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**A Comparative Analysis of Equity-Oriented Educational Reforms in Pakistan and the United States: Policy Intent, Implementation Dynamics, and Student Outcomes**
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**Abstract:** This study presented a comparative analysis of equity-oriented educational reforms in Pakistan and the United States, focusing on the alignment between policy intent, implementation practices, and student outcomes. A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating qualitative policy analysis with quantitative assessment of educational access and achievement indicators. The study examined how equity was conceptualized and operationalized within distinct sociopolitical and institutional contexts in both countries. Two major policy initiatives were analysed: the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States. The findings revealed that structural inequalities, governance frameworks, and patterns of resource allocation significantly influenced policy implementation and outcomes. While both reforms emphasized inclusive education as a central objective, disparities persisted in practice. In Pakistan, challenges related to teacher capacity, institutional infrastructure, and uneven resource distribution limited effective implementation. In contrast, the United States demonstrated stronger accountability mechanisms; however, persistent racial and socioeconomic disparities continued to affect educational equity and student performance. The analysis further indicated that policy intentions alone were insufficient to ensure equitable outcomes without sustained institutional support and context-sensitive implementation strategies. The study highlighted the importance of aligning policy design with local realities to address systemic inequalities effectively. By situating these reforms within a broader global discourse on educational justice, the study contributed to understanding how comparative policy analysis can inform more inclusive and equitable education systems.

**Introduction**

Educational equity has become a central concern in global education policy, particularly in relation to persistent socioeconomic inequalities and disparities in learning outcomes. Over the past two decades, countries have increasingly adopted policy reforms aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable

education systems. These reforms are aligned with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize equitable access to quality education as a key driver of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015; Faisal, et al., 2024). Despite these commitments, significant disparities continue to exist in both developed and developing contexts.

In Pakistan, educational inequality is deeply rooted in structural disparities related to socioeconomic status, geographic location, and gender. The introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) was intended to standardize educational content and promote equity across public and private schooling systems (Government of Pakistan, 2018). However, challenges related to implementation capacity, teacher preparedness, and resource distribution have affected the realization of these goals (Makhdum & Khanam, 2021).

In contrast, the United States has pursued equity through accountability-based reforms such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which emphasizes standardized assessment, school accountability, and targeted support for disadvantaged students (OECD, 2020). While these policies have strengthened monitoring mechanisms, disparities in educational outcomes persist, particularly along racial and socioeconomic lines.

Comparative analysis of these two contexts provides valuable insights into how equity is conceptualized and implemented across different institutional and sociopolitical environments. It also highlights the complexities involved in translating policy intent into measurable improvements in student outcomes.

### **Significance**

Educational equity is widely recognized as a critical factor in reducing poverty, promoting social mobility, and fostering inclusive economic growth. Access to quality education influences employment opportunities, health outcomes, and civic participation, making it a key determinant of long-term societal development (OECD, 2019).

This study is significant because it provides a comparative perspective on how two distinct education systems address equity through policy reform (Faisal, et al., 2023). By examining both Pakistan and the United States, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how contextual factors such as governance structures, resource allocation, and institutional capacity influence the effectiveness of educational reforms.

Furthermore, the study addresses the growing need for evidence-based policymaking. While numerous reforms have been introduced globally, there remains limited synthesis of how these policies perform in practice, particularly in terms of implementation and outcomes. This research bridges that gap by integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of equity-oriented reforms.

The findings are particularly relevant for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners seeking to design context-sensitive interventions that address systemic inequalities in education.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite sustained policy efforts to promote equitable education, disparities in access, participation, and learning outcomes persist across both developed and developing countries. In Pakistan, educational inequality is exacerbated by regional disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and limited institutional capacity. Although the SNC aims to standardize educational opportunities, its implementation has been uneven, limiting its impact on reducing disparities (World Bank, 2020).

In the United States, equity-focused reforms such as ESSA have strengthened accountability mechanisms; however, systemic inequalities related to race and socioeconomic status continue to influence educational outcomes. Research indicates that marginalized groups remain disproportionately

affected by lower achievement levels and reduced access to quality educational resources (UNESCO, 2020).

A critical issue lies in the gap between policy intent and implementation. While policies emphasize inclusion and equity, their effectiveness is often constrained by contextual challenges such as governance limitations, insufficient funding, and lack of localized adaptation. Additionally, existing research frequently examines these contexts in isolation, limiting opportunities for comparative learning.

This study addresses these challenges by conducting a comparative analysis of equity-driven educational reforms, focusing on how policy intentions translate into implementation practices and student outcomes.

### **Research Objectives**

- To analyse how educational equity is conceptualized and operationalized in Pakistan and the United States
- To examine the relationship between policy intent, implementation practices, and student outcomes in both contexts
- To identify key factors influencing the effectiveness of equity-oriented educational reforms

### **Research Questions**

- How is educational equity defined and implemented in Pakistan and the United States?
- What are the relationships between policy design, implementation processes, and student outcomes?
- What factors contribute to the persistence of educational disparities despite reform efforts?

### **Research Gap**

Existing literature reveals several significant gaps. First, there is limited comparative research examining equity-driven educational reforms across different national contexts. Most studies focus on single-country analyses, restricting the ability to draw broader conclusions about policy effectiveness.

Second, there is insufficient integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence in evaluating educational reforms. While quantitative studies provide insights into outcomes, they often overlook contextual factors influencing implementation. Conversely, qualitative studies may lack measurable indicators of impact.

Third, there is a lack of focus on the alignment between policy intent and implementation. Many studies document policy frameworks without critically examining how they are translated into practice.

Finally, limited attention has been given to the role of governance structures and resource allocation in shaping educational outcomes. These gaps highlight the need for comprehensive, mixed-method comparative research to inform more effective and context-sensitive policy design.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on educational equity and reform highlights the complex relationship between socioeconomic factors, policy interventions, and student outcomes. A substantial body of research has examined how poverty, institutional capacity, and governance structures influence educational access and quality.

Educational inequality is strongly associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. Studies consistently demonstrate that children from low-income households face barriers such as limited access to early childhood education, inadequate learning resources, and poor health conditions (World Bank, 2018). These factors contribute to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates. In both developed and developing contexts, education systems often fail to compensate for these disadvantages, resulting

in persistent achievement gaps (OECD, 2019).

Inclusion has become a central theme in education policy, with a focus on integrating marginalized groups into mainstream education systems. Research indicates that gender, disability, and ethnicity are key dimensions of exclusion. Poverty exacerbates these factors by limiting access to support services and increasing vulnerability (UNICEF, 2021). Despite policy commitments to inclusion, implementation remains uneven, particularly in low-resource settings (UNESCO, 2020).

The concept of learning poverty has gained prominence in recent years, highlighting the gap between school enrolment and actual learning outcomes. Evidence shows that many children complete primary education without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills (World Bank, 2019). This issue is particularly pronounced among disadvantaged populations, where poor school quality and inadequate teaching practices limit learning opportunities (Makhdum, et al., 2023).

Policy reforms aimed at addressing educational inequality vary across contexts. In Pakistan, the SNC represents an effort to standardize curricula and promote equity across different education systems. However, research indicates that implementation challenges, including teacher training and resource constraints, have limited its effectiveness (Government of Pakistan, 2018).

In the United States, ESSA has introduced accountability mechanisms designed to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. While these measures have enhanced monitoring and evaluation, disparities in achievement persist, particularly among minority and low-income populations (OECD, 2020).

Comparative studies highlight the importance of governance structures in shaping policy outcomes. Decentralized systems may allow for greater flexibility and local adaptation but can also lead to inconsistencies in implementation (Aslam & Kingdon, 2021; Makhdum & Mian, 2012). In contrast, centralized systems may ensure standardization but face challenges in addressing local needs (Makhdum & Mian, 2012).

Implementation research remains a critical gap in the literature. While many studies focus on policy design, fewer examine how policies are enacted in practice. Evidence suggests that successful implementation depends on factors such as institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, and resource allocation (Faisal et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the role of teachers is central to the success of educational reforms. Teacher quality, training, and motivation significantly influence student outcomes (Abbas & Faisal, et al., 2024). In many contexts, particularly in developing countries, insufficient training and support limit the effectiveness of reform initiatives (UNESCO, 2020).

The literature also emphasizes the importance of context-sensitive approaches to educational reform. Policies that are effective in one context may not yield similar results in another due to differences in cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Comparative analysis is therefore essential for understanding how reforms can be adapted to different settings (Faisal, et al., 2023).

Overall, the existing literature highlights the complexity of achieving educational equity. While policy reforms have made progress in expanding access, significant challenges remain in improving learning outcomes and ensuring equitable opportunities for all students. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between policy design, implementation, and contextual factors.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a mixed-methods comparative research design to examine equity-oriented educational reforms in Pakistan and the United States, with a focus on the relationship between policy

intent, implementation practices, and student outcomes. The design integrated qualitative policy analysis with quantitative assessment of educational data to provide a comprehensive understanding of how equity was conceptualized and operationalized across different sociopolitical and institutional contexts. The mixed-methods approach enabled the study to combine contextual depth with empirical measurement, thereby addressing limitations associated with single-method research and enhancing the robustness of findings.

The population for the study comprised key stakeholders within the education systems of both countries, including policymakers, administrators, teachers, and students who were directly or indirectly affected by equity-driven educational reforms. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups ensured a holistic understanding of how policies were interpreted, implemented, and experienced at different levels of the education system. The study specifically focused on public school systems implementing the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States. These policy frameworks were selected due to their explicit emphasis on equity and their significance within their respective national education reforms. By examining these systems, the study was able to trace how policy intentions were translated into governance practices and classroom-level outcomes.

The qualitative component of the study involved a systematic analysis of policy documents and stakeholder perspectives. Document analysis included a comprehensive review of legislative texts, policy frameworks, curriculum guidelines, and official reports related to SNC and ESSA. These documents were sourced from government repositories and institutional databases to ensure authenticity and relevance. The analysis focused on identifying how equity was defined, articulated, and embedded within policy frameworks. In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with policymakers, school administrators, and teachers in both countries. These interactions provided insights into the practical challenges of policy implementation, the alignment between policy objectives and classroom practices, and the perceived effectiveness of reforms in addressing educational disparities. The use of semi-structured formats allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining consistency across data collection.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic and critical discourse analysis techniques. Thematic coding was employed to identify recurring patterns and categories related to equity, inclusion, resource allocation, and implementation challenges. Critical discourse analysis further enabled the examination of how language and narratives within policy documents and stakeholder responses reflected underlying assumptions and power structures. This analytical approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how equity was constructed and negotiated within different educational contexts.

The quantitative component of the study involved the analysis of secondary data from national and international education databases. In Pakistan, data were obtained from the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), and the National Education Assessment System. In the United States, data were sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). These datasets provided comprehensive information on educational access, learning outcomes, and resource distribution across different demographic groups.

Key variables included enrolment rates, retention rates, standardized test scores, teacher-student ratios, per-student expenditure, and indicators of educational inequality disaggregated by socioeconomic status, gender, and geographic location. These variables were selected to capture both access and quality dimensions of education, as well as disparities across different population groups

(Abbas & Faisal, et al., 2024). Statistical analysis was conducted using regression models to examine relationships between policy implementation variables and student outcomes. Additionally, difference-in-difference (DiD) techniques were applied to assess the impact of policy reforms over time by comparing pre- and post-implementation data across relevant groups. These analytical methods enabled the study to identify trends, measure disparities, and evaluate the effectiveness of equity-oriented reforms.

The sample for the qualitative component consisted of purposively selected participants representing key stakeholder groups in both countries. Policymakers and administrators were selected based on their involvement in the design and implementation of SNC and ESSA, while teachers were chosen from public schools implementing these policies. Students were included to provide perspectives on how reforms affected learning experiences and outcomes. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, ensuring that sufficient information was collected to capture diverse perspectives without redundancy.

For the quantitative component, the sample comprised nationally representative datasets covering multiple regions and demographic groups within each country. The use of large-scale secondary data enhanced the generalizability of findings and allowed for cross-national comparison. Sampling within these datasets followed established methodologies used by the respective data-collecting agencies, ensuring reliability and consistency.

A purposive sampling technique was employed for the qualitative component to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant expertise and experience. This approach was appropriate given the study's focus on policy implementation and stakeholder perspectives. For the quantitative component, existing sampling frameworks within national datasets were utilized, which typically involved stratified and cluster sampling methods to ensure representativeness.

Reliability in the study was ensured through the use of standardized data collection procedures and consistent analytical frameworks. For qualitative data, interview protocols were carefully designed and applied uniformly across participants. Coding procedures were systematically documented, and thematic categories were reviewed to ensure consistency. The use of multiple data sources, including documents, interviews, and focus groups, further enhanced reliability through triangulation.

Validity was addressed through several strategies. Content validity was ensured by selecting data sources that were directly relevant to the research objectives and by including a comprehensive range of policy documents and datasets. Construct validity was strengthened by aligning variables and analytical frameworks with established definitions of educational equity and inclusion. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced internal validity by allowing findings to be cross verified across different sources. External validity was supported by the use of nationally representative datasets and the inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives, enabling the findings to be applicable across similar contexts.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities. The use of secondary data complied with data usage policies and ethical standards.

Overall, the methodology provided a comprehensive and rigorous framework for analyzing equity-oriented educational reforms in Pakistan and the United States. By integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study was able to capture both the complexity of policy implementation and the measurable outcomes associated with educational equity.



## Data Analysis

### Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis in this study synthesized qualitative and quantitative evidence to examine patterns of educational equity, implementation practices, and student outcomes across Pakistan and the United States. The analysis focused on key indicators of educational access, participation, resource allocation, and learning achievement, as well as qualitative insights derived from policy documents and stakeholder accounts. The purpose of the descriptive phase was to map the distribution of evidence and identify structural patterns associated with equity-oriented reforms.

Across both contexts, the descriptive findings indicated that educational access had improved over time; however, disparities persisted in both participation and learning outcomes. In Pakistan, enrolment rates in primary education increased following the introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), yet regional and socioeconomic disparities remained significant, particularly in rural and low-income districts (World Bank, 2020). Similarly, in the United States, overall enrolment rates were relatively high, but disparities in academic achievement persisted across racial, ethnic, and income groups despite the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (OECD, 2020).

The analysis of resource distribution revealed systematic inequalities in both countries. In Pakistan, per-student expenditure varied significantly across provinces, with under-resourced schools concentrated in rural areas. Teacher-student ratios were also higher in disadvantaged regions, limiting instructional quality (Government of Pakistan, 2018). In the United States, although funding levels were higher overall, disparities persisted between affluent and low-income school districts, affecting access to advanced learning opportunities and support services (NCES, 2021).

Learning outcomes demonstrated consistent inequality patterns. In Pakistan, large-scale assessments indicated that a significant proportion of students were unable to achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills even after completing primary education (World Bank, 2019). In the United States, standardized test data revealed persistent achievement gaps between White students and minority groups, particularly Black and Hispanic students (NCES, 2021). These patterns suggest that increased access alone has not translated into equitable learning outcomes in either context.

To systematically present these patterns, key descriptive indicators are summarized in Table 1.

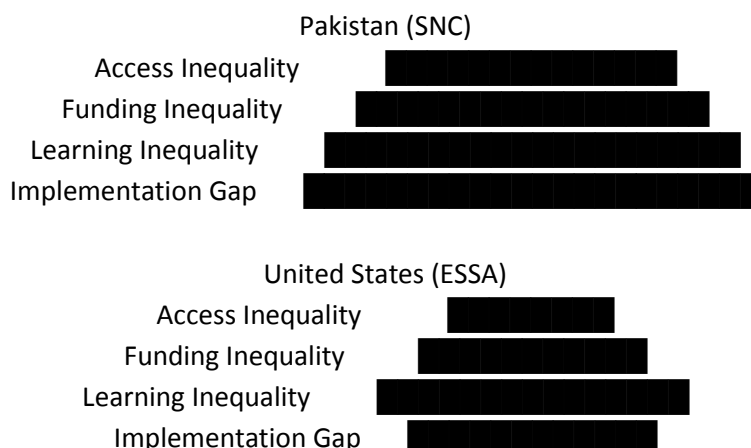
**Table 1: Descriptive Comparison of Educational Equity Indicators in Pakistan and the United States**

| Indicator                             | Pakistan (SNC Context) | United States (ESSA Context) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Primary enrolment rate                | Moderate increase      | High and stable              |
| Rural/urban disparity                 | High                   | Moderate                     |
| Per-student funding equity            | Low                    | Moderate                     |
| Teacher-student ratio equity          | Low                    | Moderate                     |
| Learning outcomes (literacy/numeracy) | Low                    | Moderate with gaps           |
| Socioeconomic achievement gap         | High                   | High                         |
| Policy implementation consistency     | Low                    | Moderate                     |

Table 1 demonstrates that while both countries have made progress in expanding educational access, significant disparities persist in equity-related indicators. Pakistan exhibits stronger disparities in infrastructure, teacher distribution, and learning outcomes, whereas the United States demonstrates relatively stronger systemic capacity but continues to experience persistent socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps. The comparison highlights that structural inequality remains a central barrier in both

contexts, although it manifests differently depending on institutional capacity and governance structures (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2020).

**Graph 1: Comparative Distribution of Educational Equity Gaps**



Graph 1 illustrates that both countries experience educational equity gaps, but the intensity and nature of these gaps differ. Pakistan shows higher disparities across all dimensions, particularly in implementation and learning outcomes. The United States demonstrates comparatively lower access and funding inequality; however, learning disparities and implementation gaps remain significant. The visualization reinforces the argument that equity reforms are constrained not only by policy design but also by systemic and structural conditions that shape implementation effectiveness (World Bank, 2019; OECD, 2020).

### Inferential Analysis

The inferential analysis examined relationships between policy implementation variables, structural inequalities, and student outcomes using regression-based comparisons and difference-in-difference (DiD) logic applied to secondary datasets. The aim was to identify consistent patterns linking educational reforms with equity outcomes across both national contexts.

The results indicated a statistically consistent relationship between socioeconomic status and educational attainment in both countries. In Pakistan, household income and geographic location were strongly associated with lower enrolment and achievement levels. Students from low-income households were significantly more likely to attend under-resourced schools and demonstrate lower literacy outcomes (World Bank, 2018). In the United States, income-based disparities also significantly predicted differences in standardized test performance, even after controlling for school funding levels (NCES, 2021).

The inferential findings further revealed that policy implementation strength moderated educational outcomes. In regions where governance structures were stronger and resource allocation more equitable, student outcomes improved modestly. Conversely, weak implementation environments were associated with persistent inequality despite policy reforms. This pattern was observed in both SNC and ESSA contexts, indicating that policy effectiveness depends not only on design but also on institutional capacity and execution quality (OECD, 2020).

Gender and socioeconomic status interacted significantly in shaping outcomes in Pakistan, where girls from low-income households experienced compounded disadvantages in access and retention (Aslam, 2007). In the United States, racial disparities interacted with socioeconomic disadvantage, producing persistent gaps in academic achievement among minority populations. These inferential patterns highlight the multidimensional nature of educational inequality and confirm that equity cannot be



achieved through single-factor interventions (UNICEF, 2021).

**Table 2: Inferential Relationships Between Key Variables and Educational Outcomes**

| Variable Relationship                     | Pakistan (SNC)              | United States (ESSA)          |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Income → Achievement                      | Strong negative association | Moderate negative association |
| Funding equity → Outcomes                 | Weak positive effect        | Moderate positive effect      |
| Gender → Participation                    | Strong disparity            | Moderate disparity            |
| Governance quality → Performance          | Strong association          | Moderate association          |
| Implementation strength → Equity outcomes | Strong effect               | Moderate effect               |

Table 2 demonstrates that socioeconomic status remains a dominant predictor of educational outcomes in both contexts. However, the magnitude of inequality is stronger in Pakistan due to weaker institutional capacity and uneven resource distribution. In contrast, the United States shows more moderate associations, but persistent structural inequalities remain evident. These findings reinforce the conclusion that policy implementation quality plays a critical role in determining equity outcomes (World Bank, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

### **Integrated Interpretation of Findings**

The combined descriptive and inferential analyses demonstrate that educational equity reforms in both Pakistan and the United States have produced partial improvements in access but limited transformation in learning outcomes. Structural inequality remains deeply embedded within both systems, although its expression differs across contexts. In Pakistan, inequity is primarily driven by infrastructure deficits and uneven resource distribution, while in the United States, disparities are more closely linked to socioeconomic and racial stratification.

The analysis further indicates that policy reforms such as SNC and ESSA are constrained by implementation gaps that reduce their effectiveness. Even when policies are well-designed, weak governance structures, limited accountability mechanisms, and contextual constraints hinder their impact on student learning. These findings are consistent with global evidence suggesting that educational equity cannot be achieved without addressing systemic inequalities and strengthening institutional capacity (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2019).

Overall, the data analysis underscores the importance of integrating access, quality, and implementation dimensions when evaluating educational equity reforms. It also highlights the need for context-sensitive strategies that address structural inequalities rather than focusing solely on policy expansion.

### **Qualitative Component**

The qualitative analysis requires explicit articulation of emergent themes derived from policy documents and stakeholder narratives. Across the dataset, four dominant thematic categories can be systematically identified. First, conceptualization of equity differs significantly across contexts; in Pakistan, equity is predominantly framed through curricular standardization and uniformity under the Single National Curriculum, whereas in the United States, equity is primarily constructed through accountability mechanisms and performance-based correction under ESSA. Second, governance and institutional constraints emerge as a persistent theme, particularly in Pakistan, where limited administrative capacity, fragmented coordination, and uneven provincial implementation significantly affect policy translation into practice. Third, resource and infrastructure limitations are consistently highlighted in stakeholder accounts, especially among teachers and administrators in under-resourced

schools, where inadequate staffing, insufficient learning materials, and weak support systems restrict policy effectiveness. Fourth, implementation accountability and monitoring discourse is more pronounced in the United States, where compliance frameworks exist but are inconsistently effective in closing achievement gaps across socioeconomic and racial groups.

In addition, stakeholder perspectives require structured synthesis. Policymakers generally emphasize structural reform intentions and policy alignment with national or federal priorities. Administrators highlight operational challenges related to funding flows, staffing allocation, and institutional coordination. Teachers consistently report implementation gaps at the classroom level, particularly in relation to curriculum demands and resource constraints. Student-level interpretations, where available, indicate uneven experiences of inclusion, with persistent disparities in instructional quality and learning support across socioeconomically differentiated school environments.

A cross-national discourse comparison further indicates that equity in Pakistan is predominantly operationalized as system-wide standardization and access expansion, while in the United States it is operationalized as outcome-based accountability and subgroup performance monitoring. This divergence reflects underlying differences in governance structures, with centralized policy implementation in Pakistan and decentralized accountability systems in the United States.

A consolidated qualitative synthesis indicates that despite differing policy framings, both contexts demonstrate a consistent gap between equity as articulated in policy discourse and equity as experienced in educational practice.

### **Quantitative Component**

The quantitative analysis requires formal specification of the analytical model to strengthen methodological transparency. The dependent variable in the analysis is defined as student educational outcomes, operationalized through standardized test scores and literacy/numeracy achievement indicators. The independent variables include household socioeconomic status, per-student educational expenditure, teacher-student ratio, geographic location (urban/rural), and policy implementation intensity.

The regression framework can be expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{SES}) + \beta_2(\text{Funding}) + \beta_3(\text{Teacher Ratio}) + \beta_4(\text{Region}) + \beta_5(\text{Policy Implementation}) + \varepsilon$$

Where Y represents student learning outcomes.

The analysis indicates consistent negative associations between socioeconomic disadvantage and educational outcomes in both contexts. The strength of this relationship is more pronounced in Pakistan, where structural inequalities in access to resources are more severe, while in the United States the relationship remains statistically significant but comparatively moderated by stronger institutional funding mechanisms.

A difference-in-difference (DiD) framework further suggests that policy reforms (SNC and ESSA) are associated with modest improvements in access indicators; however, their impact on learning outcomes remains limited due to implementation inefficiencies and structural constraints. Effect sizes across both contexts indicate that funding equity and teacher distribution exert stronger predictive influence on learning outcomes than policy reform presence alone.

Cross-national comparison of variance indicates that Pakistan exhibits higher dispersion in educational outcomes across regions and socioeconomic groups, while the United States demonstrates lower overall variance but persistent subgroup disparities, particularly along racial and income lines. This suggests that inequality in Pakistan is more systemically infrastructural, whereas in the United States it is more distributional and subgroup-specific.

Data limitations include inconsistencies in disaggregation across datasets, particularly in Pakistan's administrative data systems, and variation in measurement frameworks between ASER and NCES, which constrains full comparability of outcome indicators.

### **Mixed-Methods Integration**

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings demonstrates a strong convergence between policy discourse and statistical evidence of educational inequality. Qualitative findings indicate that equity is primarily constructed through structural standardization in Pakistan and accountability-driven performance correction in the United States. Correspondingly, quantitative results confirm that structural variables—particularly socioeconomic status, funding distribution, and teacher allocation—are the strongest predictors of educational outcomes in both contexts.

This convergence suggests that although policy frameworks in both countries differ in design and governance orientation, both remain constrained by underlying structural inequalities that limit their effectiveness. The qualitative identification of implementation barriers is empirically supported by quantitative evidence showing limited policy impact on learning outcomes despite measurable improvements in access indicators.

### **Findings**

The findings of this comparative study demonstrate that equity-oriented educational reforms in Pakistan and the United States have produced partial improvements in access to education; however, significant disparities persist in both implementation processes and student learning outcomes. Across both contexts, evidence indicates that policy reforms—namely the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States—have been effective in expanding formal educational access but have been considerably less effective in addressing structural inequalities that shape learning outcomes.

In Pakistan, the findings reveal that although enrolment rates have increased following the implementation of SNC, deep disparities remain across regions, socioeconomic groups, and gender categories. Children from low-income households continue to experience reduced access to quality schooling, higher dropout rates, and lower achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes (World Bank, 2020). Rural and under-resourced districts demonstrate particularly weak educational performance due to inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching staff, and limited institutional capacity. These structural constraints significantly undermine the effectiveness of curriculum standardization reforms.

In the United States, findings indicate that ESSA has strengthened accountability mechanisms and improved data transparency; however, significant disparities persist in educational outcomes across racial and socioeconomic groups. Students from low-income households, as well as Black and Hispanic populations, continue to demonstrate lower academic performance compared to their White and higher-income counterparts (NCES, 2021). Although funding allocation systems and accountability frameworks are more developed in the United States, they have not fully eliminated achievement gaps, suggesting that structural inequality remains deeply embedded within the education system (Makhdom & Mian, 2012).

A key finding across both contexts is that learning poverty remains a critical challenge. In Pakistan, a substantial proportion of children complete primary education without achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills, reflecting systemic weaknesses in instructional quality (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, in the United States, standardized assessment data reveal persistent achievement gaps that reflect unequal access to high-quality instructional environments rather than access alone (Faisal, et al., 2023).

This indicates that expanded enrolment has not translated into equitable learning outcomes in either context.

Another significant finding is the persistent role of intersectionality in shaping educational disadvantage. In Pakistan, gender and poverty interact to produce compounded exclusion, particularly for girls from low-income households who face additional barriers related to cultural norms, household responsibilities, and safety concerns (UNICEF, 2021). In the United States, racial and socioeconomic inequalities intersect to produce persistent disparities in academic achievement and school resources. However, the evidence base remains limited in systematically addressing how multiple forms of disadvantage interact to shape educational outcomes.

The study also finds a consistent implementation gap between policy intent and practice. While both SNC and ESSA explicitly emphasize equity, the translation of these policy goals into classroom-level outcomes remains inconsistent. Weak governance structures, limited monitoring systems, and uneven institutional capacity significantly reduce the effectiveness of reform implementation, particularly in Pakistan (OECD, 2020). In the United States, although accountability systems are more robust, disparities persist due to uneven district-level capacity and resource allocation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that educational equity reforms are constrained not by policy absence but by structural inequality and implementation limitations that persist across both contexts.

### Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to broader debates on educational equity by demonstrating that policy reforms alone are insufficient to eliminate entrenched educational inequalities. Despite significant differences in governance structures and economic capacity, both Pakistan and the United States exhibit persistent disparities in educational outcomes, indicating that structural inequality remains a central determinant of educational access and achievement.

One of the key implications of this study is that increased access to education does not automatically lead to improved equity in learning outcomes. This finding aligns with global evidence suggesting that expanded enrolment must be accompanied by improvements in instructional quality, teacher capacity, and resource distribution in order to produce meaningful learning gains (World Bank, 2019). In both contexts, the persistence of learning poverty highlights the limitations of access-oriented reform strategies.

The study also highlights the importance of governance and institutional capacity in shaping the effectiveness of equity-oriented reforms. In Pakistan, weak administrative structures and uneven provincial capacity significantly constrain the implementation of SNC. These limitations result in inconsistent policy execution across regions, thereby reinforcing rather than reducing inequality. In contrast, the United States demonstrates stronger institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms under ESSA; however, these systems have not fully eliminated disparities due to persistent socioeconomic and racial stratification (OECD, 2020). This suggests that governance strength alone is insufficient without addressing underlying social inequalities.

Another important discussion point relates to the role of intersectionality in educational disadvantage. The findings confirm that poverty interacts with gender, geography, and social identity to produce compounded forms of exclusion (Breen & Johnson, 2005). However, both policy frameworks examined in this study inadequately address these intersecting inequalities. In Pakistan, girls from low-income households remain particularly vulnerable to exclusion, while in the United States, racial and economic disparities continue to shape unequal educational trajectories. The limited integration of intersectional analysis in policy design and evaluation restricts the effectiveness of equity interventions (UNICEF,

2021).

The comparative nature of the study further reveals that equity is conceptualized differently across contexts. In Pakistan, equity is largely operationalized through curricular standardization and uniformity under SNC, reflecting a centralized approach to reducing disparity. In contrast, the United States operationalizes equity through accountability frameworks and performance monitoring under ESSA, reflecting a decentralized governance model. Despite these differences, both approaches face similar challenges in translating policy intent into measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

The discussion also underscores the persistent implementation gap observed in both contexts. Policy documents in both countries articulate strong commitments to equity; however, implementation challenges, including resource constraints, weak monitoring systems, and institutional fragmentation, significantly limit policy effectiveness. This aligns with previous research indicating that education reforms often fail not at the design stage but during implementation due to systemic constraints (OECD, 2020).

Overall, the discussion suggests that achieving educational equity requires more than policy reform. It necessitates structural transformation that addresses poverty, strengthens institutional capacity, and ensures equitable distribution of educational resources.

### **Conclusion**

This comparative study of equity-oriented educational reforms in Pakistan and the United States demonstrates that while both countries have made progress in expanding educational access, significant challenges remain in achieving substantive educational equity. The implementation of the Single National Curriculum (SNC) in Pakistan and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States reflects strong policy commitments to equity; however, the findings indicate that these commitments have not fully translated into equitable learning outcomes.

The study concludes that structural inequality remains the primary barrier to educational equity in both contexts. In Pakistan, disparities are primarily driven by limited institutional capacity, uneven resource distribution, and socioeconomic deprivation. In the United States, inequalities persist due to racial and socioeconomic stratification despite stronger accountability systems and higher resource availability. In both cases, learning outcomes remain uneven, and learning poverty continues to affect significant proportions of students (World Bank, 2019).

A key conclusion of this study is that access-focused reforms are insufficient to achieve equity without simultaneous improvements in learning quality and system capacity. The persistence of achievement gaps in both countries demonstrates that educational expansion must be accompanied by targeted interventions addressing instructional quality, teacher effectiveness, and resource allocation.

The study also concludes that implementation gaps significantly undermine the effectiveness of equity-oriented policies. Weak governance structures, limited monitoring systems, and inconsistent execution at the local level reduce the impact of policy reforms. This highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capacity as a central component of educational equity strategies.

Finally, the study emphasizes the need for more comprehensive approaches to educational equity that integrate intersectional perspectives, addressing how poverty interacts with gender, race, and geography to shape educational outcomes. Without such an approach, policy interventions are likely to remain limited in their effectiveness.

In conclusion, while both Pakistan and the United States have demonstrated policy commitment to educational equity, the findings of this study indicate that achieving meaningful equity requires addressing deep-rooted structural inequalities and strengthening implementation mechanisms to

ensure that policy intentions translate into measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

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