

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Female Students in Rural Areas of Balochistan regarding their Academic Aspirations and Access to the Internet: A Phenomenological Study in Turbat, Pakistan



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Pages: 155 – 165

DOI: 10.31703/gsr.2023(VIII-II).17

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023\(VIII-II\).17](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023(VIII-II).17)

Abstract: *This study aims to explore the lived experiences of female students in rural Balochistan, specifically in Turbat, Pakistan, with regard to their academic aspirations and access to the internet. The research adopts a phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these students in pursuing education and utilizing digital resources. Qualitative methodology, along with in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, were utilized as methods as per the nature of the study. For theoretical underpinning, digital divide theory was used to ensure and clarify the assumptions of the study. It has been found that in Balochistan, not only are there structural flaws, but there are also socio-political and cultural factors behind the digital divides and hurdles for girls in internet accessibility. Therefore, the inevitability of this study is to bridge this gap and ensure digital inclusiveness and digital parity to ensure girls' academic performances.*

Key Words: Lived Experiences, Female, Students, Internet, Academic, Balochistan

Introduction

Education is crucial for the development and empowerment of individuals, especially women, as it provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary for both their own development and the advancement of society. However, there are several issues that female students in Balochistan, Pakistan, must deal with that make it difficult for them to attend school and obtain the supplies they require. The purpose of this research is to examine the actual experiences of female students in Turbat, Balochistan. It will shed light on the challenges they have while attempting to use the internet and pursue an education, as well as examine any potential advantages of digital connectivity. Girls in Pakistan are more likely to drop

out of school and have lower attendance rates (Al-Shuaibi, 2014). This is particularly true in rural places when variables like cultural norms, financial constraints, and a lack of infrastructure all come into play. Women are prevented from achieving their full potential by the disparity in educational attainment between men and women. This prolongs the cycle of inequality and impedes social advancement. The purpose of this study is to learn about the challenges faced by female students in rural Balochistan in terms of their academic aspirations and access to the internet. The study is conducted in Turbat, Pakistan, where there is little internet connection and women's education is not given much consideration. This study aims to develop solutions to help female students

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succeed in school by learning more about the challenges they encounter when trying to obtain an education and utilize the internet. No matter who you are, where you live, or what your gender or socioeconomic status is, everyone should have access to education as a fundamental human right. According to Khan and Khan (2017), social, economic, and cultural constraints keep many rural citizens of developing countries from accessing education. Girls' education is commonly disregarded in Pakistan due to cultural attitudes prioritizing boys' education more than girls' education. Rural dwellers' restricted access to the internet makes the issue of limited access to education worse (Rasheed, Hussain, Ijaz, & Hashim, 2021).

The largest province of Pakistan, Balochistan, is found in the southwest of the nation. The region is infamous for its political unpredictability and lack of advanced technology. In addition, it is well known for its difficult terrain, severe climate, inadequate infrastructure, and the digital divide. In Balochistan, just 43% of people are literate (UNESCO Pakistan Country Strategic Document 2018-2022, 2019). This is one of Pakistan's lowest rates of literacy. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, only 11% of homes will have internet connectivity in 2021. In Pakistan, which has a patriarchal society, men rule all aspects of life. Women are commonly barred from and prevented from pursuing education due to cultural views that place a higher value on male education than female education. Additionally, it might be challenging for residents of remote areas to utilize the internet due to a lack of infrastructure and restrictive government regulations on access. Due to Pakistan's social and political climate, female students who desire to attend college and utilize the internet find it challenging (Mehmood, Chong, & Hussain, 2018). But compared to other places, where even men have very little access to the internet, the situation in Balochistan is different. Only 25% of Balochis, according to Arfeen and Nielsen (2017), utilize the internet. In the digital age, having access to the internet is becoming increasingly crucial for learning. However, Balochistan and other rural parts of Pakistan struggle to connect to the internet and stay online (World Bank, 2019). The digital divide exacerbates the gender gap in education, particularly for female students who have less access to online information, communication, and learning resources. One of the bigger cities in the province, which is otherwise primarily made up of rural areas, is Turbat. Numerous rural schools lack even the most

basic supplies and a sufficient number of licensed teachers, which is a well-known problem (Naz, 2003).

Girls in rural Balochistan struggle to get an education for a variety of reasons. Deep ingrained cultural standards, such as gender role expectations and early marriage customs, frequently obstruct girls' access to school. Their efforts to pursue an education are further hampered by poverty, a lack of dependable transportation, and an inability to access adequate school facilities. Balochistan's sociopolitical environment has several effects on women's access to education. Political upheaval, armed conflict, and security concerns have disastrously affected educational institutions, resulting in school closures and population displacement (Reliefweb, 2011). Women's access to resources and opportunities, such as education, is hampered by the area's patriarchal social structure and traditional values. Female students in rural Balochistan confront additional challenges that keep them from getting a proper education and reaching their academic goals because of the political situation there. Pakistan's government has started various initiatives to eliminate discrimination against women and bridge the gender gap in education. In order to increase female enrollment and graduation rates, the Government of Pakistan's National Education Policy 2017–2025 (Dr. Dawood Shah, 2020) strongly emphasizes gender equality in the classroom. The Government of Pakistan's 2018 Prime Minister's Education Reform Program intends to decrease the proportion of students without access to a high-quality education while increasing the proportion of students who do. However, implementing these solutions in rural Balochistan is challenging due to logistical challenges and a lack of resources (The Nation, 2017).

Background topics discussed include the gender gap in Pakistani education and the digital divide in rural areas. Rural Balochistan's demographics and educational environment have been discussed, along with the challenges faced by female pupils. Finally, the political context has addressed the political factors affecting women's access to education in Balochistan as well as the government initiatives and directives intended to address the issue. This research then explores the phenomenological technique used to look into women's internet use and educational objectives in Turbat, Pakistan. An analysis and interpretation of the findings follows a review of the study approach and data collection methods. The findings of this study allow for the recommendation of

policy interventions and support systems to enhance the educational prospects for female students in rural Balochistan by addressing the problems they confront and the possible effects of digital connectivity on their educational experiences.

Statement of Problem

This study addresses the issue that female students in rural Balochistan have few options to use the Internet and further their education. This lack of opportunity prevents them from pursuing higher education or realizing their full potential.

Significance

This study contributes to the body of information on the subject of women's access to higher education and the internet in rural Pakistan. The study finds out what kinds of problems women face when they try to use the internet to learn more and makes suggestions for how to help them in school. Policymakers and teachers in Pakistan can use the results of this study to better understand how important it is to pay for girls' education and give more people in rural places access to the internet.

Research Questions:

- What are the lived experiences of female students in rural Balochistan regarding their academic aspirations?
- What are the challenges faced by female students in accessing education and the internet in rural Balochistan?
- What strategies can be used to improve the academic outcomes of female students in rural Balochistan?

Research Objectives

- To explore the lived experiences of female students in rural Balochistan regarding their academic aspirations.
- To identify the challenges faced by female students in accessing education and the internet in rural Balochistan.
- To propose strategies that can be used to improve the academic outcomes of female students in rural Balochistan.

Theoretical Framework

The term "digital divide" was first used to describe the disparity in the number of individuals who have access to personal computers and the internet in the 1990s. This dispersion is caused by a number of factors, including financial class, education level, skin tone, gender, ethnicity, and location. The digital divide limits chances in the fields of economics, society, and education, particularly in developing nations. To comprehend the difficulties faced by female students in rural Balochistan in pursuing their educational goals and acquiring access to the internet, this theoretical framework employs phenomenology and an examination of the digital divide hypothesis.

Digital Divide Theory

The Digital Divide Theory discusses the discrepancy between people who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. The phrase was first used by researchers worried about how technology will affect society in the middle of the 1990s. Jan van Dijk is a well-known name in the subject and the author of "The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society" in 2005. Different levels of access to technology are seen to be the main cause of disparities in social and economic standing. The message is that people who lack technology literacy are less competitive in today's society. The phrase also implies that factors other than access to technology, such as abilities, attitudes, and cultural barriers, also contribute to the digital divide. Van Dijk's theory has been explored and contested by academics, and it has influenced conversations about global politics. Numerous public and non-profit organizations have started programs to broaden people's access to and awareness of valuable technologies in an effort to reduce the "digital divide." According to the "digital divide" hypothesis, a person's opportunities for economic, social, and educational advancement are strongly impacted by their access to digital technologies and the internet. This concept is based on the notion that those who have access to the internet and other digital technology are favoured tremendously in contemporary society. In order to close this gap, the digital divide theory encourages expanding access to computers and the internet.

The situation in rural Balochistan is particularly relevant to the "digital divide" notion. Rural areas frequently experience poor access to the internet and other digital technologies. Female students in rural

Balochistan confront additional difficulties that limit their mobility and access to education due to institutional flaws, political influence in governmental institutions, security concerns, geographical backwardness, cultural restraints, and other issues. The digital divide in this context must be understood if social inclusion, social parity, gender equality, and better educational opportunities are to be advanced.

Phenomenological Approach

"Phenomenological theory" is a philosophy-related way of thinking that emphasizes the individual's personal life and worldview. The concept was first proposed by the German philosopher Edmund [Husserl](#) at the beginning of the 20th century. According to the phenomenological hypothesis, each person develops their own reality based on their particular set of experiences and viewpoints. It contends that via their thoughts, feelings, and actions, humans construct their own realities rather than merely viewing them. Husserl contends that the phenomenological method necessitates a careful examination of every experience in order to expose the underlying structures and meanings from which it derives. This is putting judgment on hold and concentrating just on the current, relevant sensations in a scenario. Numerous academic fields, particularly the social sciences, have been influenced by phenomenological thinking. Just a few of the topics the researchers have used it to investigate include consciousness, perception, and individuality.

The phenomenological approach focuses on how individuals experience and interpret their surroundings. This idea holds that people's perspectives and perceptions are influenced by their own unique histories and personal experiences. The study's interest in the actual circumstances under which women in rural Balochistan pursue higher education and use the internet makes the phenomenological theory a good fit. The phenomenological hypothesis contends that it is critical to consider individuals' distinctive perspectives and experiences. In order to understand how and why female students in rural Balochistan view and use the internet in relation to their academic objectives, this study applies phenomenological theory. By becoming aware of the experiences of female students, researchers can better understand the problems they confront and provide solutions. For studying the difficulties encountered by female students in rural

Balochistan with respect to their pursuit of higher education and internet access, phenomenological theory and the digital divide theory give significant context. By using these frameworks, researchers can gain deeper insight into the difficulties experienced by female students and develop solutions. This study illuminates the manner in which rural Balochistan female students' access to digital technologies and the internet affects their desire to pursue higher education.

Literature Review

A wise investment in the future prosperity of that society is funding girls' education. However, females face a variety of challenges and issues that make it challenging for them to pursue an education in many regions of the world. Girls in Balochistan face numerous obstacles to education, including a lack of internet access, political and security worries, and the digital divide based on race and gender. Arfeen and Nielsen (2017) want to explore the literature that already exists on these topics and how it affects girls' education in Balochistan through this review. For young women in Balochistan, a big problem is the absence of internet connectivity. The internet can be a lifeline for students wishing to expand their knowledge when traditional educational materials like books are not easily available, as is often the case in more remote places. Balochistan has a serious problem with an internet connection, which prevents women from pursuing higher education (Ahmad, [2020](#)). Students are unable to take advantage of online learning options because there are numerous areas of Balochistan without consistent internet connectivity. Due to the digital gap, girls in rural areas have less access to educational resources than their counterparts in metropolitan areas (Nasser et al., 2018). In terms of schooling and other chances, girls in rural Balochistan have few options. Girls' educational opportunities in this area are hampered by a variety of factors, including a lack of resources, cultural biases, and financial difficulties. Despite these challenges, many rural girls nonetheless have high academic objectives. Girls may be able to find the support and direction they need from internet resources to get over these challenges. Finding overarching themes and knowledge gaps in the body of existing literature on this subject is the goal of this literature study. The gender disparity in Balochistan's educational system is examined by Baloch and Bhatti (2017) using data from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey. The authors assert that women are less likely

than men to pursue formal education, particularly in rural areas. The gender gap in educational attainment is a result of a number of variables, including poverty, cultural norms, and a lack of infrastructure.

Ahmad (2020) investigates the usage and advantages of the internet among college-aged women in rural Baluchistan. The author lists a number of challenges, including a lack of infrastructure, expensive fees, and cultural norms that limit girls' mobility. The research lists communication with teachers and classmates as well as access to educational resources as two examples of how digital technology may enhance women's educational opportunities.

In rural Balochistan, girls encounter many obstacles to attending school. According to Shah & Shah (2012), significant hurdles to girls' education are created by cultural norms that prioritize boys' education over girls' education. The lack of female educators in rural areas is another obstacle to women's education. Research by Baloch and Bhatti (2017) found that girls are less likely than boys to attend school, particularly in rural areas. The gender gap in education is attributed to a number of factors, including poverty, cultural norms, and a lack of infrastructure. Despite these challenges, many rural female students have high academic aspirations. Female students are very interested in attending college and working in fields like medicine, engineering, and education, claim Hanif et al. (2020). However, they did list a few things working against them including insufficient resources, a lack of family and community support, and constrictive social standards.

Resources on the internet for girls may be able to provide them with the advice and information they need to tackle and get through these challenges. However, internet access is still sporadic in rural Balochistan due to a lack of both infrastructure and funding. According to Ahmad (2020), female students' ability to connect with friends and academic resources is hampered by their lack of internet access. Bari and Ahmed (2019) recognized cultural norms that limit women's independence and potential as a significant barrier to female students' access to the internet.

In rural Balochistan, the gender gap is a significant obstacle for women trying to access the internet. According to Bari and Ahmed (2019), cultural norms that limit women's potential and autonomy are a significant barrier to their access to the internet in the

classroom. According to Nasrullah et al. (2018), economic hardship, a lack of facilities, and cultural taboos all contribute to rural women's limited access to healthcare in Balochistan. In terms of schooling and other chances, girls in rural Balochistan have few options. Many female students strive for academic distinction in spite of these challenges. Girls may be able to find the support and direction they need from internet resources to get over these challenges. However, internet access is still sporadic in rural Balochistan due to a lack of funding and infrastructure. Due to cultural norms, girls already face major obstacles to education and socialization in today's culture. Future research should focus on finding answers to these issues as well as increasing the educational and technical options available to women in rural Balochistan.

Balochistan has had problems with politics and safety for a long time. Because of safety concerns, many schools in the area have closed, which has made it very hard for girls to go to school (Hameed et al., 2017). As a result of the long war, many families have had to move, which makes it hard for girls to finish their schooling. Also, schools have been shut down because of the security situation, especially in rural places where women already had trouble getting an education (Raj et al., 2014). Girls who can't go to school because of political or safety worries are much less likely to be successful in their social and economic lives in the future. In Balochistan, girls also have to deal with a digital gender gap that is getting worse. Batool et al. (2014) used the term "digital divide" to describe the difference between people who have access to information and communication technologies and those who don't. Nasrullah et al., (2013) say that the gap between women and people of colour and people from the main group in Balochistan is made worse by the fact that fewer women and people of colour have access to the internet. Due to the digital divide, Baloch girls have fewer chances for social and economic advancement. This is because they can't get to educational resources.

There are significant issues with girls' educational access and quality in Balochistan. Young women find it challenging to utilize the internet due to a lack of infrastructure and a substantial digital divide across different ethnic and gender groupings. These barriers make it more difficult for women to pursue higher education, which in turn limits their opportunities in the workplace and the economy. To address these issues, civil society organizations, educators, and

policymakers must collaborate. Collective effort can aid in removing these obstacles, opening doors to economic opportunities and education for all girls in Balochistan.

Shah et al. (2012) made the following efforts in an effort to start a conversation about the significance of girls' education in rural Pakistan: they invited responses to legitimate concerns, involved all stakeholders, requested social mobilization, removed practical obstacles, facilitated acceptable frameworks, and ensured successful outcomes. In order to find causal connections between early marriage and poor reproductive outcomes for young women in Pakistan, Nasrullah et al.'s (2013) study looked beyond sociocultural vulnerabilities. In a recent study, Batool et al. (2014) used a survey to collect data in order to use a quantitative approach typical of social science research. In four South Asian nations with high rates of girl-child marriage (20%)—Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan—Raj et al. (2014) looked at the educational attainment of women in relation to their age of marriage during a 20-year period. In order to identify the characteristics that affect ANC uptake, Ghaffar et al. analyzed prenatal care (ANC) utilization in Pakistan's Balochistan Province in 2016.

Data from the 2001–2002 Pakistan Integrated Household Survey/Household Integrated Economic Survey were used to examine the factors that contribute to under-immunization in Pakistani children under the age of five (Murtaza et al., 2016). Hameed et al. (2017) used data from Balochistan's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2010) to assess the prevalence of multidimensional child poverty and deprivation using Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA), as girls are more frequently considered as second-class citizens than boys. Female students have it harder than their male counterparts when it comes to things like having access to the internet, receiving a quality education, and access to health care. Nasser et al. (2018) looked into the impact of ethnic identity-based politics on higher education in Pakistan through in-depth interviews with young professionals in Balochistan and Punjab. Ahmad (2020) has discussed the socioeconomic and demographic impacts of the provision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for women's empowerment in rural and urban areas of Baluchistan. Hanif et al. (2020), for instance, made an important addition to the area by investigating the information exchange between universities and

companies in order to establish entrepreneurial institutions in Quetta, Balochistan.

Research Design

The goal of this qualitative study was to better understand how women in rural Balochistan felt about their access to education and the internet. Qualitative research is an excellent fit for this problem since it has the potential to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes deeply. In-depth interviews and focus groups discussion are used in this study's data collection methods. In-depth interviews with a variety of rural female students to learn more about their opinions on education and internet accessibility. In-depth discussions about girls' education and internet access are held in focus groups with a variety of female students, parents, and educators. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were used as methods. In-depth interviews with 20 female students from rural Balochistan were conducted. Balochi was the language used for the participants' native interviews. The interviews were verbatim recorded with consent from participants and later transcription for analysis. Focus groups discussion with female teachers, parents, and students were utilized to gather research data. Each focus group has between 8 and 10 members, and it is led in the participants' native Balochi. Focus group participants consented to have their interactions videotaped and verbatim transcribed for analysis. In order to uncover, understand, and report on recurrent patterns (themes) in data, this study's data analysis used thematic analysis, a popular qualitative method. The information acquired from the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews was subjected to independent thematic analysis. The data were coded by two independent coders using a coding scheme created to meet the requirements of the study. Once everyone has finished coding, they gather to discuss their findings and resolve any issues. The final themes were selected by consensus among the programmers.

Result and Discussion

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to make themes according to the topic, research questions, objectives and theoretical framework. The themes are derived from the socio-cultural, political and economic landscape of the research area. The primary focus was on key indicators and topics of lived experiences of female

students of rural Balochistan who face internet availability issues. Socio-cultural, political and economic factors were analyzed by making themes. The themes were also made using the respondent's expertise, experience and knowledge.

Digital Divide, Regional and Gender Disparity in Rural Balochistan

After studying the literature, it can be said that Balochistan is facing several issues like socio-political and economic ups and downs, security problems, no-go areas, military operations and active insurgency. Moreover, the province of Balochistan is considered the most backward province. Only 25% of individuals avail of internet services. However, after analysis of the national official reports about the usage of internet service province-wise and gender, researchers found that there is a complete blockade of internet service in Baluchistan's rural areas: Even some major cities like Turbat, Mastung, Dera Bughti, Panjgor and Dasht are included. In this regard, the female population is the worst victim of this issue. Owing to their gender and sensitivity to security issues plus double-burden human beings. On the one hand, they are female, and they cannot move or travel from one place to another for internet usage, and on the other, there is security issues, road blockade, protest culture in Balochistan, check posts and so on. However, in cities, male students somehow access the internet by using data, travelling from urban areas of internet networks and availability. For this purpose, the researcher interviewed one of the female students:

"Pursuing academic aspirations in rural Balochistan comes with several challenges. Limited resources, lack of quality educational institutions, political instability, security issue in the region, ethnic and gender sensitivities and societal barriers such as gender norms and restrictions often hinder our progress. Additionally, the unavailability of the internet further exacerbates these challenges, restricting access to vital educational resources and opportunities. Being a girl, we face many issues including, poverty, lack of quality education, rural areas set up, and cultural and security issues in rural areas of Balochistan. On the one hand, owing to security issues in the region, we face internet service availability issues, and on the other hand, poverty and gender stereotypes also create hurdles in the way of accessibility of the internet because we are girls; we don't have mobile and we cannot move from one place to another place for internet use."

Balochistan is a region which is confronting socio-political uncertainty and security turmoil. Due to this, various districts of the province have zero internet services, not even 2G internet service. As per Kepios's (2022) report, there were 82 million internet users in Pakistan, but as per Pakistan Telecommunication report (2021), there are 7 million people who use the internet. However, the rest of the country Pakistan is using 4G and 5G. According to Business Record (2022), 60% of Balochistan does not receive internet coverage. Moreover, when the researcher did a literature review, he found that the reason behind this situation is the ignorance and negligence of state institutions and security issues concerns in the region. As a result, the people of Balochistan are backwards in the epoch of technology and digitalization for the sake of security concerns which are yet not solved since 2004. This creates digital division and regional disparity phenomena and scenarios in Balochistan. In this regard, the researcher interviewed one of the female graduated students:

"Unfortunately, internet access in rural Balochistan is scarce, and it remains a significant challenge for both male and female students. Due to political instability, war zone, cultural society, gender stereotypes and limited resources, access to the internet is severely restricted. As a result of these limitations, I can only access the internet occasionally when I visit an urban area or rely on public Wi-Fi hotspots, which are also limited in availability. The challenges in accessing the internet for academic purposes are numerous. Slow internet speeds, frequent disconnections, and the inability to afford reliable internet connections make it difficult to conduct research, access online learning platforms, or even communicate with professors and peers."

Another female girl student respondent:

"Due to the limited internet accessibility, I can only use the internet for academic purposes when I have access to it, which is infrequent. I try to make the most of my time online by downloading study materials, accessing online courses or lectures, and connecting with fellow students or professors when the internet is available."

Limited Access to Education Resources in Rural Balochistan

Education is the most important tool for human beings in the epoch of transformation, development and modernization. Quality education and digital

technology is the need for today's education process. Balochistan is the most backward and neglected region as compared to other provinces of Pakistan. There is a 74% illiteracy level in Balochistan according to the Pakistan Education Statistic report 2022. There is limited access to educational resources in Balochistan:

"Education plays a crucial role in empowering individuals and opening doors to opportunities. By acquiring knowledge and skills, I believe that I can make a positive impact on my community, challenge social norms, and overcome gender disparities. Especially, the girls' population is the worst victim of this curse. There is only a 25% female literacy rate in Balochistan. Internet accessibility for the female population is a far cry. There are various female students who do not know how to use even mobile, and as we know that we use the internet through mobile. There is a limited laptop culture. Only some of the boys use laptops. There are myriad rural areas of Balochistan where there are zero internet services. The male population move here and there to avail of internet service. If I talk about quality education in Balochistan, we can see that there is a limited enrollment of female students in higher levels of education. Females face various socio-cultural and more importantly economic challenges to get an education. The female population on the one side, face gender stereotypes and on the other due to regional security issues and poverty quit their study from very early due to limited travelling opportunities from rural areas to urban ones."

Another female student was interviewed; she responded:

"Yes, there are noticeable differences between male and female students in terms of internet access and academic opportunities. Baluchistan's cultural landscape in some areas where often prioritizes the education of male students over female students, further limiting their access to resources like the internet. This disparity further exacerbates the existing gender gaps in education and hampers female students' chances of pursuing their academic goals. As we can study the data where we cannot see a single Baloch female in the field of IT, Academia, bureaucracy, space science, engineering and many more."

Socio-cultural Barriers to Female Education and Digital Inclusion

However, due to the culture of ignorance and the curse of ignorance, there are various regions in Balochistan where there is zero tendency to teach girl

children. It cannot be denied that there are limited resources to educate a boy child that how a girl child can avail education, but the question arises here why in the situation of limited resources or poverty, a male child is preferred to study. It is also true that it is a culture which prefers boys to girls due to socio-political and economic reasons. Even, the reason of the province security issues, military check posts all over the regions, protest culture, forced disappearances issue, and curfew-like situations all the time are also the factor behind this ugly situation. As a result, the girl population confronts the worst consequence of this situation; on the one side, due to her gender, she would be discriminated against in resources distribution in the family, on the other, owing to being a Baloch, she avails limited resource as compare to other ethnic groups. In this regard, the researcher interviewed a Baloch female student:

"On several occasions, the lack of internet access has negatively affected my academic performance. I remember struggling with research assignments that required accessing online journals, articles, and educational websites. Without reliable internet, I couldn't gather the necessary information, resulting in limited resources and lower-quality work. The absence of internet access has significantly impacted my ability to pursue my academic aspirations. It has limited my exposure to educational resources, online courses, and opportunities for collaboration with students from diverse backgrounds. This lack of access has made it challenging to stay updated with the latest developments in my field of interest and hindered my overall academic growth."

For this purpose, the researcher interviewed another female student; she responded:

"I am from Kolowa Awaran and a Student of Computer Science at Turbat University. Due to my education purpose, I am living in Turbat at my uncle's house. In Kolowa, there is neither electricity nor internet service. Owing to this issue, I most of the time live in Turbat for the internet. But the problem arises when vacation announces and I have to go hometown Kolowa where there is no internet. Due to my discipline, I have to be connected to the internet for assignments and quiz purposes. Even sometimes, I visited home; my teacher gave me assignments and research tasks; I was online and out of network. This makes me more disturbed because I am very keen on my education. However, the dilemma is that my elder sister who did her Master's in Education still doesn't know the usage of the internet and mobile. Due to inaccessibility of technology for a Baloch female."

Gendered Experiences of Internet Access and Digital Literacy

There is no zero awareness of modern technology and digitalization in Balochistan. In Balochistan, there are only 31% of females are literate. Digital literacy is a far cry in Balochistan. The female population face all time hardship in the availability of quality education. Statistics and facts are crystal clear about the suffering of Baloch females in rural areas. They are less educated, we cannot see them in public spheres like in social sectors, bureaucracy, top-level academia, engineering domains and so on.

"In rural Balochistan, the challenges faced by female students in accessing education and the internet are significant. The lack of resources, limited internet infrastructure, and patriarchal cultural norms create substantial barriers to our academic progress. It is crucial to address these issues and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for female students. We are double-burden human beings in Pakistan; on the one side, we are from Balochistan where all time situations are under warm water in the shape of military operations, political crackdown, protests, and curfews while on the other hand, being Baloch female due to my gender, I am stuck off among the four walls of family."

Policy Implications for Bridging the Digital Divide and Promoting Social Inclusiveness

Now it is time to fill the gap by introducing digital gadgets and the internet to the female population of Balochistan in an equal way. To ensure digital parity, there should be seminars and workshops under the theme of Digitalization for female students from all levels of universities, colleges and schools. Internet packages should be announced. However, the problem arises when we visit rural areas of Balochistan where the male population travel a mile for internet service, then how can female student travel or move from one place to another for internet? In this regard, the researcher interviewed one of the female students: she responded:

"I bought an Android phone when I got admission to university. It was a need of time to buy a phone. I convinced my father to buy a phone. After a long endeavour, I convinced him. However, my little brother has two smartphones and he is 9th class student. There are various issues we face as a female. I came to learn how to use a phone when I entered university. However,

I often use internet services when I go to university. At home, we have an internet issue. There are no PTCL services available near my house. However, internet services 4G and 3G were restored three years before. Only the elite can afford this. My brother uses internet packages; however, I still don't know how to do internet packages."

While doing a focus group discussion, one of the females responded:

"As a Baloch female student from a rural area in Balochistan, I have personally experienced the challenges of limited internet access and its impact on pursuing academic aspirations. Political unpredictability, a patriarchal society, a lack of infrastructure, and other factors make it difficult for female students to pursue an education and use the internet for homework. The number of female students who have access to higher education and the internet must be significantly increased. Infrastructure issues must be resolved, digital literacy programs must be increased, and cultural beliefs that forbid girls from attending school or using the internet must be disproved. It is essential to increase internet connectivity in underserved areas, such as rural and mountainous areas, in order to bridge the gender gap and encourage more females to pursue higher education."

While interviewing a female student in a focus group discussion, one of the female students doing BS in Education from a rural area responded:

"Yes, it is clear that male and female students' access to the internet and their classroom experiences are unequal. Girls are subjected to additional limitations and constraints as a result of our patriarchal culture, which makes it challenging for them to access the Internet. This worsens the achievement gap between girls and boys in education and reduces the possibilities for intellectual growth and career advancement for girls. On the other side, it's likely that because they have easier access to the internet, male students have more opportunities for intellectual engagement and research."

Another female respondent with optimism:

"I hope to see improved access to education and the internet for female students in Balochistan. Investments in internet infrastructure, expansion of educational institutions, and initiatives to challenge gender disparities can help create equal opportunities for female students. It is vital for the government, community leaders, and organizations to collaborate and implement effective measures that promote education and provide equitable access to the internet for all students in Balochistan. It is

my hope that through targeted interventions, a collaboration between educational institutions, government bodies, and community organizations, we can create a more inclusive and equitable environment that fosters educational opportunities and internet access for all students in Balochistan, irrespective of their gender or geographical location."

Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the internet access and academic aspirations of female students in Turbat, Balochistan. The research employed a phenomenological approach to fathom the unique opportunities and challenges these students encountered when pursuing education and utilizing digital resources. According to the study, in rural Balochistan, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural obstacles substantially impede female students' access to education and digital resources.

According to the study, the difficulties experienced by female students in rural Balochistan—especially female students—were made worse by a lack of internet connectivity. Because fewer than 25% of people have access to the internet, the digital gap is a severe issue. It was shown that social and economic factors affected the digital divide. Balochistan's inadequate infrastructure, scarce resources, and political involvement are largely to blame for this situation. The survey also revealed that there is a significant disparity between males' and women's access to education in Balochistan. This gender gap is caused by societal and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating in and accessing education and technology. According to the survey, access to educational resources is more difficult for girls since cultural norms prioritize the education of boys. The political and financial restrictions on access to educational resources in Balochistan compound this cultural bias against female education. This study emphasizes how crucial digital inclusion and equality are to women's academic success. The poll reveals a large gender gap in educational accomplishments,

which further emphasizes Balochistan's lack of educational resources. This inequality is exacerbated by cultural limitations on girls' access to education and the internet. As a result, it is crucial to address these issues and seek to eliminate the gender and digital gaps in education. Future research can focus on finding solutions to these issues as well as encouraging gender equality in education and digital inclusion.

Conclusion

The goal of the study was to learn more about the challenges and opportunities faced by rural female students who want to pursue higher education and internet access. According to the study, socio-political, economic, and cultural barriers make it difficult for female students in rural Balochistan to access education, digital tools, and internet services. These issues are made worse by the fact that fewer students, particularly girls, have access to the internet. The study also showed that there is a sizable educational gap between the sexes in Balochistan. This imbalance is a result of cultural beliefs that prevent women from pursuing higher education and other forms of empowerment. An important barrier to girls' access to school is cultural norms that prioritize boys' education above that of girls. Balochistan's economic and political constraints on access to education accentuate the cultural bias against female education in the country. In order to secure girls' academic outcomes, the report emphasizes the necessity for digital inclusivity and equality. It's critical that we try to close the gender gap and the digital divide in education. Research in the future can look into ways to improve digital inclusion and gender equality in the classroom. In conclusion, our research adds to the existing body of knowledge on barriers to education and digital inclusion for women in rural Balochistan. The research emphasizes the need for increasing digital inclusion and gender parity in education and the need for policymakers and stakeholders to address these concerns. Research into solutions for these problems and for expanding digital equality is encouraged as a result of this study.

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