

# Classroom Setting in Urban and Tribal Areas of Pakistan

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## Abstract

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*This paper presents a study conducted in the tribal and urban areas of Pakistan to explore the preferred class setting, in-class or virtual education, by male and female students. Data is collected through surveys, conducting brief interviews and mini-discussion sessions with the students in those regions. This study investigates the relationship of gender (male/female), location (tribal/urban), and preferred educational setting (in-class/ Virtual education) in Pakistan. Results revealed that females from tribal areas significantly prefer a virtual education system as compared to female students in urban schools. Similarly, all males from urban areas preferred an in-class education system as compared to male students in tribal schools. Interview and discussion sessions that were held provided a deeper insight on the underlying issues and influential factors that led to the student preferences, especially students in tribal areas. The student preference for classroom setting leads to implications which if applied might lead to an increase in the literacy rate of Pakistan.*

## Introduction

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Education is one of the most essential components for the success of a nation. In previous times, education was limited to classrooms only but nowadays, there are multiple convenient ways through which the process of education is facilitated. This process is still quite limited in some parts of the world, especially in the third world countries, where literacy rate is still very low. In order to increase the literacy rate, the need is to find out what processes and methods will efficiently work, the solutions that are feasible and preferred among the people of those countries. It is vital to focus not only on the education quality, but on the classroom setting and environment which leads to the latter. For example

in some parts of the world, literacy rate for women is very low because of the lack of accessibility, unjustified restrictions and other influential factors. Literacy rate in those regions also depend upon the varying environment, climate, economic situation, political structure and religious beliefs of those nations.

For this study, the focus has been on the tribal and urban areas of Pakistan. The literacy rate of Pakistan is 54% which includes people who can read newspaper and write their names. In this 54% literacy rate, 37% are females and 63% are males [7]. Availability of education is common in urban and tribal areas but two extremes are observed when it comes to the education of females. Since almost half (49%) of the population of Pakistan consists of females, education for women becomes critical and necessary. It was a very important part of the research to reach out to these women and observe the differences in how males and females had the facility of education and what their concerns were with the current classroom setting. Another area of interest was to observe the difference between males and females in preferring in-class setting and virtual class setting since one of the major issues in those areas is accessibility among many others e.g., affordability, quality etc.

The education of Pakistan is based on the British educational system since the British colonization of the Indian sub-continent. There are two types of educational institutions, private and government and two types of studies, Arts and Sciences. Expanding access to primary schooling is a widely accepted priority since the education up to the primary level (5<sup>th</sup> grade) is free. Nevertheless, developing countries face a daunting task in their efforts to expand the delivery of educational services due to rapidly expanding populations and tight government budgets [2]. Tuition rate for private schools is very high, especially for low income households. Government schools are considered more valuable and honorable as compared to private schools even though private schools provide more facilities in terms of education and extra-curricular activities.

## Literature Review

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In Pakistan, there is an increasing concern with both, access to education for all Pakistani children and the quality of the schooling received. However, as in many developing countries, there is a lack of research-based understanding of the nature of school quality, classroom setting and the process of successful change to increase the literacy rate. According to a research conducted by Iffat Farah, it was

revealed that the successful schools proved to be very different from control schools on a number of qualitative properties, including school and classroom climate, teacher mastery and competence, curriculum implementation, teacher commitment, student attitude, and community ownership of the school [5].

Several researches have focused on the privatization of academic institutions and varying tuition rates. Many researchers have conducted pilot studies to study the effect of low income households in attending private and government institutions. They also shed light on the issue of women not being able to access schools in rural areas. Alderman and Kim concluded through a series of pilot programs that the consensus from studies of the relative effectiveness of public versus private schools in developing countries is that the predicted performance of children in private schools is higher than predicted performance in government schools [1]. Privatization seems to provide the up-to-mark education that most parents seek but it should be considered that fees, quality or distance affect education or learning of students. Unfortunately, most existing studies of public-private choice do not include the option of not attending school and thus do not shed light on this key group of children. Also, studies that examine how fees, distance or school quality affect the likelihood of the government versus private institutions, do not shed light on no school or home-school option.

Since gender segregation is of concern to some of the households along with other issues, Shaikh and Hatcher describe through the use of extensive literature review that the gender sensitive strategies and solutions need to be developed in order to address the needs of both male and female students [7]. Schooling demands are analyzed separately for boys and girls. Analyzing the sample separately by sex is particularly important in Pakistan where evidence suggests that females receive less education than males. Boys have consistently higher mean enrollment rates and school attainment, although the differences between boys and girls are most pronounced in rural areas and tribal areas. Also, because Muslim culture encourages protection of young girls from exposure to the opposite sex once puberty is reached, the lack of all-girl schools with female teachers may be a significant deterrent to girls' continuation into middle and secondary school. Special transportation or a chaperone must often be arranged for daughters in middle and secondary schools, thereby adding to the costs of sending girls to school [4]. Thus, the household's decision to educate daughters appears to be quite different from the decision to educate sons.

Holmes from Yale University found out through her study that the enrolment rate for both male and female in urban and tribal areas were informative to understand the general situation. In response to

the alarmingly low levels of enrolment, in recent years the percentage of the overall development budget allotted to education has risen dramatically, and it has been supplemented with donor funds[6]. Das from The World Bank and Khwaja from Harvard University provide evidence through their empirical research that private schools which are coeducational have high enrolment rates for girls and had a high number of female instructors. It was also observed that the rural areas where there is a greater supply of educated women are able to respond very effectively to the growing demand for education by formation of schools and by increased enrollment. But there was also a clear difference in the socio-economic status of the females enrolled in these schools as compared to the socioeconomic status of girls from public schools [3].

Data obtained through an empirical study conducted in rural areas of Pakistan by Arif and Saqib shows that the gap between male and female enrolment rate has been bridged a little during the last two decades but a lot of work still needs to be done. They also suggest that it is important to learn the difference between public and private schools and how they are interrelated. They identify that private educational institutions existed even at the time of its independence in 1947 but they were boosted during the 60's, particularly in the urban areas. A major shift in the education policy occurred in 1972 when more than 3000 private schools and colleges were nationalized. As a result, the number of schools under government administration increased sharply, resulting in serious deterioration in the management and resource availability. The standard of education in the public schools also declined accordingly and the infrastructure wore out with the passage of time [6]. However, the literature does not suggest ways of how to approach the issue and does not suggest any solutions of how to bridge the gap between male and female enrolment rates. The difference in public and private schools is marked with coeducation, quality and high tuition rates which low income households and households very particular about gender segregation cannot afford.

This gave rise to the need of further research about what the students themselves preferred in terms of classroom setting and schooling. Literature lacked the aspect of virtual education which can reduce the difference of public versus private schools and the issue of gender segregation could also be solved. Considering these hypotheses, empirical research was conducted in the tribal and urban areas of Pakistan using the following hypotheses.

**Hypotheses:** The focus of research is on male and female differences in literacy rate in urban and tribal areas and how classroom setting played a role in this difference. Through our qualitative research, we also focused on the causes of lower numbers in literacy rate and what the causes were for student

preference. From the literature review conducted, it was clear that some of the causes were affordability, accessibility, and cultural setup. It was also clear that there was a massive difference between male and female literacy rate due to causes mentioned above. But there was a lack of research on classrooms where males and females were actually present during the process of education.

Therefore, the intention of this study was to analyze if class room setting was of any problem which caused lower literacy rate and how virtual education played role in people's preference towards getting education, and eventually, increasing the literacy rate. Based on that, the hypotheses were:

**H1:** Females in urban areas will prefer in-class education as compared to females in tribal areas who will prefer virtual education.

**H2:** Males in both, urban and tribal areas will prefer in-class education equally.

## Method

*Subjects:* The sample consisted of 120 participants, 60 males and 60 females. Thirty females were randomly selected from schools in tribal areas and 30 females were randomly selected from schools in urban areas (i.e., 60 females were equally selected from tribal and urban areas). And, 30 males were randomly selected from schools in tribal areas and 30 males were randomly selected from schools in urban areas (i.e., 60 males were equally selected from tribal and urban areas). Following table represents subject selection.

Table 1. Subject selection across urban and tribal areas of Pakistan

	(Urban)	(Tribal)	TOTAL
Males	30	30	60
Females	30	30	60
TOTAL	60	60	120

*Materials:* Materials included in the research consisted of a survey about participant's (1) location and (2) preferred class settings. These were the two variables we were interested in for this study but several other questions were included in the survey (a total of 10 questions). Other questions on the survey inquired participants of their (3) gender (4) age (5) grade (6) institution type (private or government school) (7) willingness to travel for this research (8) comfort level with their present class setting (9) knowledge about virtual education (10) knowledge about in-class setting. The last question on the survey was optional which inquired students of their per month school tuition.

After the survey, the participants were asked to fill out an optional brief questionnaire about influential factors that led them to their preference about class setting. The questionnaire was used to understand the general trend in the different locations about class setting preference. The questionnaire included a total of 3 open ended questions. These questions were (1) Explain why did they prefer their preferred class setting? Describe. (2) Why are they (not) comfortable with the present class setting? (3) What are the major concerns and hurdles they have to overcome on a short term and/or long term basis in order to get to school?

*Procedure:* The participants were provided with a 6-month long theoretical and practical training about virtual class setting and in-class setting to make sure the participants were familiar with both types of class settings. It was made sure that they received proper and adequate guidelines especially for virtual class setting since they had limited knowledge about the virtual educational system. The training was given in a lab in the capital of the state, Islamabad in Pakistan. All the traveling and residential expenses were covered by the research organization.

After the training ended, the participants were asked to fill out the survey discussed earlier. After filling out the survey, the participants were handed an optional questionnaire to get a deeper insight about the survey responses. These responses could also lead to further this research or develop follow-up research. Several participants volunteered to answer the questions on the questionnaire and discussed their views, which are also included in the report as narratives. Those narrations were coded by analyzing the spectrum of answers and noting down the themes that repeated across the participants. The themes that emerged across the given answers and discussions were noted down and are included in the results section. The data were analyzed using SPSS 17.0 on a PC and the answers from the questionnaire were manually coded.

## Results

The data were reviewed as two separate sets at first. These two sets were based on male and female preference separately. After the representation of the results of each set below, numerical values regarding significance in SPSS are discussed. The discussion of the results is aided by using descriptive statistics for better interpretation. The sample size consisted of 120 subjects (n=120). The alpha level was set at 0.05 for the data to account as significant. Since the data was collected in the form of surveys and case study, there were two sets of data; Quantitative data and Qualitative data. First, Quantitative data will be presented which will be followed by Qualitative data:

**Quantitative Data:** The first main set was based on preferred class setting by females (n=60) and the second main set was based on preferred class setting by males (n=60). There were two subsets within each main set, one subset from urban areas, consisted of 30 females and 30 males, and the second subset from tribal areas, consisted of 30 females and 30 males.

The survey results obtained for female participants from tribal areas revealed that, of the 30 female participants in tribal areas, 30% preferred in-class setting and 70% preferred virtual education. Similarly, the survey results obtained for female participants from urban areas revealed that , of the 30 female participants in urban areas, 90% preferred in-class setting and only 10% preferred virtual education. This distribution of results can also be seen in Table 2 below.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between females from schools in urban and tribal regions of the state and their preferred class setting. The relationship between these variables was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 9.67, p < .05$ . Females from schools in urban areas were interested in an in-class setting as compared to the females from schools in tribal areas who were interested in virtual class setting.

Table 2. Female Subjects' Preference about Classroom Setting

Females in schools –			
Tribal	In Class	9/30	30%
	Virtual	21/30	70%

Urban	In Class	27/30	90%
	Virtual	3/30	10%

The survey results obtained for male participants from tribal areas revealed that, of the 30 male participants in tribal areas, 73% preferred in-class setting and 27% preferred virtual education. Similarly, the survey results obtained for male participants from urban areas revealed that, of the 30 male participants in urban areas, 100% preferred in-class setting and 0% preferred virtual education. This distribution of results can also be seen in Table 3 below.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between males from schools in urban and tribal regions of the state and their preferred class setting. The relationship between these variables was significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 32.27, p < .05$ . Males from schools in urban areas were interested in an in-class setting as compared to the male students from schools in tribal areas who were interested in both in-class and virtual class setting.

Table 3. Male Subjects' Preference about Classroom Setting

Males in schools –			
Tribal	In Class	22/30	73%
	Virtual	8/30	27%
Urban	In Class	30/30	100%
	Virtual	0/30	0%

**Qualitative Data:** Data obtained from the students who voluntarily participated in the questionnaire and discussion, a mini case study, was in the form of notes. The notes were then manually coded for themes that emerged across the notes. A collection of themes were observed which are presented in the form of quotes as following:

**Females in Tribal Area:**

- *“It’s not safe to go to school anymore”* [ **Theme 1: Fear**]
- *“In-class is more expensive, my parents can’t afford”* [**Theme 2: Affordability**]

**Females in Urban Area:**

- *“I want to become a doctor so in-class is crucial for me”* [**Theme 3: Professional Career**]
- *“I will be studying arts so no need to go to class, virtual education is super convenient”*  
[**Theme 4: Non-professional Career**]

**Males in Tribal Area:**

- *“It’s not safe to go to school”* [**Theme 1: Fear**]
- *“Schools shut down so virtual education is super convenient”* [**Theme 2: Convenience**]
- *“Even though in-class is dangerous, I still need high-quality education”* [**Theme 3: Quality**]

**Males in Urban Area:**

- *“I *\*have\** to become an engineer and so I need to go to labs so there is no point in virtual education”* [**Theme 4: Professional Career**]
- *“I’m not a girl...”*[**Theme 5: Gender difference**]

## Discussion

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Since the results obtained are in the form of quantitative and qualitative data, each will be discussed separately for females and males. At the end, both types of results will be discussed for males and females, contrastively.

The quantitative results show that more females in urban areas are interested in an in-class setting whereas less females in tribal areas are interested in an in-class setting. When the females from urban schools, who preferred in-class setting and filled out the questionnaire, were asked to describe why they preferred in-class setting over virtual education, they described that the main reason was their preference for a professional career. It was also revealed through the study that most of the females were interested in becoming medical doctors. Since there are two types of studies in Pakistani schools, Arts and Sciences, Arts studies do not require students to conduct laboratory experiments whereas Science studies require students to conduct weekly laboratory experiments. Since these laboratory sessions cannot be provided in virtual education, virtual education is not preferred by Science students. It was also observed that students in the urban areas were more interested in pursuing professional careers as compared to the students in the tribal areas.

The qualitative data obtained shows that the preference of achieving a professional career causes the respective preferences of females in both regions. According to Farah, responsibilities for females are different than males in tribal areas due to cultural restrictions [8]. Females are not required to provide for the family; thus, their need for a professional career decreases according to the culture in tribal areas. This trend was not observed in urban areas where the situation was almost opposite for females. In urban schools, most of the females preferred in-class education because of their preference of pursuing professional careers. Urban culture seems to be promoting the female students to get Science education; thus, more females in urban schools were interested in an in-class setting. These results were statistically significant and confirmed the first hypotheses which stated that females in urban areas will prefer in-class education as compared to females in tribal areas who will prefer virtual education.

The situation for males was different in both tribal and urban areas. All males in urban areas were interested in an in-class setting and 73% of the males in tribal areas were interested in an in-class setting. The rest of the 27% of the males in tribal areas were interested in virtual education. Qualitative results revealed that most of the males were interested in pursuing professional education; thus science studies which require weekly laboratory sessions. Also, since the responsibility of males is

to provide for the family, they were preferred to pursue professional careers due to high salaries of science majors than arts majors. The 27% of the males in tribal areas revealed that fear due to on-going war in tribal areas was the result of their preference. Even though these results were confirmed as statistically significant but they did not satisfy the second hypothesis which stated that males in both urban and tribal areas will prefer in-class setting equally.

Themes from qualitative data reveal that there was a sense of fear and affordability among the females in tribal areas. Since their primary responsibility does not require them to provide for the family, their parents fail to afford science education which is more expensive than arts education. This also describes the fact that virtual education is less expensive than in-class education because it will not require students to buy uniforms or pay for travelling to school. Girls also described that they either went to school in a group or in the presence of a chaperone, virtual education will ease this restriction for them; thus, virtual education will be more convenient and safe as well.

Theme for females in urban areas showed that their preference of pursuing a medical career led them to their preference of in-class education. There were some girls preferring virtual education in tribal areas, but it was due to a convenience factor. They also specified that since they are arts students, they are not required to go to class; thus, virtual education will serve the purpose. It was revealed through literature review that schools with female instructors had higher enrolment rate for female students as compared to schools with male instructors. Since gender segregation is very vital in tribal culture, this also becomes another deciding factor for female preference and virtual education is thus preferred.

Themes from qualitative data reveal that there was a sense of fear, convenience, and quality. Students who preferred virtual education in tribal areas described that there was a sense of fear due to on-going war in the region due to which it was not safe for students to travel to schools. Since schools were being targeted by the terrorists, students in tribal areas were starting to prefer virtual education. Still there were some students who preferred in-class education because of their preference of a professional career like engineers or doctors even though they did mention that in-class education was dangerous due to the on-going war conditions.

Themes coded for males in urban areas revealed that there was a sense of pursuing a professional career and gender difference. As it is clear from the quantitative data that all males preferred in-class setting, some students described that it was due to the reason that they wanted to pursue science education which requires conducting weekly labs. Since it was not possible on virtual education, they

preferred in-class setting. Some male students also described the notion of a gender difference existing among them. It was observed that virtual education in urban areas was seen to be a lower level of education because it did not provide the facility of conducting laboratory experiments and also, it did not require the students to travel to school.

The perceived traditional role of women is to stay home and provide care to the family; female students preferred virtual education because they were not going to pursue a professional career. Due to this, males perceived virtual education lower than in-class education because their perception about virtual education was that it was suitable for females because of their responsibility. This perception was different in tribal areas as some male students' preferred virtual education due to safety and security issues.

## Conclusion

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Extreme observations and comparisons were noticed between the results obtained through student from urban and tribal areas. More males, both from tribal and urban areas are interested in an in-class setting and more females from urban areas are interested in an in-class setting whereas more females from tribal areas are interested in virtual class setting.

Main causes of preference for virtual education were fear, affordability, accessibility, gender difference, difference in responsibility for males and females. Main causes of preference for in-class setting were quality of education, difference in arts and science education, pursuance of professional careers like doctors and engineers, the need of laboratory sessions, and considerations of virtual education as lower level and in-class setting as higher levels of education.

These results can have implications on the current education design, especially in terms of classroom settings, in Pakistan and have the potential of increasing the literacy rate, especially for women in tribal areas. If virtual education is used in tribal areas, literacy rate for women can substantially increase. In urban areas, most of the students prefer in-class setting, so by considering the issues of affordability, literacy rate can substantially increase as well.

As a whole, it is observed that males are more career-oriented than females, especially in tribal areas. Females have a different responsibility in tribal areas than in urban areas leading the females to get less

education in tribal areas than in urban areas. Virtual class-setting might increase literacy rate, especially for women in tribal areas and can also save time of students who are living in tents and waiting for the on-going war to end. In-class setting is suitable for males and females interested in pursuing professional careers since it provides laboratory facilities and professional experience.

### ***Future Research:***

Since this research points towards the solution of increasing the literacy rate, especially for women in tribal areas, it leaves many questions as well. One question that can be researched is the impact of virtual education on females, especially in tribal areas. It might lead to less social activity; thus, less professional experience for women. The implementation of in-class education only can further lead to a decreased enrollment rate based on the issues of fear and safety. On the other hand, it could also produce more professional males and females in the positions of doctors and engineers which can eventually boost the unstable economy of the country.

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