about the potential benefits of sending their children to school. These initiatives could significantly alter a family's decision-making process regarding their children's education.

Programs and policies aimed at assisting older children in acquiring relevant skills should also be developed and provided to families who heavily rely on their children's incomes to support their households (Heinrich et al.2022). Improving the quality of education and learning outcomes is another significant step. It is essential to enhance parents' awareness and build their confidence in the schooling process, as well as highlight the potential long-term benefits of formal education. Research suggests that parents who believe in the potential of schools to aid their children in advancing their knowledge and skill sets are far more likely to invest in their children's education. Thus, strategic awareness-raising activities, along with complementary information campaigns, could be effectively delivered during parent-teacher meetings at schools to promote this critical message.

Engaging local communities also plays an essential role in guiding and transforming societal attitudes towards child labor. Increased communal awareness can help make participation in school and skill development programs a more acceptable alternative compared to child work (Jabeen2021). Despite the fact that

education sector spending in Pakistan has shown a notable increase in recent years, government funding remains insufficient to successfully achieve the goal of universal primary education. Therefore, it is crucial that the government allocate a significantly larger portion of the national budget towards education in the coming years to ensure that universal basic education becomes a reality for all children.

It is also vital to incentivize and encourage non-governmental organizations and international agencies to invest their financial resources into the growth and future of students. This funding should supplement and strengthen government investment in education for both children and adults. Another important avenue to explore is the expansion of additional educational programs aimed specifically at out-of-school children. Some children who find themselves in the labor force, or who have never enrolled in school, would greatly benefit from innovative forms of educational provision. These could include alternative education programs tailored to help older or working children catch up in their studies.

Vocational training can represent a critical component of such innovative educational programs. By establishing prosperous cross-cutting activities, particularly focused investments within vocational training program scaffolds, more out-of-school children can effectively transition into formal education systems (Hassan and Rosly2021). This initiative aims not only to enhance educational outcomes but also to contribute positively to broader societal indicators that measure workforce quality and employment rates. Given the substantial short-term adjustments and observable results that these assumptions and supporting perceptions could yield, it has been deemed necessary to undertake a more focused and strategic study of these vital areas.

It remains too early to conclusively associate specific outcomes with these planned interventions. Nonetheless, it is likely that there will be significant results stemming from this initiative, which could serve as pivotal indicators of progress as Pakistan shifts its focus from merely controlling the trends within its ranks of newly enrolled students and pre-service maneuverers (Galli et al.2024). Ultimately, gathering and accurately analyzing coverage data beyond what has been reported end masse in our recent survey will aid in estimating the conclusiveness of our ongoing research. We will collect the requisite resources and conduct thorough investigations that will be vital in achieving these objectives.

### **Conclusion**

This paper delves deeply into the complex and intricate interlinkage between education and child labor within the context

of the still-developing economy of Pakistan. It highlights the significance of this dynamic relationship in addressing one of the most pressing and urgent issues faced by the nation today. The argument is presented that education possesses the remarkable potential to significantly reduce child labor in the short run, while in the long run, it stands as a crucial catalyst for driving broader economic growth and comprehensive development. Furthermore, after thoroughly examining and advocating for the theoretical frameworks that pertain to the formation and nurturing of human capital in light of the ongoing challenge of child labor, the paper investigates this informal aspect closely. It examines the wide-ranging consequences of child labor in conjunction with the prevailing trends concerning child schooling and economic activities throughout Pakistan.

Therefore, this case study provides a comprehensive and multifaceted view of the complexity surrounding the child labor problem, particularly in one of the most marginalized and disadvantaged societies across the globe. In such contexts, both economic conditions and entrenched social norms significantly influence children's lives and their opportunities. To catalyze major and transformative changes, it becomes essential to recognize each child as an invaluable asset through proper education and training. This paradigm shift requires the implementation of integrated strategies that span multiple sectors, thereby allowing for both natural and artificial mechanisms to work collaboratively in addressing the challenges surrounding child labor.

Having discussed the critical issues that envelop educational development alongside child labor, as well as the necessary policy directions and various obstacles we face in a largely under-developed world, we firmly believe that this paper presents several meaningful insights and valid recommendations aimed at stakeholders, including policy-makers, public institutions, NGOs, and the various social and industrial sectors. We strongly reiterate the urgent necessity for exploring innovative ways to incorporate and interlink the multifaceted issues of education and child labor by encapsulating the virtuous circle that exists between these two vital areas. Achieving this outcome can be realized through a variety of educational programs designed to empower children, alongside initiatives that improve reproductive health and ensure that social security is inclusive for the wider population.

Moreover, there is a critical and pressing need to revise and modify the existing legal frameworks regarding child labor in the informal sector. Such modifications should enable children to pursue their

schooling while simultaneously gaining practical skills that can aid in their future. To enhance this approach, it is essential to improve vocational training by integrating relevant educational components, along with establishing widespread adult literacy programs that can benefit the broader community. These initiatives could function as non-aligned funds directed towards vital resources that may effectively rescue children from merely becoming trapped in unyielding work situations.

Looking ahead, future research endeavors will aim to explore the types of work that could be legally performed by children, as well as how much work is appropriate and permissible within the age range typically required for mandatory schooling. From a social policy design perspective, this study underscores the urgent and indispensable need to create and cultivate an educated citizenry capable of contributing positively to society. Furthermore, it highlights the critical importance of introducing core values and guiding principles that not only maintain but also elevate the overall quality of life for every child. Such laws and programs, devised to enhance the comprehensive well-being and future prospects of the child, can be vigorously defended through the various political systems operative within a well-functioning democratic society. This unique positioning will help ensure sustained efforts toward improvement, equity, and social justice across the landscape of education and beyond, thus ultimately benefiting generations to come.

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