

# The Impact of Urban-Rural Cultural Differences on Students' Academic Achievement in Pakistan from the Perspective of Educational Equity

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the impact of urban-rural cultural differences in Pakistan on students' academic achievement from the perspective of educational equity. Through a combination of literature review, theoretical analysis, and empirical research, it deeply analyzes the significant differences between urban and rural areas in Pakistan in terms of cultural concepts, educational resources, and family environments, exploring the specific mechanisms through which these differences affect students' academic achievement. The research results indicate that urban-rural cultural differences, by influencing students' learning motivation, learning conditions, learning support, and other aspects, lead to a significant gap in academic achievement between rural and urban students, exacerbating educational inequity. This study not only provides a new perspective for understanding the urban-rural education gap in Pakistan but also offers theoretical support and practical references for formulating targeted education policies, improving rural education conditions, and promoting educational equity.

**Keywords:** Educational Equity; Pakistan; Urban-Rural Cultural Differences; Academic Achievement; Impact Mechanism

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## 1 Introduction

Globally, educational equity has always been a core issue in the field of education, concerning social stability and development, and serving as an important guarantee for realizing equal human rights. For Pakistan, a populous developing country, the realization of educational equity holds special significance. Pakistan possesses abundant human resources, but due to unbalanced educational development, the potential of a large number of talents has not been fully tapped, which, to a certain extent, constrains the country's economic development and social progress.

Pakistan's urban-rural dual structure is very pronounced. This structure is not only reflected in economic development levels but also profoundly reflected in the cultural sphere. The cultural differences between urban and rural areas act like an invisible chasm, affecting the distribution of educational resources, the formation of educational concepts, and the implementation of educational processes, ultimately having a profound impact on students' academic achievement. In recent years, although the Pakistani government has adopted a series of measures to promote educational development, the urban-rural education gap remains significant, and the backwardness of rural students in academic achievement has not fundamentally changed.

From the perspective of educational equity, this gap in academic achievement caused by urban-rural cultural differences violates the principles of equal educational opportunity and equity in educational outcomes. Therefore, in-depth research on the impact of Pakistan's urban-rural cultural differences on students' academic achievement has significant theoretical value and practical significance. Theoretically, this study can enrich the application of educational equity theory and cultural pedagogy theory in developing countries; practically, the research results can provide a scientific basis for the Pakistani government to formulate education policies, optimize the allocation of educational resources, and improve the rural education environment, helping to promote the development of Pakistan's education sector towards greater fairness and balance.

## 2 Educational Equity Theory and Overview of Urban-Rural Cultural Differences

## 2.1 Educational Equity Theory

Educational equity is a complex concept interpreted differently by various scholars. Comprehensively, it includes three levels: equity in educational opportunity, process, and outcome.

Equity in educational opportunity is the starting point, requiring individuals to have equal access to education, unaffected by various factors. In Pakistan, although the law stipulates the right to equal education, due to urban-rural cultural differences, rural students, especially girls, face difficulties in obtaining educational opportunities.

Equity in the educational process is the core, emphasizing that students receive equal educational resources and treatment, covering aspects such as teachers and facilities. Differences in the allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas are significant, placing rural students at a disadvantage during the educational process.

Equity in educational outcomes is the goal, meaning students can fully develop their potential, and their academic achievements and abilities receive fair evaluation. The gap in academic achievement between urban and rural students in Pakistan is obvious, with rural students' average levels being lower, failing to meet the requirements of outcome equity.

These three levels are interconnected and together constitute the educational equity system. Achieving equity in opportunity lays the foundation for equity in process, and equity in process promotes the achievement of equity in outcome.

## 2.2 Manifestations of Urban-Rural Cultural Differences in Pakistan

### 2.2.1 Differences in Cultural Concepts

Urban areas are deeply influenced by globalization and modernization, with open and diverse cultural concepts. Urban residents value education highly, have high educational expectations for their children, and are willing to invest resources in their upbringing. For example, urban parents choose quality schools and enroll children in tutoring classes.

Rural areas are relatively closed, with deep-rooted traditional cultural concepts. Some rural families believe children should help with family labor, and that educating girls is less meaningful. This perception leads to lower enrollment and advancement rates for rural students, and a high dropout rate among girls. Furthermore, cities value knowledge and have a strong learning atmosphere; rural areas place less emphasis on knowledge, affecting students' learning motivation.

### 2.2.2 Differences in Educational Resources

Educational resources affect education quality. Pakistan's urban-rural differences are reflected in:

**School Infrastructure:** Urban schools have complete facilities, providing a good environment conducive to improving teaching effectiveness and interest. Rural schools have poor infrastructure, affecting teaching quality and learning experience.

**Teacher Quality:** Urban schools attract excellent teachers with high qualifications, rich experience, and good compensation. Rural schools suffer from poor teacher quality, with low qualifications, lack of training, outdated teaching methods, and problems of shortage and attrition.

**Curriculum:** Urban schools offer diverse and modern curricula, including specialized and elective courses. Rural schools have monotonous curricula, lacking innovation and struggling to meet talent cultivation requirements.

### 2.2.3 Differences in Family Environment

Family environment significantly impacts student academic achievement, with clear differences between urban and rural Pakistan.

**Economic Conditions:** Urban families have higher and more stable incomes, enabling them to provide abundant learning resources for children. Rural families have lower and unstable incomes, struggling to afford educational expenses.

**Parental Education Level:** Urban parents generally have higher education levels and can effectively guide their children's learning. Rural parents often have lower education levels and find it difficult to provide such guidance.

**Family Learning Atmosphere:** Urban families foster a strong learning atmosphere and create conducive learning spaces. Rural families have a weaker learning atmosphere, and children's learning is easily disrupted.

## 3 The Impact Mechanism of Urban-Rural Cultural Differences on Students' Academic Achievement

### 3.1 Impact of Differences in Cultural Concepts

Cultural concepts profoundly influence people's behaviors and choices, including in education. Pakistan's urban-rural cultural concept differences affect student academic achievement by influencing learning motivation, educational expectations, and learning attitudes.

Insufficient emphasis on education in rural areas means families and students undervalue education, lacking learning goals and motivation. Students learn passively, finding learning tedious and merely meeting requirements, leading to difficulties in improving grades. For example, some rural students feel studying won't lead to good jobs, preferring to work instead, leading to early dropout. Traditional gender concepts are also detrimental to rural students; discrimination against girls limits their educational opportunities and resources, resulting in lower academic achievement compared to boys and urban girls.

Urban cultural concepts benefit student learning and growth. Families and students have high educational expectations, strong learning motivation, clear goals, actively participate in learning, and pursue high achievement.

### 3.2 Impact of Differences in Educational Resources

Educational resources are the foundation for student learning and growth. Differences in Pakistan's urban-rural educational resources affect teaching quality and student academic achievement.

Poor infrastructure in rural schools, lacking laboratories and multimedia equipment, restricts teaching activities and effectiveness, hindering deep understanding of knowledge and lowering learning interest. Weak teacher quality, lack of training, and outdated "spoon-feeding" teaching methods neglect students' agency and ability development, leaving students lacking independent thinking and innovation skills. Monotonous curricula fail to meet student needs, limiting comprehensive development and affecting academic achievement.

Urban schools, with abundant resources, advanced facilities help students master knowledge, excellent teachers stimulate learning interest and potential, and diverse curricula promote comprehensive development, giving urban students an academic advantage.

### 3.3 Impact of Differences in Family Environment

The family environment influences student academic achievement in multiple ways. Differences between urban and rural family environments in Pakistan play a significant role by affecting learning resources, support, and habits.

Good economic conditions in urban families provide abundant learning resources, expanding knowledge and improving learning abilities, e.g., reading extracurricular books, using computers/internet, attending tutoring classes.

Limited economic resources in rural families lead to insufficient learning resources, narrow knowledge structures, and difficulty coping with complex learning tasks. Urban parents' higher education levels and correct educational concepts enable them to provide learning support, emphasize communication and cooperation with schools, and promote student academic development. Rural parents' lower education levels prevent effective support, pay less attention to learning, communicate less with schools, negatively impacting student academic achievement.

## 4 Empirical Research

### 4.1 Research Design

To deeply explore the impact of Pakistan's urban-rural cultural differences on student academic achievement, this study employed a combined method of questionnaire surveys and interviews.

The research subjects were primary and secondary school students, parents, and teachers from urban and rural areas in Pakistan's four major provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. In each province, 2-3 cities and 2-3 rural areas were selected, with schools chosen as sample schools considering factors like school type (public, private) and size to ensure representativeness. A total of 100 urban schools and 100 rural schools were selected. From each school, 30-50 students, 10-15 parents, and 5-10 teachers were selected as research subjects.

The questionnaires mainly included:

Student Questionnaire: Basic information (gender, age, grade), learning attitudes, learning habits, access to learning resources, academic performance.

Parent Questionnaire: Parents' education level, occupation, family income, educational concepts, support for children's learning.

Teacher Questionnaire: Teachers' qualifications, years of teaching experience, teaching methods, understanding of urban-rural cultural differences, views on factors affecting student achievement.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with selected students, parents, and teachers. Interview topics focused on the impact of urban-rural cultural differences on student learning motivation, learning behavior, academic achievement, and suggestions for improving rural education.

To ensure data authenticity and validity, survey personnel received specialized training to standardize procedures. Questionnaire reliability and validity were tested to ensure scientific rigor and reliability.

## 4.2 Research Results

Statistical analysis of the collected data yielded the following results:

(1) Significant differences exist in academic achievement between urban and rural students. In tests of major subjects like Language, Mathematics, English, and Science, the average scores of urban students were significantly higher than those of rural students, with this difference being statistically significant. The gap was most pronounced in English and Science, where urban students scored over 20% higher on average.

(2) Cultural concepts are positively correlated with student academic achievement. The survey showed that children from families holding positive attitudes towards education and valuing it highly generally achieved higher academic performance. Conversely, children from families placing insufficient importance on education or deeming it useless achieved relatively lower performance. This correlation was more pronounced in rural areas, as family educational concepts exert a stronger influence there.

(3) Educational resources are closely related to student academic achievement. The more complete the school infrastructure, the stronger the teaching faculty, and the more reasonable the curriculum, the higher the students' academic achievement. The advantages of urban schools in these aspects are key reasons for their students' higher achievement. For example, students in schools with multimedia classrooms and laboratories scored significantly higher in Science than those in schools without such facilities.

(4) Family environment significantly impacts student academic achievement. Students from families with good economic conditions, high parental education levels, and a strong family learning atmosphere tend to achieve higher academic performance. Conversely, students from families facing economic hardship, with low parental education levels, and a poor learning atmosphere achieve relatively lower performance. In rural areas, the influence of family environment on academic achievement exceeded that in urban areas.

(5) Gender differences in academic achievement were evident among rural students. Rural girls generally achieved lower academic performance than rural boys. In urban areas, this gender gap was relatively smaller.

## 5 Strategies for Improving Educational Equity and Enhancing Rural Student Achievement

### 5.1 Policy Interventions

The government plays a leading role in promoting educational equity and improving rural education. Measures should include:

Increase Investment in Rural Education: The Pakistani government should adjust the structure of education funding allocation, increase fiscal investment, focus on improving rural school infrastructure (buildings, renovations), equip schools with teaching facilities, raise operational funding standards, and ensure school operation.

Strengthen the Rural Teaching Workforce: Develop preferential policies to attract outstanding university graduates to teach in rural areas (e.g., higher salaries, subsidies, career development opportunities). Improve the teacher training system and organize training sessions. Encourage urban teachers to support rural education and implement urban-rural teacher

exchange programs.

**Reform the Rural Education Curriculum System:** Adjust the curriculum based on rural realities and development needs, adding practical content like agricultural technology, and strengthening English and information technology education.

**Guide Rural Family Educational Concepts:** Conduct publicity campaigns to educate parents about the importance of education, change outdated concepts, encourage parental involvement in children's education, and strengthen home-school communication.

## 5.2 Social Support

Social forces are an important supplement to improving rural education. Efforts should be made to mobilize various sectors:

**Encourage Enterprise and Social Organization Participation:** Encourage businesses to donate funds and materials to support school construction. Encourage social organizations to carry out activities like volunteer teaching.

**Leverage Media for Publicity and Supervision:** Media should increase publicity, report on current situations and problems, and supervise the implementation of government policies to ensure fair resource distribution.

**Strengthen Urban-Rural Education Exchange and Cooperation:** Promote the establishment of support relationships between urban and rural schools, carry out inter-school exchanges, and facilitate resource sharing.

## 5.3 School Education Reform

Rural schools should implement education reforms to improve teaching quality:

**Innovate Teaching Methods:** Teachers should change traditional methods, adopt diversified teaching approaches, and utilize teaching resources to conduct engaging activities.

**Strengthen Student Learning Guidance:** Establish a learning guidance system providing methodological guidance and psychological counseling. Implement differentiated instruction and individual tutoring to cultivate autonomous learning abilities.

**Build Harmonious Teacher-Student Relationships:** Teachers should care for students, respect individual differences, offer encouragement and praise, and conduct interactive activities to build understanding and trust.

**Enhance Home-School Cooperation:** Schools should hold regular parent meetings, organize parental participation in teaching activities, and establish communication mechanisms to solve problems.

## 6 Conclusion

This study conducted an in-depth exploration of the impact of Pakistan's urban-rural cultural differences on student achievement. The results indicate that significant cultural differences exist between urban and rural Pakistan, primarily manifested in cultural concepts, educational resource allocation, and family environments. These factors collectively act upon students' learning motivation, conditions, and support systems, leading to significant disparities in academic achievement between rural and urban students, thereby exacerbating educational inequality.

Specifically, cultural concepts, as deep-seated factors affecting rural student achievement, limit learning motivation and opportunities due to insufficient emphasis on education and the constraints of traditional gender concepts. The unbalanced allocation of educational resources places rural students at a disadvantage in learning conditions. Furthermore, differences in family environments further widen the academic gap between urban and rural students. The deficiencies of rural families in economic conditions, parental education levels, and learning atmosphere negatively impact students' resource acquisition and learning support.

To improve the current situation, promote educational equity, and enhance the academic achievement of rural students, joint efforts are required from the government, society, and schools. The government should strengthen policy interventions, optimize the allocation of educational resources, and guide conceptual change. Society should provide more support and create a favorable atmosphere focusing on rural education. Schools should reform their education systems, improve education quality, and provide better services.

Although this study achieved certain results, it has limitations. For example, the sample selection did not cover urban

and rural schools in all regions, and the exploration of impact mechanisms was not deep enough. Future research should expand the sample scope and delve deeper into the impact mechanisms to provide more precise recommendations for improving the state of rural education in Pakistan.

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