



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Teachers' Views of Cultural Factors Impacting Secondary Education for Girls in Punjab, Pakistan.

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Master's thesis:	30 credits
Programme/course:	L2EUR (IMER) PDA184
Level:	Second cycle
Term/year:	Spring 2025
Supervisor:	Kassahun Weldemariam
Examiner:	Ernst Thoutenhoofd

Abstract

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Keywords:	Girls' education, cultural barriers, rural Punjab, gender norms, early marriage, education policy.

Education is a key driver of social and economic progress; yet, in rural Punjab, Pakistan, girls' access to education is significantly hindered by cultural, societal, and familial barriers. This study, from teachers' perspectives, examines teachers' views on the challenges faced by female students in continuing secondary education, focusing on traditional gender norms, household responsibilities, early marriage expectations, and economic constraints. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews reveals teachers believe that girls are often prioritized for domestic work and early marriage, which limits their educational opportunities. Additionally teachers reported that societal perceptions devalue girls' education, while economic pressures lead families to prioritize boys' education. The teachers in this study describe employing strategies such as mentorship programs, community engagement, and creating safe spaces within schools to combat these barriers and encourage girls to remain in school. Teachers in this study emphasized the need for professional development in gender-sensitive teaching practices to better support female students. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of receiving more resources and training to effectively address the cultural and economic barriers impacting girls' education.

Foreword

This research study has required considerable effort to reach this point. Yet, it would not have been viable without the contributions of several key individuals. Therefore, I am sincerely thankful to everyone who has lent their support to my research in their distinctive ways.

First, I must express my deep appreciation for my supervisor, Kassahun Weldemariam, whose patience; motivation, unwavering support, and guidance were instrumental from the outset to the completion of my study. His expertise and encouragement have played a crucial role in developing this thesis.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the participants of this study, whose willingness to share their personal experiences and insights laid the groundwork for this research. Without their contributions, this study would not have been feasible.

I am incredibly thankful to my family, particularly my brother and husband, for their relentless support, love, and patience. Their encouragement has fueled my academic journey, and I will always be grateful for their faith in my aspirations. Additionally, I appreciate my dear friend Meghan's help in developing it.

Finally, I thank all the professors and tutors for their valuable mentorship, inspiring lectures, and stimulating discussions, which have greatly enhanced my academic experience.

This research could not have been accomplished without the input and encouragement of all these individuals. I am genuinely grateful for their assistance in completing this study.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background of Study	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3	Research Questions	3
1.4	Statement of relevance.....	3
1.5	Significance of the Study	4
1.6	Scope and Limitations	4
1.7	Structure of the Thesis	5
2	Review of Literature	6
2.1	Cultural Factors Influencing Female Secondary Education.....	7
2.2	The Impact of Gender Roles and Family Dynamics.....	9
2.3	Teacher-Led Strategies	10
3	Conceptual Framework	14
3.1	Gender Performativity Theory: A Brief Overview.....	14
3.1.1	Historical Context.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.1.2	Significance of framework.....	16
4	Research Methodology.....	20
4.1	Research Design.....	20
4.2	Sampling Strategy	21
4.3	Data Collection Methods	21
4.4	Data Analysis	21
4.5	Ethical Considerations	22
4.6	Sustainability Statement	22
4.7	Conclusion	22
5	Results and Discussion.....	23
5.1	Cultural Barriers.....	23
5.1.1	Household Responsibilities and Their Impact on Girls' Education	24
5.1.2	Family Financial Status and Its Effect on Girls' Education.....	26
5.1.3	Belief in Marriage over Education.....	28
5.1.4	Gender-Specific Education Priority	31
5.1.5	Religious and Traditional Beliefs	34
5.2	Social Barriers.....	40
5.2.1	Peer Influence and Socialization.....	40
5.2.2	Family Decision-Making and Its Impact on Girls' Education	42
5.2.3	Parental Education Levels	43
5.2.4	Community Influence and Motivation	44

5.3	Teachers' Challenges in Ensuring Female Students' Participation	47
5.3.1	Societal Pressure to Conform to Gender Norms	47
5.3.2	Resistance from Parents and Communities	49
5.3.3	Cultural Resistance to Educating Girls Beyond a Certain Age	51
5.4	Teacher Strategies to Overcome Cultural Barriers	52
5.4.1	Community and Parental Engagement	52
5.4.2	Safe Spaces for Girls.....	54
5.4.3	Mentorship Programs	55
5.4.4	Teacher-Community Engagement for Girls' Education	56
5.5	Policies and Initiatives for Increasing Enrollment.....	58
6	Conclusion & Recommendations.....	62
6.1	Conclusion	62
6.2	Recommendations	62
6.3	Limitations and Contributions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
7	References	65
8	Appendices	72
8.1	Appendix 1: Letter of Consent for Participating in Research	72
8.2	Appendix 2: Consent Form for Participating in Research	73
8.3	Appendix 3: Semi- Structures Interview Questions	74

1 Introduction

Societies recognize education as a fundamental human right because it promotes social advancement. The educational gender divide persists across many areas, particularly in Pakistan, where women face significant restrictions that hinder their meaningful participation in community development and economic growth. This study examines teachers' views on the key barriers to female secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan, focusing on the impact of cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and infrastructural challenges. It explores how traditional gender roles, family dynamics, and societal expectations, as observed by teachers, contribute to the ongoing educational inequalities for girls. This chapter delves into the research background, followed by a clear problem statement, before presenting the investigative research questions.

1.1 Background of Study

Education is essential for societal progress, gender equality, and empowerment, as it serves as the foundation for change and development. It is a fundamental human right for all individuals, regardless of gender. In Pakistan, gender inequality manifests in various areas, including employment, healthcare, and education. Even when women enter the workforce, they often face wage disparities and other forms of inequality due to social pressures to conform to traditional roles (WEF, 2022). Women's engagement in society is further complicated by problems like gender-based violence (HRW, 2023). Despite national and international initiatives to support universal education, significant obstacles remain for girls, particularly in conservative regions. Gender-specific social roles further exacerbate inequality in schooling.

As a basic human right, the UN requires that everyone have access to education. The UN also highlights the importance of education for women around the World. Both women's status and the progress of the nation as a whole depend on education. Children, especially girls, can access valuable opportunities through a strong and sustainable educational system. (Reshi et al., 2022). According to a 2017 World Economic Forum assessment on the global gender gap, Pakistan ranks 139 out of 149 nations in educational attainment. This illustrates the dire situation regarding women's education in Pakistan. It is commonly acknowledged that women in Pakistan face many different and complex barriers to education, particularly in rural regions where they are ranked lower than men in the educational hierarchy. (Panzai et al., 2024).

Education is a key element influencing societies and individual development by facilitating economic advancement, promoting social equity, and maintaining community welfare. Research shows that education functions as a fundamental human right, delivering exceptional value, particularly to individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, as it helps them make better choices and enhances their quality of life (Barnes, 2018). Through education, society experiences substantial development by fostering socialization and reducing inequalities (Mir, 2019). It is a primary factor in economic growth through workforce development and technological modernization (Kuwar, 2021).

Secondary education is essential because it links primary education to higher education while teaching vital skills for employment and fostering personal development in students. Research demonstrates that secondary education drives economic progress and combats poverty while developing skilled individuals who contribute to national advancement (Poornima & Nair, 2019). Improvements in quality and access to secondary education increase national productivity, enabling individuals to develop skills necessary for work and academic advancement (Tian, 2023).

Female secondary education plays a crucial role because it creates substantial impacts on social advancement, along with both gender equality and economic expansion. The education process makes women more likely to engage in employment, make smart health choices, and contribute to their families and communities (Banerjee, 2021). Female secondary education in Pakistan encounters

significant barriers caused by socio-cultural obstacles, money issues, and a lack of good teaching quality (Ali et al., 2024a). Women's education unlocks dual benefits for themselves and positively impacts societal systems that drive economic prosperity and poverty elimination (Gebre, 2020). Sustainable development needs two essential policy interventions: reducing gender inequalities and inclusive educational systems supporting female education (Zhu, 2022).

The Punjab region of Pakistan faces major obstacles to female secondary school education development, even though programs exist to boost its progress. The Pakistan Education Statistics 2021-22 report a total school dropout rate of 60% among children at the higher secondary level, while provinces exhibit different levels of non-attendance. The enrollment initiatives in Punjab succeeded, but gender inequality persists throughout the province. The Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education documented in their 2021 report that girls in Punjab continue to face inadequate access to quality secondary education, particularly in rural regions, even though improvements have occurred. (PAGE, 2021). Factors such as socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, and inadequate school facilities contribute to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates among female students. While existing national and international reports broadly recognize socio-cultural norms as a barrier to girls' education in Pakistan, there is a notable lack of region-specific research exploring these cultural factors from the perspective of teachers in Punjab. Understanding teachers' viewpoints is essential, as they directly observe and influence how local traditions, expectations, and gender roles affect girls' access to and retention in secondary education. This study fills this important gap by examining the cultural challenges faced by female students in Punjab through the lens of teachers' experiences. The goal is to explore teachers' views on the localized barriers to girls' education and provide practical recommendations on what teachers need to improve the enrollment and retention of girls in Punjab's secondary schools.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Punjab, Pakistan, cultural expectations such as traditional gender roles, early marriage, and prioritizing boys' education continue to limit girls' access to secondary schooling. These deeply rooted norms are particularly influential in rural areas, where longstanding customs assign girls primary responsibility for household duties over academic pursuits. Economic inequality and inadequate educational infrastructure, which often fails to provide a safe and supportive environment for girls, further exacerbate these challenges (UNICEF, 2023). As a result, many teachers reported that girls face significant obstacles in completing secondary education, limiting their future educational and economic opportunities.

Cultural values prioritize early marriage and household duties over academic success, significantly influencing girls' educational opportunities. Because of these expectations, girls frequently have fewer educational options, which lowers their secondary school enrollment and completion rates. This phenomenon is especially common in rural communities, where traditional values are still strongly embedded, and societal expectations of motherhood and domesticity mostly determine females' responsibilities (Nyangwe-Moyo, 2021). These Cultural norms are further reinforced by poverty and other intersecting inequities, such as limited access to resources and gender biases in educational systems, which result in a cycle of low educational attainment and restricted socioeconomic mobility for women (Kabeer, 2005).

While previous research has explored structural and financial barriers to female education, there is a critical gap in understanding how cultural norms influence classroom dynamics and teachers' attitudes—factors that directly affect girls' academic support and engagement. Gender biases within educational settings shape instructional practices and can reinforce existing disparities. Without addressing these cultural and perceptual barriers at the classroom level, efforts to improve girls' secondary education in Punjab are unlikely to succeed. This study focuses on examining the cultural influences and systemic biases from the perspective of teachers in Punjab's secondary schools. It aims

to reveal how the perceptions of teachers impact girls' enrollment, retention, and academic experiences, thereby informing effective strategies to promote gender equality and enhance educational outcomes for female students in the region.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions will be developed to investigate the research objectives, with responses gathered from teachers:

1. How do teachers view the role of cultural factors in influencing female students' access to and engagement with secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?
2.
 - a) How do teachers perceive the impact of traditional gender roles on girls' access to secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?
 - b) How do teachers view the role of family dynamics in influencing girls' participation in secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?
3. How do teachers overcome cultural hurdles, and what are some effective strategies for increasing girls' secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?

1.4 Statement of relevance

The research provides an essential understanding of teachers' perceptions of cultural elements affecting secondary education opportunities for girls in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Research focuses on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by demonstrating why cultural obstacles need to be resolved for female education access, while using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as its foundation. The research identifies barriers to discussing policies promoting inclusive and equitable education systems (Nations, 2015).

Teachers' perceptions of gender equity movements have long recognized the need for equal educational opportunities; however, today's society remains constrained by cultural norms, gendered expectations, and traditional gender frameworks. The findings analyze cultural components that facilitate or hinder women from pursuing educational opportunities, illustrating the evolution of gender roles. It is crucial to examine the effects of changing cultural perceptions regarding gender and education on girls' school attendance, as perceived by teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities, negatively impacting girls through increased higher education dropouts and more stringent cultural restrictions on education. This research integrates cultural perception data to illustrate how pandemic-related educational setbacks developed due to cultural beliefs. It also evaluates recovery procedures designed to help girls return to schooling while continuing their education. Educational policies that fail to address cultural sensitivities ultimately fail to tackle girls' challenges. This research examines cultural influences in specific regions to make recommendations for policymakers seeking to develop effective culture-based programs that support female education retention and student outcomes enrollment.

The rising importance of mental health education reveals the necessity of studying cultural attitudes about female educational development and psychological health. This research implements cultural understanding and mental health analysis to design strategies that benefit female students' academic success and complete well-being (World Economic Forum, 2017).

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is crucial because it identifies and interprets the cultural barriers to secondary education for female students in Punjab through the perspectives of teachers, who play a key role in shaping and influencing teachers' perspectives on girls' educational experiences. The study evaluates the impact of traditional gender roles and social norms on family expectations through an examination of problems such as early marriage, along with teachers' views on parental viewpoints and societal pressure that block girls from educational growth. It investigates deeply how established educational barriers remain unaltered even after policy implementation and social advocacy efforts, as seen through teachers' perception.

The main research value of this investigation stems from its analysis of educational practices that teachers can implement to reduce cultural opposition to school attendance by girls. The research delivers specific examples of institutional solutions by examining community outreach initiatives, culturally appropriate teaching methods, and school educational programs. Besides adding to theory, this study uses teachers' perspectives to explore practical ways to improve girls' education and how these methods can work in similar communities with the same cultural challenges.

The research outcomes furnish beneficial advice to government officials, teachers, and community leaders to develop policies adapted for each culture to increase female attendance in secondary education. The approach supports the global advancement of gender equity education through its connection to SDGs 4 and 5. The findings from this research about Pakistan help other countries understand how to develop education strategies in cultural environments similar to Pakistan, thus making this information useful internationally.

The presented study strengthens women's empowerment and gender equality by advocating for transformative educational policies. This research establishes a comprehensive approach to addressing educational gender disparities through its analysis of cultural barriers, educational systems, and mental health aspects, along with recovery plans following the pandemic.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The research examines the cultural factors that hinder female students from completing secondary education in rural districts of Punjab, Pakistan, through teachers' perspectives. Traditional beliefs and cultural expectations, as seen through teachers' views, are the main reasons behind poor female enrollment and retention rates. This study explores how teachers, school facilities, and community support collaborate to eliminate various obstacles that impede the advancement of female education. It provides crucial evidence regarding the cultural barriers, as perceived by teachers, that limit female education in Punjab, although its geographical boundaries restrict its applicability to other regions of Pakistan and cultural contexts worldwide. The research does not evaluate the overall influences on female education due to time and resource constraints, while overlooking political policies and governmental involvement initiatives, as noted by teachers.

The research adopts qualitative strategies based on interviews and case studies for an extensive analysis, but these approaches reduce the ability to generalize results across broader contexts. Cultural norms regarding gender-related matters create barriers for studying specific populations that shape the data collection process. Although some research constraints exist, this investigation delivers essential cultural knowledge to understand gender equality in education more broadly. The study reveals important localized solutions and challenges that assist policymakers and educators alongside gender equity advocates who attempt to enhance female education in cultures with shared characteristics.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis structure is organized to fulfill the research objectives across several key chapters. Chapter 2 reviews existing literature on female education in Pakistan, focusing on gender-related barriers, the role of teachers, and socio-cultural impacts, incorporating teachers' perspectives on the topic. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical frameworks and concepts, including pedagogical content knowledge, gender equality, and cultural barriers, drawing from teachers' insights. Chapter 4 outlines the qualitative research design, including sampling methods and data collection approaches, as guided by teachers' input. Chapter 5 presents the research findings, combining interviews, surveys, and observational data on cultural challenges to female education. It also discusses these results in relation to existing literature on socio-economic and cultural factors affecting girls' schooling, highlighting teachers' views. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with policy recommendations to address cultural barriers to female education, with input from teachers on potential solutions.

2 Review of Literature

This review synthesizes literature from 2000 to 2024 related to the multidimensional barriers to female education in Punjab, Pakistan. It looks at girls' cultural, social, and economic obstacles when accessing and participating in secondary education, especially in rural locations. A review of existing literature highlights how pernicious patriarchal norms, early marriage, socioeconomic challenges, and deficient infrastructural development continue to act as barriers to girls' education. Cultural attitudes, which regard education for girls as less important than for boys, and family expectations that keep women in domestic spheres, are still major hurdles in girls' educational advancement.

A large body of literature has focused on how gender bias in the form of differential treatment from educators impacts the learning outcomes of female students. Work by Awan (2016) and Sattar et al. (2012) highlights that gender stereotyping and biased perceptions from teachers can significantly affect girls' academic aspirations and achievements. In addition to family background factors, structural issues like poor school infrastructure, lack of female role models, and pre-marriage are contributory factors to high dropout rates. Although many national and international efforts promote gender parity in education, these barriers exist, especially in rural Punjab. Existing research lacks exploration of how teachers and schools resist or reinforce cultural barriers. There is a shortage of meaningful evidence on community co-produced solutions, context, and the lived experiences of female students in rural education environments. Important keywords to search data in databases like PubMed, Google Scholar, and Science Direct include "gender bias in education", "teacher gender perceptions", "rural education in Punjab", "female education barriers in Pakistan", and "community-based interventions for girls' education".

Education is a fundamental right and an essential tool for the development of human society. However, in Punjab, Pakistan, there are still disparities in educational attainment based on gender, particularly in rural areas where cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and socioeconomic factors hinder female students from accessing and participating in secondary education. Patriarchal norms, early marriages, and family expectations are among the primary cultural determinants contributing to the marginalization of girls in education, career choices, and socioeconomic mobility (Hashmi et al., 2008).

Even with several policy initiatives and awareness campaigns promoting gender parity, entrenched societal norms continue to determine the educational trajectories of girls. In many families, boys take precedence over girls' education; parents often see educating boys as a better economic investment because of the notion that it is men who are the main breadwinners, while women are seen as domestic homemakers and caregivers (Sattar et al., 2012). In addition, socio-economic constraints, lack of infrastructure, and absence of female role models in education also affect women's education and presentation, resulting in higher dropout rates for females in secondary schools (Fatima et al., 2024).

While past research has focused on financial and infrastructural barriers to female education, little research has been conducted on the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students that contribute to and shape these gender disparities in classrooms. Teachers are central to students' educational experiences, and their attitudes toward gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge what students see as social norms. However, few studies have investigated how teachers negotiate cultural barriers or enact strategies that foster gender inclusion in schools (Awan, 2016). This chapter presents a detailed review of existing literature on cultural and social influences affecting female education in Punjab. The discussion is structured into three key themes:

1. Cultural factors shaping female students' access to secondary education
2. The role of traditional gender roles and family dynamics in shaping girls' educational opportunities
3. Teacher strategies to overcome cultural barriers and enhance female education

This chapter reviews the existing body of work in the field of education regarding gender issues to highlight the gap in the literature. It will help support the current research exploring various teachers' perspectives on coping with gender-based problems in the Punjab education system. Educational research and literature on cultural and social influences on female education are available.

2.1 Cultural Factors Influencing Female Secondary Education

Cultural expectations surrounding gender roles, social hierarchy, and family honor significantly impact girls' access to education in Punjab. Due to the prevalent practices in many of these conservative societies, girls' education is often not deemed necessary because their future is expected to revolve around public affairs, likely household responsibilities, or marriage, rather than technical or professional ambitions. The socially embedded belief that women are fundamentally less valuable has strengthened obstacles impact not only women's access to education but also their capacity to advance in their careers. "The cultural and social factors that are challenging female higher secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan: A field-based study" provides insights into understanding the cultural and social factors affecting access to schooling for female students. These factors stem from cultural norms, gender roles, and societal expectations that influence access to educational opportunities, especially in rural areas, for girls. While many efforts have been made to increase female education, cultural obstacles still represent one of the toughest challenges.

Awan (2016), as one of the most comprehensive studies on this subject, makes an important point about the connection between female education and empowerment. Awan explains that cultural attitudes in rural areas of Punjab prevent girls from studying beyond the primary school level. Parents, especially in these rural areas, often favor boys for education, perceiving girls' education as less important due to cultural expectations that girls should stay home, assist with household chores, and enter into marriage. However, Awan points out that while the situation has somewhat improved, particularly in urban Punjab, rural areas overall continue to be affected by previous economic and gender cultural stigmas that restrict girls from learning and studying. The same research suggests that a variety of challenges, including poverty, lack of infrastructure development, and conservative culture, create significant barriers to the acceptance and promotion of female education in rural Punjab. He also highlights that extreme poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and deeply rooted conservative cultural norms pose significant barriers to female education in rural Punjab (Awan, 2016).

The cultural factors influencing female education in rural Jhang, Punjab, were examined to reinforce the findings of Hashmi et al. (2008). Their study identifies several social and cultural barriers, such as the focus on educating sons over daughters, the impact of parental education, and socio-economic conditions like wealth and educational accessibility. It has been observed that while some educated parents are more supportive of their daughters' education, traditional gender biases remain prevalent, especially in rural areas where secondary education options are limited. The researchers advocate for establishing more secondary schools for girls and developing policies aimed at challenging ingrained cultural attitudes towards women and their education. Additionally, the paper emphasizes the urgent necessity for focused policy initiatives to combat deep-rooted cultural biases in communities that impede the educational advancement of rural girls (Hashmi et al., 2008).

Further information regarding socio-cultural obstacles to girls' education is provided by Sattar, Yasin, and Afzal (2012). "A Socio-Cultural Diary of Girls' Education: A Case Study of Southern Punjab" has been referenced in the study. Key deterrents to female education include cultural norms where boys are preferred for education, early marriages, and restricted movement for girls, the study shows. The study found that socio-economic status was another significant factor influencing whether girls were allowed to attend school. However, it also revealed that many low-income families are not only constrained by scarcity but are also rigid in their beliefs, limiting girls' access to secondary education. This review highlights a gap: despite numerous studies focusing on socio-economic barriers, there is very limited detailed analysis on how community-level interventions (e.g., social awareness

campaigns, targeted educational initiatives) can effectively address socio-cultural and economic factors in rural settings (Sattar et al., 2012).

Additionally, Tajammal (2018) studies the effects of gendered social presumptions on girls' education and highlights how, culturally, many of the beliefs regarding gender roles remain considerably greater hurdles in enrolling girls in schools and keeping them enrolled compared to government policies such as stipends that incentivize educational attainment. A study says that although the stipend program may have succeeded in boosting enrollments, it does not account for the more enduring cultural barriers, like the idea that girls' education is only primary school. It also identifies geographic variation — for example, between urban districts and those like Rahim Yar Khan that are away from cities, where parents are still unaware of educational opportunities for girls. These results highlight one of the major gaps in evidence: there is still much to learn about how the interplay between gender, poverty, and culture impacts the rates of enrollment of girls in education and their longer-term retention in secondary schooling. This research urges a more nuanced conversation regarding the barriers, including policy recommendations for community-driven interventions that challenge lingering cultural attitudes in Pakistan and build toward systemic change (Tajammal, 2018).

A more recent study by Fatima et al. (2024), *Sexual Harassment and Dropout of Female Students in South Punjab: Understanding the Demand Factors*, found that early marriages, the burden of household chores, and lack of school infrastructure were the key drivers behind the increased dropout rates they found. It also emphasized gender discrimination and a dearth of female role models at schools as contributing factors. Regarding girls' school dropouts, we understand that barriers related to socio-economic are well-known; yet, the other important finding in this study is that we need solutions to address the obstacles that fit infrastructure and financial constraints to keep girls in school. The lack of existing literature emphasizes the need for more targeted government and non-governmental responses to correct these infrastructure and financial strains directly (Fatima et al., 2024).

A pioneering study by Firdoos et al. (2023) offers extensive insights into the role of cultural norms in educational gender gaps. The researchers explain that many parents see little point in young girls pursuing secondary education in Punjab, as they perceive that a woman's role ultimately is to become a wife and mother. Such perceptions lead to high dropout rates for girls after they have completed primary school, as families are wont to pull them out of formal education so that they can learn traditional roles as homemakers. In many rural schools, the study indicates that students may internalize gender stereotypes from teachers who, often unconsciously, discourage young girls from entering subjects like science and math, or teachers may favor boys during class activities. But this research lacks accounts from female students or educators themselves, limiting our understanding of how these gender biases play out in the day-to-day workings of schools (Firdoos et al., 2023).

Khan and Ali (2005) detailed how gender role expectations within a cultural context impact parental decision-making. In their study, they find that many families in Punjab consciously prioritize their sons' education over their daughters', because they see boys' education as a better long-term bet. Because, unlike boys' education, girls' education is often viewed as a transitory matter until a girl gets married, it is not a priority for many parents. In Pakistan, it is even common for gendered educational choices among families to be influenced by traditional cultural beliefs, regardless of how educated they are, which reflects the deep-rooted patriarchal structure of Pakistani society. While this research offers a rigorous quantitative examination of educational disparities, it leaves unexplored regional disparities in cultural attitudes within Punjab (for example, how gender norms might vary between urban and rural communities or families from different socioeconomic backgrounds) (Khan & Ali, 2005).

Bradley and Saigol (2012) strengthen this argument by examining how cultural traditions merge with religious beliefs to create gendered education in Pakistan. In their study, madras's (Islamic schools) and conservative religious teachers frequently pass on gender-specific teachings, shaping girls' aspirations to be more in line with family goals and domestic skills rather than their academic or

professional ambitions. The study points out that while some religious institutions promote female education, many still cling to rigid interpretations of gender roles that dissuade families from letting their daughters seek higher learning. The study also finds a significant urban-rural divide regarding female education, with urban populations far more amenable to gender-inclusive schooling compared to rural constituencies that remain heavily under the influence of conservative religious and patriarchal ideologies. Nevertheless, concrete recommendations on implementing gender-inclusive education in a religious schooling system are lacking from the study, which remain critical for policy initiatives (Bradley & Saigol, 2012).

Although these studies contribute valuable information to understanding the cultural and socio-economic constraints on female secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan, they also expose a pressing gap in the literature. Yet we need further unpacking of the masculinity norms and biases that shape everyday relationships in schools and the ways that teachers, students, and wider communities negotiate these in ways that reinforce gender differences. While these studies provide valuable insights, further research is needed to examine how masculinity norms shape gender disparities within schools and how regional differences, particularly between urban and rural areas, affect both access to and quality of female education. Addressing these research gaps will enable policymakers to design more culturally sensitive and impactful interventions.

2.2 The Impact of Gender Roles and Family Dynamics

Early marriage remains a serious obstacle to education for girls in Punjab. Cultural and religious beliefs, meanwhile, are said to encourage early marriage, which sees higher education as delaying marriage and upending gender roles. An educated, unmarried daughter is sometimes viewed as more of a burden than a blessing. Girls often find themselves victims of these parental preferences in the form of social stigmas. The early marriages are largely correlated with the reduced mobility for the girl child, especially in the rural and suburban regions, where parents often use the tool of restrictions to control their daughters. This is usually motivated by fears that girls might face harassment or lose respect in the community.

According to the study by Jamshaid (2020), early marriages and socio-economic pressures are directly associated with the female educational outcomes in rural regions. The study notes that girls who marry young are frequently withdrawn from school due to developmental costs, and that leaving school early restricts career and social mobility. Mobility restrictions that inhibit girls' access to schools farther from their homes also enhance this problem; this is especially true in rural districts with limited access to transport (Jamshaid, 2020).

Similarly, Ali et al. (2015) mention cultural factors, particularly those related to traditional gender roles that exert tremendous pressure on young girls to marry early, thus leaving behind their educational goals. However, even when girls attend school, the social norm of early marriage can cut short their education, according to the study. These pressures are not merely cultural; they also have deep economic roots. In rural areas, families view early marriage as a means to alleviate financial burdens. Dowries—often a substantial cost for the bride's family—are a powerful economic incentive for early marriage. Families marry off their daughters at a young age to avoid incurring dowry costs later on. Inheritance practices and financial dependence on men further influence this decision. In many rural communities, girls are perceived as liabilities to the economy, and their education is regarded as less valuable than investing in the education of a male child who is expected to support the family in the future. The economic dynamics among male family members render early marriage desirable to mitigate the 'female costs' associated with raising children (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2023). Alongside social factors, these economic limitations curtail educational opportunities and career paths, resulting in girls being withdrawn from school and restricted movements (Ali et al., 2015).

A study conducted in rural Punjab in 2021 by Rashid et al. (2020) showed that girls' school attendance is strongly impacted by distance to schools and the absence of female-friendly infrastructure. The study has found considerable barriers to secondary education that teachers reported that girls face in rural Punjab, including long distances travelled to schools and a lack of female teachers, resulting in low retention rates. The risk of safety from a society that does not accept women, and the risk of being judged for restricting girls' mobility (Rashid et al., 2020).

Another study by Sathar and Kazi (2000) was based on data from women's autonomy in rural Punjab. It showed that traditional gender roles not only shape the timing of marriage but also restrict women's movement, contributing to gender inequality in education. In rural areas, women are engaged in household work, and girls' education is considered secondary, especially for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This does nothing to address barriers to girls' education, including early marriage and limited mobility (Sathar & Kazi, 2000).

The findings of a study by Shaukat and Pell (2017) highlight how the absence of support for women in balancing their education and professional goals with society's expectations results in high dropouts. The study also recommended that to retain girls in the school systems, girls must be accepted socially and have access to education. Therefore, it highlights the need to reform the perspective on education for girls and make the education systems more agreeable to girls, particularly in rural areas (Shaukat & Pell, 2017).

For these reasons, many efforts have been made to reduce early marriage and prevent the restricted mobility of girls. Grants to families, such as the Punjab Education Foundation's Voucher Scheme, offer assistance in keeping girls in schools. These programs lessen the socioeconomic stress that frequently leads to early marriage. Local NGOs like the Sahil Organization work to raise awareness about harmful practices related to early marriage and assist with the legal representation of vulnerable girls. Moreover, there are positive local initiatives, including efforts that support women by establishing female transportation networks and safe, accessible boarding schools in remote areas. These interventions serve as important models for addressing the complex problem of early marriage and restrictions on mobility.

Further research should examine how these interventions can be scaled and adapted for different areas of Punjab, specifically assessing their impact on girls' educational outcomes. Community-generated solutions (for example, expanding female transportation networks or offering boarding school options in rural areas) should be explored more as viable ways to increase girls' access to education and decrease rates of early marriage.

2.3 Teacher-Led Strategies

Teachers are pivotal in shaping intended educational experiences and countering classroom gender bias. The educators at the secondary level adversely influence the female students in Punjab, Pakistan. While there is a gender-sensitive curriculum, most teachers, especially in the rural context, have never been trained to teach gender sensitively. For example, in their study of teachers' perceptions of gender equality in secondary education in Multan, Pakistan, Aftab, Ali, and Rehman (2023) highlighted significant inequities regarding course selection, gender-based violence, and stigma each of which systematically excludes girls in the classroom. These biases occur in several ways: teachers may unconsciously discourage girls from taking traditionally male subjects, for instance, science and technology, and push them into "feminine" subjects like literature or home economics. Furthermore, they might be given leadership roles in classroom discussions, while girls are marginalized or told not to take initiative. Stigma and gender-based violence are reflected in improper comments or discriminatory attitudes that alienate female students even more. In-service training and Awareness programs should be regularly conducted to sensitize the teachers to gender sensitivity in their education practices. These findings demonstrate the fundamental importance of the more inclusive classroom environments that teacher training programs create, which can help break down the barriers

to full academic participation for both male and female students, and ultimately help to challenge the biases that prevent female students from participating fully in their education (Aftab et al., 2023)

Durrani, Akram, and Kanwal (2021) evaluated training aimed at building the capacity of teachers in rural Pakistan, specifically those teaching girls who had left school. They found that teacher trainers who received specialized professional development delivered more effective gender-sensitive education. These included gender protection, communication skills, and teaching techniques, all critical for breaking down cultural barriers to female education. (Durrani et al., 2021).

Qureshi (2019) found significant variance in teachers' self-efficacy based on setting (urban vs. rural) and gender, with female teachers in rural contexts demonstrating particularly low self-efficacy. However, the study lacked an in-depth examination of the structural and cultural factors leading to these differences. Rural female teachers experience limited professional development opportunities, little supportive institutional changes, and societal expectations constraining their agency. School management structures, which are typically patriarchal-centered, may, for example, reinforce male standards of authority and leadership and shatter the self-confidence of female teachers. Societal factors are equally vital, with entrenched gender roles in rural areas generally relegating the position of women to inferior in educational success. Furthermore, these challenges necessitate the development of targeted teacher preparation programs and training for rural contexts. By addressing these structural and cultural barriers, such programs can better empower female teachers to challenge gender biases in the classrooms and create gender-sensitive teaching practices. (Qureshi, 2019).

Jamal et al. (2023) examined educational interventions in Pakistan to empower girls. These initiatives correlated with improved academic performance, enhanced self-confidence, and better decision-making skills among girls. They suggest that educational policies should prioritize training teachers in gender-sensitive pedagogy and fostering inclusive classrooms to address gender disparities in educational outcomes effectively (Jamal, 2023).

Aliya et al. (2023) examined gender bias within Pakistan's medical education context. Its findings indicated that gender bias influenced students' learning experiences and success, especially in male-dominated medical fields. The study recommends that medical institutions implement anti-bias training, transparent assessment systems, and diverse panel examiners to counter these issues. Such measures may be implemented in other educational environments to mitigate the gender biases inhibiting female students' contribution and performance (Aliya et al., 2023).

A study by Tahir Farooq et al. (2023) studied the views of 200 teachers on gender equality in educational opportunities in Pakistan. Teachers in rural areas were more likely to show gender-biased attitudes in the study, often channeling female students away from high-level courses and leadership positions. The researchers suggested that teacher training programs should include modules that highlight areas of gender equality and the need to reduce bias in the school system to transform these mindsets and to ensure equal opportunities in education provision for both boys and girls (Farooq et al., 2023)

Akhter (2017) also studied the decision-making of female teachers at schools in Bangladesh. They found that more female teachers in leadership roles in schools translated to better retention and grades for female students. The female teachers in decision-making positions were more likely to implement initiatives encouraging girls to join leadership opportunities and pursue non-conventional subjects. This study confirms that fostering female teacher leadership in educational institutions can play a key role in dismantling cultural and social barriers for female students (Akhter, 2017).

Hussain et al. (2022) published a study of teacher attitudes toward gender roles in secondary education settings throughout Punjab. This indicates that many educators, especially male educators, devote more academic attention to male students. Looking at classroom discussions, the research found that boys were encouraged to take on leadership roles, whereas girls were allocated passive roles or

discouraged from leading any decision-making activity. Further, the study shows that teachers consciously or unconsciously direct the girls toward subjects deemed "more appropriate" for women, such as literature or home economics, whilst directing the boys to science and mathematics. This separation perpetuates gender-specific career trajectories, trapping girls in less male-dominated industries while constricting their career ambitions in male-dominated sectors such as engineering and technology (Hussnain et al., 2021).

Teacher-led approaches are crucial for dismantling gender biases and establishing gender equality in education throughout Punjab, Pakistan. Research, including works by Aftabet et al. (2023) and Durrani et al. (2021), underscores current teachers' need to receive ongoing training in gender-sensitive teaching methods to counteract these entrenched social norms affecting female students. Additionally, studies by Farooq et al. (2023) and Koval et al. (2023) illustrate how teacher attitudes significantly influence the reinforcement or challenge of gender biases in education, particularly in rural areas where these biases are often more entrenched. Furthermore, such literature by Hussain et al. emphasizes the need to address teacher bias; however, reinforcing systemic biases will only exacerbate these inequalities (Quinlan et al., 2022). This initiative must empower female teachers to rise into leadership roles and provide positive role models for girls.

The three-fold nature of the combined issue paves the way for teacher training interventions, gender sensitivity awareness, and female teacher leadership to address the underlying societal problem of gender inequality in education. These interventions need to be implemented holistically, particularly in rural areas where gender bias is more pronounced. Further studies will be required to determine whether such teacher-led interventions have a lasting impact and foster gender equality within the classroom walls. Policy measures must prioritize the continuous professional development of teachers, especially regarding their gender-responsive pedagogical approach and the needs of women practitioners to enhance equal learning opportunities for all learners.

Yet various studies demonstrate that community engagement is key to enhancing female education across Punjab, Pakistan. Effective interventions must thus address both socio-cultural barriers and deficits in educational infrastructure. According to studies, important factors for sustainable educational changes for girls include government support, community awareness, and the involvement of local leaders. However, a one-off initiative will unlikely provide females with the necessary equality. Therefore, more comprehensive methods, such as gender-sensitive policies, parental education, and resource allocation, are also required to improve girls' education in the long term. These strategies show promise, but the study points out that consistent government support and investment of funds are necessary to implement these interventions at scale.

Overall, although the existing literature contributes substantially to our understanding of socio-cultural and economic barriers to female education in Punjab, significant gaps remain that need to be addressed in future research. While much work has been done to explore gender biases in the classroom, little has been attempted to reveal how these biases manifest in rural schools and their impact on girls' day-to-day lives and learning experiences. Moreover, teacher training programs, identified as one of the key interventions to ensure gender-sensitive teaching, have not been effectively studied for their long-term impact, especially in rural and underserved areas where such training is often absent.

One such gap is in what to do with the study's findings about community engagement to overcome cultural barriers to female education. Community leaders, local NGOs, and family attitudes also play a role in addressing educational obstacles, and further research should consider how community-driven initiatives can improve girls' academic outcomes. Moreover, although there is recognition of different contexts within Punjab (urban/rural divide, for example) that may affect policies and interventions, there is very limited exploration on how policies and interventions affect the regional variations.

Future research studies must address the intersectionality of gender, socio-economic status, and regional cultural norms in determining female students' access to secondary education. Research

explores novel approaches to addressing barriers like early marriage, constrained mobility, and the absence of safe transport to schools. They should also focus on studies on gender-friendly curricula, gender-sensitive school infrastructure, and the increased presence of female role models in schools that would contribute to the protection of girls by stimulating their potential. Filling these gaps will help guide policymakers to design appropriate and targeted policies/interventions that could help improve educational outcomes for girls in Punjab and lead to gender equity in education.

3 Conceptual Framework

This chapter describes the theory used to analyze the cultural and social factors shaping female education in Punjab, Pakistan. The study adopts Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory as a core theoretical lens to explore how cultural and gendered norms inhibit girls from educational achievement. In this chapter, the theory's relevance to the traditional gender roles that restrict girls from accessing education and, consequently, produce specific educational outcomes is analyzed. Here, the chronological evolution of this theory explains its development and adaptation process and notes its role in Punjabi society, particularly in rural areas, which are most rigid about gender roles.

3.1 Gender Performativity Theory: A Brief Overview

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, introduced in 1990, challenges the traditional belief that gender is a fixed, natural trait assigned at birth. Instead, Butler argues that gender is *constructed* through repeated actions and behaviors—what she calls “performances.” These performances include how people speak, dress, move, and interact with others. Over time, these repeated acts create the appearance that gender is stable and natural, but in reality, gender is not an internal or biological truth. Rather, it is a social process shaped by cultural rules, norms, and expectations. This means that gender identity is always constructed and can vary depending on historical and cultural contexts.

The key characteristics of Gender Performativity Theory are: first, gender is a performance rather than a fixed identity; second, these performances are shaped by and reinforce social norms and power structures; and third, because gender is performed and not inherent, there is potential for these performances to be subverted or changed. Butler's theory can be understood through three main ideas: (1) gender is actively produced through repeated behaviors rather than being a natural fact; (2) social and cultural norms regulate which gender performances are accepted or rejected; and (3) gender performances can be disrupted, opening possibilities for resistance and new expressions of identity beyond traditional categories.

In applying Butler's Gender Performativity Theory to our research on female education in Punjab, I examine how gender roles are actively performed and reinforced within local cultural and social practices. Punjab's society holds strong traditions and religious beliefs that assign distinct roles to girls and boys from an early age. Girls are typically encouraged to focus on domestic duties and caregiving, while boys are motivated to pursue education and career development. These gendered behaviors are continuously performed and validated by family, community, and educational systems. As a result, schools and families teach girls that their primary role is to care for others, limiting their academic ambitions and opportunities. This reinforces the wider societal belief that caregiving is a woman's responsibility, which contributes to the unequal educational outcomes between girls and boys. Using Gender Performativity Theory, my research highlights that these inequalities are not natural or fixed but are created and maintained through repeated gender performances within Punjab's specific cultural context. This framework helps us better understand the barriers teachers reported that girls face in education and the ways gender norms shape their learning experiences (Butler, 1990; Shah & Shah, 2012).

Butler's theory would gain further depth when combined with Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Through their social conditions, people form internal behaviors and characteristic habits that they carry throughout their lives. Applying this theory allows us to comprehend the root cause of how Punjab

gender norms affect girls' early learning and form their educational attitudes. Women learn from childhood that household responsibilities belong to their core identity, impeding their chances of education. Gendered expectations exist as internal components of social identity because the theory of habitus shows that these performances influence social construction and shape choices from education to other life directions. The analytical concept of habitus helps explain how gendered performances maintain themselves while forming educational results for young females in society (Butler, 1990; Shah & Shah, 2012).

The analysis would benefit from incorporating intersectionality along with other analytical concepts. Intersectionality studies the effects when different social categories, such as gender, class, caste, and ethnicity, combine to produce distinct forms of marginalization. The pursuit of education becomes tougher for Punjab girls who belong to social classes below the middle class and those who come from lower caste backgrounds. The teachers reported that girls face two layers of inequality because their gender roles develop under the influence of traditional requirements, together with their socio-economic background and caste membership. An intersectional analysis would advance the study by reframing gender-based analysis toward the structural obstacles girls encounter when pursuing education. This approach demonstrates how different forms of discrimination work together to create the barriers girls experience in their pursuit of education while providing an enriched understanding of all the factors blocking their access to learning. The three theories of Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Bourdieu's habitus with intersectionality offer an advanced approach to grasping the structural education barriers faced by women in Punjab. The theories of Butler and Bourdieu, together with intersectionality, provide understandings about gender performance reinforcement by societal norms as well as how these roles embed within habits and the additional obstacles girls confront through their social identification. Using these research frameworks together gives us a better interpretation of the multiple cultural, social, and structural elements that preserve gender inequities in educational systems within Punjab (Jamal et al., 2023).

3.1.1 Cultural Context of Gender and Education in Punjab

Judith Butler introduced gender performativity in 1990 as a concept that rejected the notion of natural gender determinism. Despite prevailing notions, Butler demonstrated that gender operates as a social construct that individuals perform based on societal expectations, as it deviates from fixed views of biological restriction. (Butler, 1990)

Since then, scholars have built on the theory and applied it to other cultural settings, including ones where patriarchal cultures are deeply embedded. In Pakistan—especially in Punjab—traditional gender roles create boundaries for women to define their places; women are expected to marry, have children, and manage the household, while men are responsible for providing various necessities for the family and participating in public life. (Farooq, 2020). The fact that cultural practices have constrained women's access to education and career paths makes Butler's theorizing about the performativity and social construction of gender roles particularly useful for understanding the gendered gaps in education in Punjab. Gender Performativity Theory has been adapted to various socio-cultural contexts, including Punjab, where it helps examine how gender and socio-economic status impact girls' education. (Durrani, 2008).

Punjab's history regarding women disqualified them from education for centuries, having a lasting impact on class and gender inequality in these communities. Although urban areas have witnessed a change in traditional gender roles, rural spaces, especially in Punjab, continue to remain heavily bound to tradition. Therefore, Butler's theory has gone a long way towards accounting for how continued performances of gender construct educational inequities. (Jamal, 2015).

So, in rural Punjab, poverty exacerbates the gender gap in education. Sons are viewed as future breadwinners, prompting families with limited resources to prioritize their education, while daughters are expected to bear domestic responsibilities. (Arif & Khalid, 2020). When applied in this context, Butler's theory highlights how economic pressures and gendered cultural performances work in

concert to deny girls opportunities to learn in school. Because masculinity and femininity are performed and reinforced at every level of society, from the family to the community, such performances are internalized by girls themselves, constraining their educational aspirations in virtue of their status as incompletes.

The practical application of Butler's Gender Performativity Theory needs a better understanding of how it addresses the conjunction between gender and economic boundaries through policy actions and geographical variations. This part of the section acknowledges poverty as well as PESRP government changes, yet it fails to analyze Butler's theoretical weaknesses in addressing these systemic elements. The core analysis of Butler's gender performance theory deals with gender enactment but is limited in its explanation of how socio-economic obstacles, governmental programs, and geographic variations impact female educational outcomes. The theory requires an extension to examine how institutional practices, government policies, and cultural standards prevent girls from attending school. This additional component would enhance the understanding of the multiple institutional factors hindering girls from obtaining proper education.

3.1.2 Applying Gender Performativity Theory to Research Questions

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory offers an essential framework for understanding how teachers perceive the cultural factors influencing female students' access to secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan. The theory's central idea is that gender is not an innate or fixed trait but is constructed through repeated social performances shaped by cultural norms and expectations. This perspective is directly relevant to Research Question 1 (RQ1), which investigates how teachers view the role of cultural factors in teachers' perspectives on girls' education. Through this lens, cultural factors are understood as ongoing performances that define and regulate girls' behaviors and roles, influencing their opportunities to engage in schooling.

The second research question, divided into Research Question 2a (RQ2a) and Research Question 2b (RQ2b), examines teachers' perceptions of traditional gender roles and family dynamics. Gender roles within families and communities are seen not as static realities but as repeated acts and behaviors that reinforce societal expectations. Teachers' insights into how family dynamics influence girls' participation in education can be analyzed as reflections of these gendered performances, where girls are often socialized into caregiving and domestic roles at the expense of academic pursuits. This helps explain how gendered behaviors are maintained and legitimized within the local cultural context.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) explores how teachers overcome cultural barriers and what strategies prove effective in increasing girls' access to education. Since Gender Performativity Theory posits that gender is a performance that can be disrupted and changed, teachers' strategies can be understood as interventions that challenge and reshape traditional gender norms. These efforts create new possibilities for girls to engage in education by transforming the cultural performances that previously limited their opportunities. Overall, Butler's theory allows the research to move beyond viewing gender inequalities as natural or fixed, highlighting instead how they are actively produced and sustained through everyday cultural practices. This theoretical approach enriches the analysis of teacher perceptions by revealing how gendered barriers are socially constructed and how they might be addressed through changes in these performances. By applying Gender Performativity Theory to the data, the study gains a nuanced understanding of the cultural dynamics shaping female education in Punjab and the potential for transformative strategies to improve teachers' perspectives on girls' educational outcomes.

3.1.3 Significance of framework

Butler's Gender Performativity Theory offers a powerful theoretical foundation for understanding how gender roles are created, maintained, and reinforced in Punjab's educational context. By viewing gender as a series of repeated social performances rather than a fixed identity, the theory sheds light on the complex cultural and social mechanisms that shape girls' and boys' experiences in schools and

families. This perspective is crucial for developing gender-sensitive educational policies that go beyond surface-level solutions to address the deep-rooted social norms that influence education in Punjab.

Despite its strong conceptual value, the practical application of Butler's framework in Punjab's education policies remains limited. There is a noticeable gap between the theory's insights and policy measures to reduce gender inequality in education. Concrete actions such as curriculum reforms, teacher training, and community engagement, that actively challenge and transform gender performances, are often missing or insufficient. To fully realize the benefits of this theoretical framework, policymakers need to implement strategies that disrupt harmful gender norms and promote equal educational opportunities for girls. In the context of our research, Butler's theory is highly significant because it provides a lens to critically examine how gender performances affect girls' educational access and achievement in Punjab. It helps explain why traditional gender expectations persist in schools and homes, influencing girls' roles and limiting their aspirations. This framework guides our analysis of the cultural and institutional barriers that teachers reported that girls face, enabling us to suggest practical, culturally informed interventions. Ultimately, the theory helps bridge the gap between understanding gender inequality as a social construct and taking meaningful steps to address it within Punjab's education system (Butler, 2025).

It's important to know how real-life situations differ from theories when you begin with Butler's work on Gender Performativity Theory. This study correctly discusses how gender is performed in society and what impact this has on education, as reflected in teachers' perspectives. According to teachers, while gender roles are theoretically understood as fluid and socially constructed, in practice, they are rigidly reinforced in schools and communities, particularly in rural Punjab. Teachers observe that societal expectations around gender often constrain girls' educational aspirations, with many girls internalizing these roles. These insights highlight the gap between theoretical frameworks and the lived realities of students, as perceived by educators.

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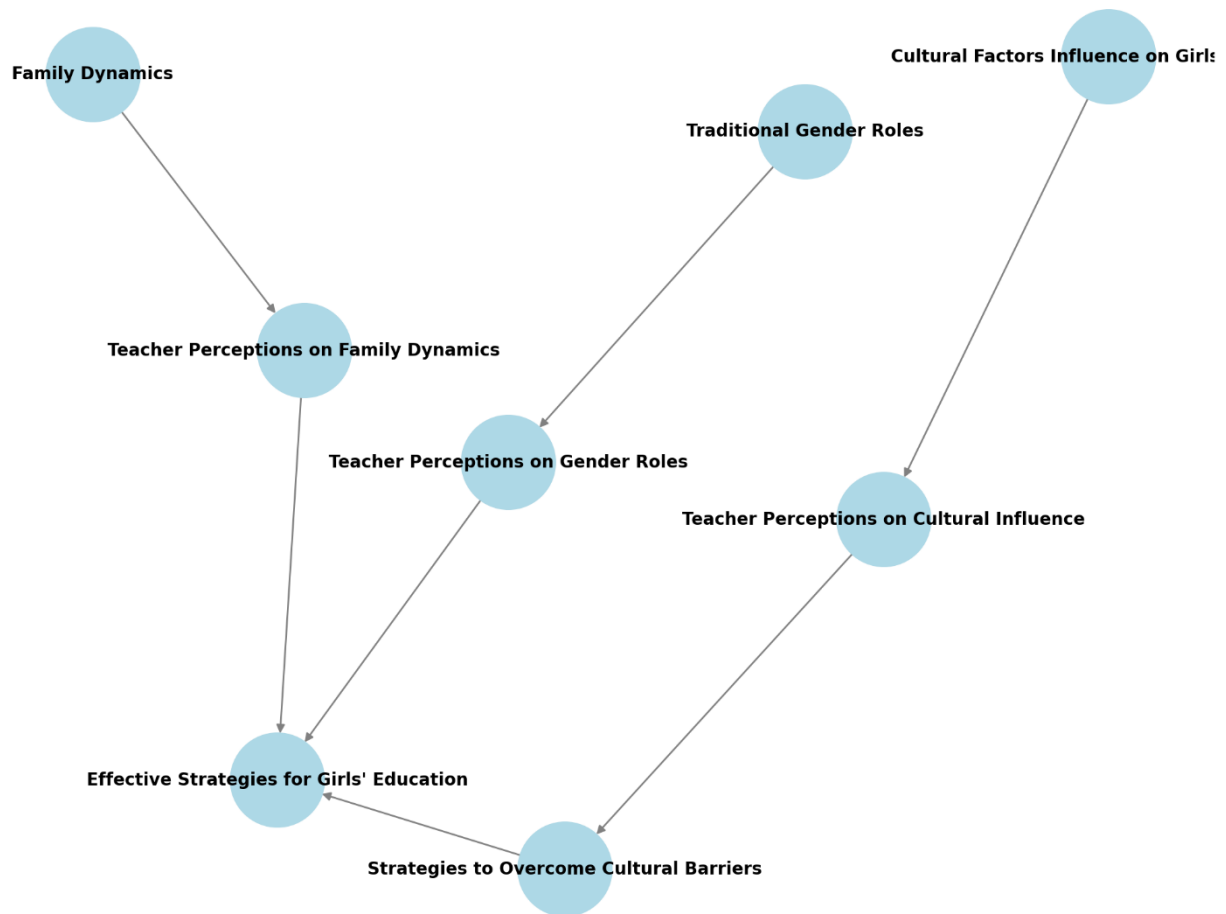


Figure 3.1: Teacher views shape strategies for girls' education

According to Butler, gender comes from regular actions or performances, instead of being a fixed thing we are born with. It is widely believed in Punjab that getting an education for boys is more vital than getting one for girls. Many people hear and follow these ideas regularly, making sure gender roles do not change. Butler helps us understand how gender roles are learned and maintained, while also pointing out that people can change their roles when they want. At the same time, the theory doesn't automatically offer immediate answers to weak enforcement and unfair restrictions on girls' access to schooling. For teachers' perspectives on girls' education to improve in Punjab, cultural gender performances must be considered while also adding stronger policies that defeat barriers in society and among state bodies.

Research focused on schools and teachers finds this theory especially valuable because teachers influence gender norms. Many Punjabi teachers assume that caring for others is girls' duty and learning and academic activities should be left to boys. Such expectations determine how teachers deal with students, select their topics and take charge of the classroom. Through Butler's work, we see how teachers' ways of behaving fit into gender roles that affect how girls learn. Because of this, teacher training can make sure educators treat all students equally and help end any negative stereotypes. According to Gender Performativity, social class, poverty and rural living also have an impact on girls' education in Punjab. Women and girls from poor communities and rural places have to deal with challenges including lengthy school trips, limited transportation and limited resources (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020). In addition to the stereotypes surrounding men and women, these issues create even

greater problems. When researchers and policymakers acknowledge the overlap of these issues, they can identify solutions that benefit everyone involved counts.

Researchers are encouraged by the theory to focus on more than just girls being enrolled in education. It aims for girls' learning spaces to include ideas and ambitions for various fields, including STEM, not just what is often called a woman's career line (Stentiford, 2017). Insights on recognizing gender bias from teacher training programs make it easier for teachers to help girls realize their ambitions. Using this approach may increase girls' engagement, results and general performance in education.

In the countryside of Punjab, programs by the government such as the Girls' Stipend Programme (GSP), have made it possible for more girls to attend school thanks to the money they provide. Nonetheless, resistance to education due to culture can continue to be a problem. Old habits cause some parents in lower income communities to give increased importance to their sons' schooling (Tajammal, 2018). Although people realize why educating girls matters, traditions often prevent actual progress (Purewal & Hashmi, 2015; Hashmi et al., 2008). Joining financial support with educational efforts will help address these cultural barriers better.

When women within a community challenge traditional gender norms, it can lead girls to change their minds about what's possible and can influence what society thinks (Ton, 2018). Butler's Gender Performativity Theory explains the role of social causes in creating gender and also gives us tools to oppose the restrictions on teachers' perspectives on girls' education found in culture and educational policies. It helps to prompt teachers, policymakers and communities to doubt discriminatory gender norms and improve education for all. Apart from increasing learning chances for girls, this theory aims to help society become a place where people can achieve in education and work, without limitations from traditional gender roles.

4 Research Methodology

This research investigates how teachers see the cultural factors that influence female students' access to and experiences in secondary education within Punjab province, Pakistan. Specifically, it explores how teachers see cultural values, gender roles, and family dynamics shaping the educational opportunities and challenges faced by girls. Using qualitative methods, the study gathers insights directly from teachers through semi-structured interviews, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how teachers perceive these influences. Unlike the literature review, which provides a broad overview of existing theories and findings, this study focuses on teachers' firsthand observations and experiences within their classrooms and communities. This approach highlights practical realities and localized cultural barriers that affect girls' schooling, providing nuanced perspectives that enrich and complement the existing academic discourse.

This chapter demonstrates the research design with information about participant choice and data collection methods, in addition to presenting analysis procedures and ethical review. Through ethical diligence, I verified the process integrity and credibility. I have chosen qualitative methodology as it provides the most appropriate framework because it helps me investigate educators' in-depth perspectives and experiences. The preferred method enables me to use adaptable data collection techniques to grasp female students' fundamental obstacles in education.

4.1 Research Design

My research utilizes qualitative techniques because these methods align best with the research target of analyzing cultural elements that hinder female educational access. My research method has enabled the investigation of how societal norms affect access to education for girls in Punjab. The inductive study direction was implemented to let participants lead the data gathering process free from prescribed theoretical structures. I designed my method to achieve research objectives about cultural barriers that prevent girls from accessing education because it meets my goal of understanding these limitations. My research method allowed me to understand the substantial relations between cultural standards and what girls experience in their educational journey in Punjab (Naqvi et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2020).

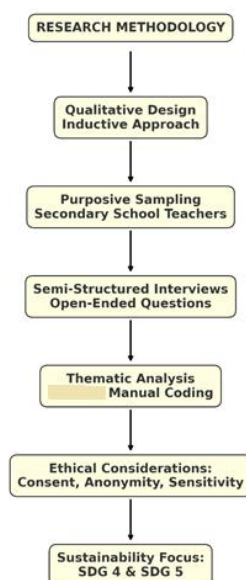


Figure 3.1: Research Methodology Steps

4.2 Sampling Strategy

This study uses purposive sampling to select participants who are well-qualified to provide insights on the impact of cultural factors on female secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan. The respondents selected for the study are secondary school teachers, all of whom have relevant teaching experience and cultural understanding necessary to address the research questions.

A total of nine (9) female teachers were chosen, from both small rural community schools and larger urban government schools. These schools were selected to ensure diverse representation in terms of school size, location, and socio-economic status (SES). The variation in school size and SES provides a broad perspective on how cultural factors affect girls' education across different settings. The teachers' roles range from classroom teachers to senior educators and department heads, all of whom have extensive teaching experience ranging from 2 to 15 years.

The participants were specifically chosen for their direct involvement in teaching female students, with all having at least two years of continuous engagement with this group. Demographic details such as age range (30 to 50 years), gender (all female), and educational qualifications (mostly Bachelor's and some Master's degrees in education or related fields) were documented to provide context for analyzing their perspectives. These factors contribute to the cultural intelligence and understanding of gender roles within their communities, which enriches the data collected.

Teachers who lacked sufficient knowledge or experience regarding gender issues, cultural barriers, or traditional social norms were excluded from the study to maintain the study's focus and data quality. This ensured that the sample consisted of respondents capable of providing in-depth and meaningful reflections on the cultural influences affecting girls' education. By incorporating this carefully selected group of teachers, the sampling strategy strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and social dynamics shaping teachers' perspectives on girls' education in Punjab (Shah et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2019).

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews have been my preferred data collection method, as they allow extensive exploration of participants' opinions while focusing on my study's key themes. This research technique facilitates a thorough investigation of cultural barriers that, according to teachers, hinder girls' access to education. I provided all participants with a brief description of the research objective before they consented to the interview. I utilize audio and video recording equipment to ensure accurate transcription of the information gathered. Each interview lasts between 45 and 60 minutes, giving participants ample opportunity to express their thoughts comprehensively. The open interview format employs open-ended questions that encourage free responses. The interview questions specifically address cultural norms, gender expectations, and household behaviors that impact girls' education. A complete list of the nineteen (19) interview questions is included in the Appendix section (Ali et al., 2024b; Maqsood & Raza, 2012).

4.4 Data Analysis

I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis for data analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data by reading the transcripts and noting my initial ideas. Then, I generated initial codes and grouped them into potential themes. I reviewed these themes, refining and adjusting them as necessary. Once finalized, I defined and named the themes, ensuring their clarity and relevance. Finally, I wrote the analysis, interpreting the themes and their connection to the research questions. This deductive approach allowed me to identify pre-existing themes while uncovering new insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As part of the preliminary data analysis, I utilized a word cloud to visualize the most frequent terms from the interview responses. Although it is not a substitute for thematic analysis, the word cloud illuminated key themes and directed my analysis by concentrating on the most discussed topics. This tool reinforced the findings from Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to my research, given its focus on sensitive topics such as gender norms, cultural taboos, and educational opportunities. I ensured participants' rights were fully respected throughout the study, prioritizing their comfort. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with forms available in both English and Urdu to ensure understanding. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms, and only I had access to the data, which was securely stored. The study was conducted with cultural sensitivity by holding interviews in culturally appropriate settings. I personally ensured that female teacher participants felt secure and comfortable throughout the process. Precautions were taken to prevent emotional, social, or psychological harm, and participants were allowed to skip uncomfortable questions" (Anjum et al., 2023).

4.6 Sustainability Statement

I have aligned this research with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (Ullah et al., 2019).

SDG 4: Quality Education

My research has examined SDG 4 by investigating cultural norms that stop girls from learning in Punjab, such as early marriage, domestic obligations, and the lack of educational assistance. Through this work, I have joined the global initiative for inclusive education equity. The research examines the types of obstacles and how to establish a favourable learning space for girls in the Punjab region (United Nations, 2015).

SDG 5: Gender Equality

My analysis focused on patriarchal systems and the family and community habits that perpetuate gender inequality throughout rural Punjab. Cultural limitations create barriers for girls to participate in secondary school education. This analysis aims to boost female empowerment by developing culturally appropriate educational support for girls.

My research findings may guide the development of new educational guidelines and intervention strategies. Through my actions, I aim to establish educational practices that honour cultures and consider gender sensibilities to empower women and girls effectively. Women who attain higher education are more successful in enhancing household prosperity while contributing to their communities and sustaining regions.

4.7 Conclusion

I adopt qualitative analysis techniques to study the impact of cultural and social elements on female education in Punjab, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews provided me with comprehensive information about the restrictions female students face due to cultural norms and gender roles, as well as family structures. Using thematic data analysis has enabled me to identify recurring patterns among thematic elements. The research demonstrates compliance with ethical values, cultural understanding, and thorough confidentiality practices. My research will progress with the foundation established in this chapter by presenting findings that will guide practical educational reforms based on the insights obtained.

5 Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are based on semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. From the teachers' perspective, Research Question 1 revealed that cultural barriers deeply affect teachers' perspectives on girls' education. Teachers explained that societal beliefs and traditional customs, often rooted in religious and social norms, create strong pressure on girls to leave school early, especially once they reach marriageable age. Teachers note that these cultural expectations limit girls' participation and engagement in education more than what general literature describes. In relation to Research Question 2a, teachers highlighted how traditional gender roles, such as the responsibility for household chores and early marriage, consume much of girls' time and energy, reducing their motivation and ability to attend school. Many teachers noted that families prioritize boys' education over girls' because of the belief that boys will become the family's main earners, a point that adds practical detail to existing studies by showing how these attitudes play out in daily school life. Regarding Research Question 2b, the teachers observed that parental education and financial conditions strongly influence girls' continuation in school. Families with educated parents tend to be more supportive of girls' schooling, while economic difficulties force other families to focus on immediate household needs, often sacrificing girls' education. Teachers also mentioned the role of extended family members, such as grandparents, who sometimes oppose teachers' perspectives on girls' education, reinforcing cultural resistance more vividly than reported in broader literature.

For Research Question 3, teachers acknowledged the challenges they face in encouraging girls to stay in school amidst these cultural pressures. However, they shared strategies they use to support female students, including engaging directly with families, mentoring girls, and increasing the presence of female teachers. Female teachers especially act as role models, helping to break down cultural barriers and motivate girls to continue their education. These teacher-driven efforts provide concrete examples of how cultural performances can be challenged and changed, linking directly to the theoretical framework of gender performativity. Overall, this teachers' perspective offers grounded and detailed insights that complement and deepen the findings from the literature review. It reveals the lived realities of cultural barriers in schools and highlights the important role teachers play in addressing these challenges, providing practical evidence of how change can be fostered at the community and school levels.

These findings connect the research questions with the cultural and familial factors that hinder female students' educational progress in rural Punjab and suggest strategies such as community engagement, financial support, and increasing female teacher representation to improve girls' educational outcomes. The study also identified five key themes that emerged from the interviews: cultural barriers, social barriers, teachers' challenges in ensuring female students' participation, teacher strategies to overcome cultural barriers, and policies and initiatives for increasing enrollment. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies affecting teachers' perspectives on girls' education in the region.

5.1 Cultural Barriers

From the teachers' perspective in rural Punjab, traditional cultural values create significant challenges for female students progressing into their second year of regular schooling. Teachers reported that deeply ingrained social roles and conventional norms often bind girls to household duties and early marriage before they can fully benefit from formal education. According to the teachers, these cultural beliefs do not only influence individual families but are also strongly reinforced by wider societal expectations. This creates a dominant framework that, in their experience, consistently undermines teachers' perspectives on girls' educational ambitions and limits their opportunities to continue schooling.

5.1.1 Household Responsibilities and Their Impact on Girls' Education

The social norm in rural Punjab requires girls to take complete responsibility for home duties and household organization. During early childhood, girls receive socialization that teaches them to perform domestic tasks while caring for younger siblings. The domestic duties assigned to girls in rural Punjab leave them with minimal time and energy to pursue their educational goals. Many girls experience absenteeism due to disengagement and struggle to focus on academic achievement, which prevents them from achieving their educational objectives targets. One X respondent emphasized this when stating,

"In our community, girls are conditioned from a young age to focus primarily on household tasks like cooking, cleaning, and looking after younger siblings. From the moment we were old enough, these were seen as our main duties, and because of that, many of us didn't have the energy or time left to concentrate on our schoolwork. Education was seen as a secondary pursuit that we would eventually leave behind as we moved into adulthood and marriage."

The statement emphasizes the struggle between domestic work and academic goals for rural Punjab girls because domestic responsibilities receive higher importance than school. Additional evidence comes from Y respondents who stated,

"The expectation that girls will grow up, marry, and become responsible for managing a household is deeply ingrained in our culture. This expectation leaves little room for girls to consider pursuing an education. Even if they want to, it's often dismissed as unnecessary because the ultimate goal is to be a good wife and mother. When education conflicts with these roles, education almost always takes a backseat."

The research indicates how cultural traditions restrict female educational opportunities by assigning girls domestic responsibilities inside the household. Tajammal's (2018) study confirms that rural domestic work assignments limit girls from achieving their school obligations. The research presentation identifies how early overwhelming household responsibilities cause girls to abandon their pursuit of education (Tajammal, 2018). Ullah (2011), together with Ajaib (2022), suggest that rural regions maintain patriarchal cultural norms that support girls should mainly perform household duties rather than schoolwork. Traditional social values restrict girls from receiving an education because domestic work is their main responsibility, even though education remains limited in their lives (Ajaib, 2022; Ullah, 2025).

Through Gender Performativity Theory, Butler establishes a method to explain the socialization process, which maintains these cultural norms. Gender identity does not exist as a natural trait according to Butler (1990) since it requires daily performance through social behavior. The recurring performance of household chores, including cooking and cleansing, together with taking care of family members by female individuals in rural Punjab area continuously establishes their caregiver role identity. Repeated cultural performances establish girls' roles and reduce their growth potential since they restrict opportunities for learning in other fields, such as education. The societal gender norms solidify through these repetitive social activities, creating an environment where girls fail to view education as a viable gateway to the future (Butler, 1990). Repeated socialization into household work leads girls to subordinate their education to their domestic obligations. One respondent shared,

"As I grew older, I realized that my family and the community did not expect me to pursue higher education. The priority was always for me to help around the house, and once I reached puberty, marriage became the next step. Education was never emphasized beyond a certain point—after all, the belief was that I would eventually be married, and school would no longer matter." This quote captures how the perception of education as secondary is deeply embedded in the cultural expectations surrounding girls' roles within the family. Another respondent noted,

"In my family, my brothers were always encouraged to go to school, while my sisters and I were expected to focus on household chores. No one ever questioned why we couldn't go to school just like them. Over time, I started to believe that education wasn't for me either. It was just something for boys, irrelevant to what I was going to do with my life."

This response reflects a common belief that education is more suited for boys than girls, who are often seen as responsible for domestic tasks. Jamal et al. (2023) note a trend wherein rural female students abandon their academic aspirations as they age and take on household chores. Increased domestic responsibilities diminish the role of education in shaping their identity (Jamal et al., 2023). Tusińska (2020) found that patriarchal cultures tend to limit educational opportunities for girls by prioritizing their domestic duties. This cultural framework instills the idea that education is irrelevant for girls once they reach marriageable age (Tusińska, 2020).

According to Butler's concept of performative gender identities, girls in rural Punjab come to believe that domestic responsibilities take precedence over educational pursuits. Butler (1990) explicates that gender identity is formed through continuous social interactions rather than being static. A typical routine for girls in rural Punjab involves cooking, cleaning, and caring for family members. Through the repetitive performance of caregiving roles, girls internalize this identity, which influences their educational choices. Butler argues that the cyclical enactment of gender roles reinforces the caregiver identity in girls, thereby diminishing their perception of education as integral to their identity. Consequently, this repetition makes girls feel that their rightful place is within the home rather than the classroom, causing them to undervalue education.

Teachers acknowledge that girls encounter numerous obstacles in their schooling due to the significant time they dedicate to domestic work, hindering their ability to attend class regularly or focus during lessons. A survey participant articulated the burden of household responsibilities as follows: description.

"Girls spend hours daily helping with cleaning, cooking, and looking after younger siblings. This takes up most of our time, and by the time we finish; we're exhausted and can't focus on our studies." Another respondent added, *"From dawn to dusk, our days are filled with household work. School feels like a distant dream because by the end of the day, there is no energy left to focus on anything but preparing for the next day of chores."*

Every day, household responsibilities occupy most of girls' time, limiting their opportunities to study. Teachers in this study confirm that domestic responsibilities cut into educational time and adversely affect female academic performance, as also highlighted by Rahman and Pingyan (2017), along with Cyan et al. (2019). Teachers note that girls are often expected to perform repeated domestic duties, which significantly hampers their school attendance and academic focus (Rahman & Pingyan, 2017).

The repeated domestic tasks that girls perform support the formation of their identity, according to Butler (1990). Teachers' perspectives align with Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, demonstrating that girls internalize household duties to form their gender identity. This is reflected in teachers' views that domestic responsibilities not only reduce school attendance time but also reinforce cultural perceptions about female domesticity. These perspectives show how, according to teachers, girls increasingly see themselves in caregiving roles rather than academic ones. Butler's theory further suggests that these performed gender roles prevent girls from recognizing education as a future possibility due to the ongoing cultural reinforcement of caregiving duties by family standards and social protocols.

A study participant explained the effects of domestic work on girls, stating: "Girls are often overwhelmed with household tasks that leave them little time or energy to focus on schoolwork." This

comment reflects teachers' views on the significant barriers created by domestic responsibilities, which regularly cause girls to miss school and struggle to concentrate academically. A study participant explained the effects of domestic work on girls by stating,

"Girls are often too tired or distracted from housework to attend school regularly or focus when they do attend. Concentrating in class is difficult when you're worried about chores at home, and your body is exhausted from the work you did before school." Another respondent added, "The burden of household responsibilities means that even when girls come to school, they are not fully present. Their minds are elsewhere, thinking about the work left at home."

The situation leads girls to disengage because household responsibilities frequently prevent them from pursuing their education. Teachers in this study observe that traditional gender roles establish a system of unequal opportunities within educational systems. According to teachers, teachers reported that girls face cognitive interference from their domestic workload, resulting in diminished academic performance levels, as highlighted (Rahman & Pingyan, 2017). In his research, Emerson (2018) shows that rural home division tasks prevent girls from fully accessing their educational opportunities, a perspective supported by the teachers' views in this study (Emerson, 2018).

The concept of gender performance developed by Butler serves as a foundation for analyzing why local girls in Punjab face difficulties in their academic studies. Teachers in this study note that the continuous practice of household tasks restricts girls' time to excel in academics. Butler (1990) explains that when girls continuously enact gender-specific caregiving and household duties, it reinforces the notion that their purpose should be taking care of others rather than studying. Teachers observe that this performance of gender roles, enacted daily, poses an obstacle for girls to break free from their traditional roles, thus creating a barrier to viewing educational success as a viable option.

The heavy burden of household work prevents rural girls in Punjab from pursuing their education seriously. Teachers emphasized that the prevalent cultural norms that establish home duties as superior to education, along with cultural expectations of gender roles, sustain the belief that female duty belongs within the domestic sphere. Butler's Gender Performativity Theory shows how social constructs evolve into repeated practices that prevent girls from seeing education as central to their identity and future, a view shared by the teachers in this study.

5.1.2 Family Financial Status and Its Effect on Girls' Education

Young girls face numerous obstacles in pursuing education, as their families' financial needs often precede their educational futures. Teachers in this study highlight that families' economic circumstances significantly influence the decision to educate their children, with particular emphasis on girls' education. According to teachers' perspectives, the financial strain often leads families to prioritize immediate economic contributions over long-term educational goals. This problem was identified by one research participant who said:

"When a family is struggling financially, the first thing they do is pull their daughters out of school to help with household work or, in some cases, marry them off. The belief is that educating girls is an unnecessary expense, especially when there's no money to pay for tuition or school-related expenses. The focus is always on survival, not investing in education for the future."

Educational opportunities for girls are often unaffordable for rural families, as they prioritize domestic responsibilities and marriage agreements over formal education. Teachers in this study agree with Sathar et al. (2013), who studied how economic limitations push girls away from school, supporting this observation. Teachers note that families with limited resources often make difficult choices, where the immediate economic contributions of daughters are seen as more valuable than their education. Family limitations extend beyond monetary means, as parents need their children, especially

daughters, to help with household responsibilities (Sathar et al., 2013). Y commented further on this problem by explaining that

“Families that are financially struggling find it incredibly hard to fund education for their daughters. When the money runs out, the first thing that suffers is education. It’s seen as a waste, especially when there’s no guarantee of a return on investment.”

From this perspective, teachers in this study note that girls' education is often viewed as an expensive concern because families prioritize preparing their daughters for domestic work rather than professional employment. Teachers share that, in rural homes, the financial strain often leads families to focus on girls' household duties, considering them more immediate and important than formal education. Teachers in this study also refer to the observation by Ahmad et al. (2014) that families frequently choose household routines over girls' education when economic burdens become heavy. Teachers point out that, in rural homes with limited resources, the education of girls is seen as an unnecessary expense. Teachers emphasize that families in impoverished areas prioritize immediate survival needs over the long-term educational benefits that could result from their daughters' education (Ahmad et al., 2014).

According to teachers' perspectives, Farooq & Kayani (2014) emphasize that household financial struggles lead families to consider girls' education as an unnecessary expense. During periods of financial limitations, families tend to prioritize boys over girls for advanced education, as boys are expected to become the breadwinners, while girls are expected to remain in the household until marriage. Teachers observe that, in financially limited families, there are significant differences in available educational access between male and female children, based on how resources are distributed according to gender (Farooq & Kayani, 2014).

Through Gender Performativity Theory, Butler provides essential explanations about the sex-biased ways families allocate their resources. Teachers agree with Butler's theory, explaining that gender does not derive from natural sources but develops through social practices that are repeatedly enacted. Teachers observe that rural families who prioritize boys' education over girls' in times of financial difficulty are practicing gendered behavior that helps maintain conventional gender norms in society.

Whenever households facing financial challenges select education for their male children first, teachers note that they are enacting longstanding cultural gender roles that have developed across successive generations. Teachers agree with Butler's theory that society's belief that boys will become future male earners of the family and girls will take on roles as wives and mothers establishes a gendered social structure within families. These financial decisions are not neutral, according to Butler's (1990) theory, as they actively work to construct and solidify existing gender norms. Teachers emphasize that family resources allocated to education primarily focus on boys, as they adhere to cultural expectations of becoming providers, whereas girls will remain at home. One respondent explained,

"In our community, parents always choose the boys when there isn't enough money to send everyone to school. They believe that boys will grow up to work and support the family, while girls don't need an education because they will be married off. This decision is not just about money, it's about how the family perceives the roles of men and women."

The financial processes in families demonstrate how the basis for monetary decisions extends beyond mere economic considerations, as teachers in this study explain that cultural gender norms restrict educational options for girls. Teachers observe that traditional gender role pressures, such as the expectation for boys to earn money, alongside the pressures placed on girls to perform domestic work and engage in motherhood activities, hinder girls' access to education. According to teachers' perspectives, these gendered expectations are deeply ingrained within the family structure, influencing

financial decisions that limit educational opportunities for girls.. A participant observed that financial troubles generate gendered social requirements that affect family decisions.

“When families face economic challenges, they often feel it’s a waste of money to educate girls. They believe that girls will eventually marry, and their education won’t have any lasting impact. This perception is rooted in the idea that a girl’s worth is tied to her ability to manage a household, not her ability to contribute to the workforce.”

The current situation reveals, according to teachers' perspectives, that educational opportunities for women are often viewed as less significant than those for men, which further undermines girls' long-term academic outcomes. Teachers in this study highlight that these choices reflect more than individual preferences; they represent intricate gender-related social dynamics. Teachers' perspectives align with Butler's theory, which argues that gender identities are not fixed but are shaped by repeated actions and performances. Cultural norms, according to teachers, lead to a preference for investing in sons' education over daughters', reinforcing the belief that men should be economic providers while women take on caregiving roles. Teachers observe that these ongoing social practices—such as the distribution of educational resources and household responsibilities—sustain a male-female hierarchy, resulting in boys receiving greater educational benefits while girls are marginalized in their access to education.

According to teachers' views and the research by Sathar et al. (2013) and Farooq & Kayani (2014), rural families base their educational choices on a fixed gender hierarchy. The cultural belief that boys represent future breadwinners stimulates families to prioritize male education over female education, since girls must prioritize household duties. Teachers emphasize that this preference emerges as a gendered performance, as explained by Butler's theory, because it goes beyond economic rationale to sustain gender inequalities (Farooq & Kayani, 2014).

The financial limitations that families in rural Punjab face create substantial hurdles for girls' educational advancement. Teachers stress that societal customs devalue female education compared to male education, illustrating the acceptance of traditional gender role expectations within communities. By using Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, analysts can study how financial decisions function both economically and as performative acts that sustain traditional gender norms. Teachers agree that economic choices benefiting male education while restricting female educational opportunities perpetuate gender inequality in schools, rendering female education secondary to cultural domestic expectations. The path to eliminating these obstacles, according to teachers, involves a dual strategy targeting both economic limitations and challenging gender expectations surrounding females, as these repetitive social actions reinforce these principles according to Butler's theory.

5.1.3 Belief in Marriage over Education

Traditional society in rural Punjab, according to teachers' perspectives, demands that girls prefer marriage over education, which substantially hinders their educational progress. Teachers in this study highlight that this cultural conviction restricts girls' educational possibilities because it determines their assigned societal position, emphasizing their role as wives and mothers rather than students with academic aspirations. Teachers observe that these deep-rooted societal expectations limit girls' opportunities to pursue education, reinforcing gender-based disparities in access to learning. Respondent C shared,

“In many villages, there's a strong belief that girls don't need to be educated beyond a certain age. Once they reach the marriageable age, the focus shifts from their education to preparing them for marriage, managing a household, and raising children. Education at that stage is no longer seen as important.”

This view illustrates teachers' perspectives on cultural customs that marginalize girls by labeling them for wifehood and motherhood rather than letting them pursue learning or professional goals.

According to teachers in this study, these societal norms create significant barriers to girls' education, as they are often expected to prioritize domestic roles over academic or career aspirations. Teachers note that this cultural labeling limits the opportunities available to girls, reinforcing traditional gender roles that restrict their potential. Similarly, Respondent Z emphasized,

"One of the main barriers is the strong belief that girls don't need an education past a certain point. Their education is considered unnecessary once they are expected to become wives and mothers. This deeply embedded cultural view sees marriage as the ultimate goal for girls, overshadowing any educational or professional aspirations they might have."

Culture presents marriage as the top priority in a girl's life, which devalues her educational achievements in society's eyes. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with Ali (2022), who explains that the cultural practice of marriage expectations tends to halt female education when girls transition to puberty. The study reveals an unusual practice that forces rural girls to end their education because they are considered ready for marriage (Ali, 2022). According to teachers, this cultural norm is deeply ingrained, and teachers observe that girls are often pulled out of school as soon as they reach the age deemed appropriate for marriage. As Junejo (2020) asserts, early marriage acts as the prominent cultural norm in rural Pakistani communities, compelling girls to leave school before reaching the typical age for completing their education (Junejo, 2020). The cultural norms in numerous rural locations place family obligations above education, as demonstrated (Farooq, 2020; Voigt, 2020).

Butler's Gender Performativity Theory enables researchers to explore how marriage functions as an identity-shaping practice that restrains women's identities beyond regional customs. Teachers' perspectives reflect Butler's assertion that gender identity is not an innate trait but forms through continuous social performances in daily life activities. Teachers observe that rural society in Punjab maintains institutional pressure that forces girls to marry before a given schedule. At the same time, this practice solidifies marriage as the primary purpose of female identity, overshadowing roles as students or professionals.

According to Butler (1990), repetitive gender role performances, including girls preparing for marriage and caregiving tasks, develop and strengthen their identity. Teachers note that society executes the act of withdrawing girls from school after they become marriageable through performative processes. Teachers explain that this gender role repetition creates a subtle yet constant conditioning, making girls accept domestic work as their main life path. As a result, education becomes increasingly irrelevant once they reach adulthood. The recurring performance of cultural norms, as observed by teachers, determines how young girls' futures unfold by limiting their educational potential and professional growth. Teachers assert that young girls drop out of school due to sociocultural pressure to find husbands right after they finish their education, further reinforcing traditional gender expectations. Respondent C shared,

"As soon as girls reach puberty or their parents begin considering marriage, they are pulled out of school. The focus shifts entirely from their education to preparing them for marriage. No matter how well they perform academically, their education is deemed less important than getting ready for marriage."

Ahmad et al.'s study (2014) demonstrated that early marriage is the main factor driving girls to leave school in rural areas. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with Ahmad et al.'s findings, noting that girls' educational decisions are criticized because traditional cultural values give precedence to matrimonial life over academic pursuits (Ahmad et al., 2014). Teachers emphasize that, in rural

Punjab, cultural norms regarding early marriage strongly influence girls' educational paths, often pushing them to abandon school in favor of marriage.

Studies by Khan et al. (2017) reveal that cultural norms surrounding early marriage often supersede educational aspirations, as people view marriage as a natural milestone when girls reach adulthood (Khan, 2017). Teachers' views in this study support this finding, with many indicating that marriage is perceived as the ultimate life stage for girls, often overshadowing any academic goals. Teachers point out that in most rural communities, marriage is regarded as the ultimate life stage for girls, making it difficult for education to compete against the social pressure for early marriage effectively (Fatima et al., 2024). The statement from Respondent D illustrates this notion when they asserted:

“When there are financial constraints, parents usually choose to invest in the boy’s education, while the girl’s education becomes secondary, as her role is to stay home and prepare for marriage.”

Early marriage expectations limit teachers’ perspectives on girls’ educational opportunities according to the principles of Butler’s Gender Performativity Theory. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that, according to Butler (1990), gender identity develops continuously through performative action. Teachers observe that society expects females to marry early, so their gender identity emerges through domestic capabilities instead of educational or occupational success. Traditional gender roles, as noted by teachers, receive continuous reinforcement through these performative societal acts, which include supporting early marriage traditions alongside the emphasis on domestic roles over academic achievement.

At puberty, girls transition into the status of future wives and mothers as society requires them to prepare for marriage. Teachers in this study align with Butler’s (1990) assertion that the continual execution of gendered actions curtails educational opportunities for girls. Teachers observe that girls must put academic learning behind them because marriage preparation takes precedence, as the determining factor of their future directions. Teachers emphasize that this transformation into a future wife and mother follows a social path that families, communities, and societal norms affirm and promote. By frequently performing caretaker roles, girls confirm their future role as caregivers, which hinders their ability to picture themselves as professionals or educated adults.

The cultural norms regarding marriage and family duties commonly cause teenage girls, as observed by teachers, to stop attending school when they become eligible for marriage. Respondent E explained,

“Once girls start nearing the age of marriage, the pressure to marry and take on household responsibilities intensifies. Education becomes a secondary concern. Even girls who have done well in school begin to lose interest in continuing their education because they know that marriage is what their families expect from them.”

Ambreen & Mohyuddin (2014) strengthened this finding by stating that cultural norms frequently pushing girls into early marriage reduce their educational motivation (Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2014). According to teachers' perspectives, the pressure for early marriage indeed diminishes girls' motivation to continue their education.

According to Fatima et al. (2024), the role pressure for girls to become mothers and wives surpasses their desire for education, thus causing schools to lose students to dropouts (Fatima et al., 2024). Teachers observe that this pressure often results in high dropout rates as girls prioritize domestic roles over academic pursuit. Respondent E further noted

“As soon as girls reach the age when marriage becomes the next step, education is often abandoned. The social environment clarifies that marriage is the ultimate achievement, and education becomes irrelevant to their futures.”

Society displays gender norms, and this repetitive activity creates a cultural push for early marriage relationships. According to teachers' perspectives, the established norms do not function as individual beliefs but exist because of collective social practices that repeat continuously. Teachers emphasize that early marriage expectations operate through social performances, which lead girls to understand marriage as an unavoidable future step. The process of internalizing social roles occurs when individuals engage in repetitive actions through various channels, including family members and community leaders or institutions, according to Butler (1990). Teachers note that society's execution of gender norms guides girls' personal development and affects their educational paths.

The ongoing performance of future wives and mothers by girls in rural Punjab ultimately leads to identification with these traditional gender roles. Teachers highlight how the repetition of gender performance and the social backing of early marriage prevent girls from discovering different personal identities that could include education and professional careers. Teachers' perspectives show that following the cultural norm of marrying early in life turns girls into passive beings who lose their developmental capabilities and miss out on multiple educational and career development possibilities.

The cultural practice that expects girls to prioritize marriage over education serves as a major barrier that reduces their ability to access educational opportunities in rural Punjab. Through Gender Performativity Theory, Butler demonstrates that societal marriage norms function through repetitive social behavior to maintain their occurrence, even while these notions are produced by society. Teachers argue that the gender-based societal displays drive girls to prioritize marriage and homemaking over education, thus diminishing their importance in their eyes. Teachers emphasize that girls' education must gain recognition as a worthwhile pursuit, even when they are unmarried, due to the unacceptable barriers that stand in their way. The analysis using Butler's theory demonstrates the importance of disrupting gender norms so that girls can develop expanded gender identities that allow for the pursuit of education beyond domestic role expectations.

5.1.4 Gender-Specific Education Priority

The cultural norms of rural Punjab show more priority toward the education of boys rather than girls. Teachers' perspectives in this study confirm that traditional societal beliefs expect men to contribute to household finances, while girls are primarily seen as caregivers. Teachers observe that these cultural norms lead to a clear bias in educational opportunities, with boys receiving more support for their education as they are expected to become providers, while girls are encouraged to focus on domestic roles. The participant Y explained his belief by saying,

“In many villages here, people still believe educating girls is not as essential as educating boys. The priority is placed on boys because they are seen as the future providers for the family, while girls are expected to take care of the household and family responsibilities.”

This mindset, according to teachers' perspectives, shows that girls have less educational value while giving establishments priority status in academic achievement, thus controlling their opportunities and aspirations. Teachers highlight that this cultural viewpoint limits girls' potential, reinforcing the belief that their roles are confined to domestic responsibilities rather than educational or professional aspirations. Respondent B's observation further supported the point,

“People continue to emphasize boys' education above girls' education, manifesting the direct influence of gendered performances on educational limitations. Boys are considered investments for the family's future, and their education is deemed more important.”

The statement shows how society assigns future financial responsibilities to boys so they obtain better educational resources and opportunities compared to girls. According to teachers' perspectives, rural communities emphasize the increased educational importance of male children because boys will become responsible for income generation when they become adults. Teachers observe that this societal belief leads to a clear preference for boys' education over girls', as boys are seen as future providers, while girls are expected to stay within domestic limits. According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus functions as internalized cultural dispositions formed through participation in social activities. Teachers highlight that rural Punjab behaviors indicate that future providers must be boys, ensuring they receive more education than girls, perpetuating systemic bias and gender inequality in educational access.

The Gender Performativity Theory, developed by Judith Butler, offers an insightful approach to analyzing the social creation and continued propagation of educational gender biases. Basing her theory on Butler (1990), teachers' perspectives suggest that gender identity emerges from continuous social actions rather than through natural birth. Teachers explain that rural Punjab society continuously performs gender-based roles that position boys as the priority for educational access over girls, who are assigned to domestic roles. According to Butler (1990), this repeated performance of gender-based expectations shapes how society perceives education as intertwined with gendered activities. This repetition of performance leads to institutionalization, which determines both genders' perceptions of education, where boys' schooling is seen as important and girls' training remains supplementary.

In rural Punjab, teachers observe that boys will improve their ability to become future financial supporters of their families when they receive study encouragement. In contrast, the academic dreams of girls who spend time with their familial responsibilities face minimal backing from their families. Teachers point out that social activities that require gender performances multiple times result in institutionalized unequal treatment between boys and girls, which affects their educational opportunities.

Parents use gender-based expectations within family traditions to determine school choices for their children. Teachers observe that parents in rural Punjab areas select better educational advantages for their sons because they believe boys will become future financial providers. Respondent X observed,

“Parents in rural areas prioritize boys' education because they are viewed as the future providers for the family. Investing in their schooling is seen as necessary, while girls are expected to help at home and eventually manage their households.”

The society gives boys higher priority for education based on the assumption that future family responsibility lies on male financial support, while teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that women are expected to maintain domestic duties. Teachers emphasize that this cultural belief leads to boys receiving better educational opportunities, as they are seen as future providers, whereas girls are relegated to domestic roles, limiting their educational potential. The importance of educating boys was highlighted by Respondent Y when he stated,

“Boys are considered the future providers, so their education is more important. This belief overshadows any consideration for the value of educating girls, who are perceived as fulfilling domestic roles.”

According to their research analysis, economic factors influence parental educational choices, according to Arif and Khalid (2020). Teachers' perspectives in this study confirm that households with monetary constraints prioritize long-term educational investments for their male children because they

view female education expenses as useless (Arif & Khalid, 2020). Teachers observe that this economic reasoning positions male children as more valuable assets, leading rural parents to direct their educational resources toward males instead of females, as girls remain bound to domestic labor (Jamal et al., 2023).

The education-related choices parents make regarding male and female students function as performative acts according to Gender Performativity Theory to strengthen conventional gender ideals. According to Butler (1990), gender does not represent a static identity since people perform social practices that construct gender identities. Teachers in this study explain that rural Punjab society creates and strengthens its belief about educational importance for boys and a supplementary aspect for girls through continuous social practices of educational gender divisions. The repeated household practices contribute to the common understanding that men need to supply income and women need to maintain house management roles. The performative execution of gender roles serves as a fundamental factor in parent selection choices, which strengthens the gender-based educational inequality existing in rural Punjab.

The social perspective towards female education influences how girls interact with their school experience. Teachers note that rural Punjab views female educational pursuits as inferior to male educational pursuits, creating a strong barrier that hinders girls from finishing secondary school. Respondent X detailed the issue through his observation: "Society views female education as less important compared to male education. Many families do not prioritize girls' schooling, believing that girls will eventually marry and take care of a home. This perception influences whether parents allow their daughters to attend school regularly." Respondent Y agreed, adding, "In many rural areas, girls are often discouraged from pursuing education, as their roles are primarily seen as caregivers in the home. Education becomes secondary to their domestic responsibilities."

The cultural preference for gender roles runs deep within rural Punjab because society treats women as household-bound while training men for public work (Yusuf, 2013). Traditional family values mentioned by Qamar (2014) emphasize providing education to boys rather than girls (Qamar, 2014). Society generally starts dismissing the educational value of girls after they reach puberty because it believes marriage represents their final destination. Junejo (2020) argues that numerous rural societies view post-teen education for girls as nonessential because social expectations move them from classes toward marital targets (Junejo, 2020).

However, understanding societal gender attitudes toward female education becomes possible by applying Butler's Gender Performativity Theory. Teachers' perspectives align with Butler (1990), establishing that gender identity forms as people engage in social behavior repeatedly. The public acts that express negative attitudes toward female education throughout rural Punjab create a shared belief that education for girls holds less value. The repeated dissemination and internalization of devaluing education attitudes lead to their institutionalization, which modifies both girls' and their families' educational beliefs. The performative process creates perceptions of education irrelevance, which leads girls to withdraw from school studies since they no longer find them important. Teachers emphasize that the achievements of male siblings, particularly brothers, determine if girls will continue their education. Respondent X observed,

"If there are older brothers who are receiving an education, the focus usually remains on them. The belief is that the education of boys is more valuable than that of girls. The resources that could go toward educating girls are typically allocated to boys, who are seen as the future providers for the family."

School resources exhibit gender discrimination, which leads to a preference for boys in education, while girls end up with limited educational prospects. In various rural communities, teachers' perspectives align with Tusińska (2020), who demonstrates that parents perceive boys' education as essential since they take responsibility for family support (Tusińska, 2020). Through his Gender

Performativity Theory, Butler explains how this process happens. Teachers in this study note that sending boys to educational institutions while girls face educational barriers perpetuates established gender stereotypes. According to Butler (1990), gender identity develops from carrying out social performances, including selection preferences for boys' schooling instead of girls'. Through continuous repetition of this behavior, society makes it clear how boys belong in public domains (education and employment) while girls must stay confined to domestic work (home activities and caregiving). Teachers observe that educational opportunities for girls become restricted when people perform gender-specific roles and maintain existing education-based gender disparities.

Boys' education sometimes drives female students to continue studying, although in opposite instances, it might discourage their academic ambitions, as teachers point out that when boys are prioritized, girls often feel that their education is less valuable.. Respondent B shared, *"When girls see their brothers go to school, they sometimes feel motivated to pursue their education. They feel encouraged to achieve as much as their brothers."* However, Respondent E provided a contrasting perspective: *"In many families where only boys are educated, girls feel that their education isn't as important. They believe their brothers' education is the priority and begin to feel that their education doesn't matter as much."*

This dual impact shows that while some girls may be motivated by seeing their brothers' education, many others internalize the belief that their educational opportunities are less important. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this, noting that while some girls are inspired by their brothers' academic achievements, many others feel discouraged and perceive their education as secondary. The Gender Performativity Theory presented by Butler provides substantial information about this occurrence. Teachers explain that education provided to male siblings reinforces gender roles over and over again, showing how learning for boys carries greater value compared to girls. The repeated performance of education gains different meanings for girls depending on their social environment, since it might encourage or dissuade them from pursuing education. Teachers observe that girls often lose respect for their education because they witness their male siblings receiving schooling while they must maintain traditional domestic duties in society. The ways girls enact gendered behaviours in their daily lives affect their educational development by making them underestimate the value of education in their lives.

5.1.5 Religious and Traditional Beliefs

Religious beliefs and traditional practices in rural Punjab constitute a key element of the cultural framework that influences how girls receive education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that while religion itself does not prohibit female education, some believers interpret religious texts to reinforce male dominance, which prevents girls from attending school. Teachers observe that, in this context, a religious-educational conflict arises because a gender-based interpretation of religious principles limits women's self-reliance. Religious conservatives, as noted by teachers, utilize this selective interpretation to justify traditional gender roles, which designate women's primary responsibility as home duties rather than academic advancement.

Respondent X emphasized this point, saying, *"Certain interpretations of religious teachings in our community emphasize women's roles as wives and mothers, and this is used to justify limiting their access to education. This selective interpretation implies that girls should stay home and focus on domestic tasks rather than pursue education."*

Various researchers, including Ali et al. (2015), demonstrate how religious teachings are misinterpreted to prevent women from exercising their rights, especially their educational freedoms (Ali et al., 2015). Teachers' perspectives in this study align with these findings, as they observe that religious beliefs serve as justification for patriarchal practices in numerous rural areas, which enforce women to remain within household spaces. Teachers highlight that the belief that women should stay at home above all else denies them social participation and educational opportunities, solidifying their

designated domestic position. Shoukat et al. (2019) elaborate on the situation by stating that conventional religious teachings push girls to concentrate on housework since they believe education is not vital for their maternal and spousal responsibilities. Teachers agree, noting that these cultural and religious norms directly impact girls' ability to pursue education, reinforcing the notion that their primary roles are domestic rather than academic (Shoukat et al., 2019). As one respondent remarked,

"Religion, when misinterpreted, plays a big role in reinforcing the belief that girls are meant to stay home and take care of their families. Education is considered unnecessary because their roles are confined to the household."

The rural community commonly expects girls to play mainly the roles of wife and mother instead of being scholars or professionals. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, which provides a profound analytical tool to explore how repeatedly performed social activities support religious interpretations to take effect. Teachers observe that the construct of gender exists as an artificial creation according to Butler (1990), because it requires performative acts for its manifestation. Community leaders, religious figures, and families in rural Punjab continuously perform selective interpretations of spiritual teachings that become public displays. Through repetitive social presentations, teachers note that these performances demonstrate that women should prioritize domestic work while denying them educational possibilities.

Repeated social actions, including religious teachings and cultural practices, maintain the belief that women must perform only domestic duties. According to teachers' perspectives, Butler (1990) argues that performative actions through social conduct create gender identity rather than being basic behaviors. The regular performance of these acts creates social norms that find institutional support, so they define the basic expectations for female identity. The acceptance of gendered performances among girls and their families leads them to believe women's essential nature connects to caregiving responsibilities, thereby decreasing educational value. According to teachers, Butler (1990) suggests that girls experience barriers to professional growth because performative gender actions repeated in domestic spaces prevent them from seeing themselves in professional spheres.. Respondent B explained,

"Religion plays a big part in reinforcing the belief that women's primary role is in domestic duties, limiting their access to education. We are taught that girls should stay home and focus on household chores rather than learning."

The study of Ambreen and Mohyuddin (2014) supports the notion that traditional family beliefs require girls to prioritize household responsibilities such that their educational opportunities are reduced. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this finding, as they observe that cultural norms often lead girls to be seen primarily as caregivers, reducing the value placed on their education. Junejo (2020) supports this by stating that rural communities view girls only as future maternal figures; hence, education becomes unnecessary after transitioning to adulthood (Junejo, 2020). Teachers in this study agree with this view, noting that the societal belief in girls' domestic roles often leads families to prioritize marriage and homemaking over schooling for girls.

According to Khan et al. (2017), rural communities maintain the belief that girls' education should end when they can manage household responsibilities alongside family duties. Teachers' perspectives reinforce this notion, observing that the cultural expectation for girls to handle domestic work prevents many from continuing their education, as family structures are traditionally upheld at the expense of educational aspirations (Khan, 2017).

According to Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, religious and traditional views of women's roles in the family shape gender identities through repeated social interactions. Families, together with religious institutions, perform domesticity based on established religious and cultural standards. Teachers observe that through social behavior, these acts demonstrate that girls should prioritize

household responsibilities first. Butler (1990) maintains that society develops this view of education being inferior to marriage and motherhood because gendered roles are repeatedly performed over time, a view echoed by teachers in this study.

The societal performance of gender roles functions as a main factor that explains why many girls in Punjab's rural areas do not attend school. According to teachers, these repeated gender roles, as explained by Butler (1990), become established in public consciousness, creating significant obstacles for girls attempting to escape these constraints. Religious teachings combined with cultural traditions repeatedly teach girls they must put marriage and household work before pursuing their education, which shapes their sense of self and their imagined future. These habits restrict female educational opportunity and simultaneously mold their inner selves, blocking their ability to envision educational possibilities, as noted by teachers' perspectives in this study. The respondent Z shared his viewpoint, saying,

"Religion itself doesn't directly oppose girls' education, but the way it is interpreted makes girls feel that their main role is in the home. This belief is so ingrained in society that education becomes secondary to family responsibilities."

The above statement shows that religious beliefs supporting male dominance systems help sustain inadequate educational opportunities for girls. As Khan et al. (2017) note, early marital commitments and family duties within communities create substantial pressure that causes girls to drop out of education, as cultural values prioritize nuptials over academic completion. Teachers' perspectives align with this, as they observe that societal pressures for girls to marry early often lead to them leaving school, as their roles are primarily viewed in relation to domestic duties.

Misinterpretation and selective religious teaching practices in rural Punjab create a force that builds masculine power structures, obstructing girls from pursuing educational opportunities. Teachers in this study agree that these practices, when combined with societal norms, limit girls' ability to pursue education, reinforcing male dominance and restricting girls' future prospects. Society diminishes the educational value of girls when it establishes a narrow definition of female roles centered around household management, thus limiting their potential for academic and professional development.

The Gender Performativity Theory proposed by Judith Butler provides an effective model for understanding how repeated gender-related actions reinforce the social construction of sex-bound expectations. Teachers' perspectives in this study suggest that these social performances, which are embedded in cultural and religious norms, shape female identities while influencing their aspirations, making it difficult for education to be imagined as an attainable goal. Teachers emphasize that these gendered performances limit girls' ability to visualize education as part of their futures. Society needs to shift both religious interpretations of gender and social norms to help girls escape traditional gender expectations while pursuing their educational ambitions, as teachers believe this change would open up more opportunities for girls' academic and professional growth.

Table 4.1: Barriers to female education in Punjab, focusing on cultural factors

Themes	Sub-Themes	Key Points	Analysis	References
Cultural Barriers to Education	Household responsibilities	Girls are expected to manage household chores, reducing time and energy for school.	Traditional roles confine girls to domestic tasks, which discourages education.	(Hashmi et al., 2008)
	Belief in marriage over education	Girls are expected to marry and manage a household, with little	Societal pressure to marry early leads to educational interruptions.	(Ali, 2022)

		emphasis on further education.		
	Gender-specific education priority	Boys' education is prioritized over girls' education.	Cultural preference for educating boys over girls limits opportunities for girls.	(Fatima et al., 2024)
	Age-related cultural norms	Once girls reach puberty, societal pressure to marry causes them to drop out of school.	Cultural norms around marriage age contribute to girls' premature withdrawal from education.	(Jamshaid, 2020)
Environmental Perception and Engagement	Devaluation of female education	Society views girls' education as less important than boys', discouraging girls from engaging in school.	The societal undervaluing of girls' education leads to reduced attendance and participation in school.	(Yusuf, 2013)
	Peer influence	Girls feel discouraged when they see others not attending school, reinforcing the belief that education isn't needed.	Peer pressure and community behavior strongly influence girls' educational aspirations.	(Fatima et al., 2024)
	Family decision-making	Parents often make education decisions based on societal perceptions, not the child's potential.	Family decisions are heavily influenced by cultural perceptions, leading to a lack of support for girls' education.	(Awan, 2016)
Religious and Traditional Beliefs	Interpretation of religious teachings	Some interpretations of religion stress women's roles as wives and mothers, limiting educational opportunities.	Cultural interpretations of religion influence how much girls' education is valued or supported.	(Sattar et al., 2012)
	Women's roles in the family	The belief that women's primary role is in domestic duties influences their access to education.	Traditional beliefs about women's roles in the family limit their educational opportunities.	(Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2014)
Community Influence and Motivation	Lack of community support	Community attitudes toward female education often demotivate girls, making them feel their education is pointless.	Negative community attitudes undermine girls' motivation to continue schooling.	(Fatima et al., 2024)
	Pressure to conform to societal roles	Girls face pressure to conform to societal expectations,	Societal pressure to conform to traditional roles	(Rashid et al., 2020)

	Impact on Education	Girls often perceive education as secondary to household responsibilities.	Socialization of girls into caregiving roles limits their educational aspirations, reinforcing a cycle of limited educational attainment.	(Caner et al., 2016; Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
Impact of Household Work	Time and Energy Constraints	Household chores take up so much time and energy that girls miss school or cannot focus when they do attend.	The burden of domestic work significantly hampers girls' ability to attend school regularly and perform well academically.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
	Impact on Attendance	Household duties often lead to absenteeism, or girls arrive at school too tired to focus.	Girls' educational engagement is disrupted by the conflicting demands of domestic duties, affecting attendance and concentration.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
Parental Preferences	Prioritization of Boys' Education	Boys are seen as future financial providers, so their education is prioritized over girls'.	Cultural and economic expectations push families to prioritize boys' education, reinforcing gender inequality in access to education.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
	Investment in Boys' Education	Families feel that educating boys offers better long-term financial returns, while girls are expected to marry and manage the home.	Socioeconomic factors shape parental attitudes, leading to underinvestment in girls' education due to their perceived role as future homemakers.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
Early Marriage	Disruption of Education	Early marriage leads to the cessation of education as girls are expected to manage their new family and household.	Early marriage deprioritizes education, with cultural norms exacerbating girls' educational abandonment.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022)
	Impact on Educational Continuation	Once married, girls are expected to manage family responsibilities, leading to dropping out of school or discontinuing education altogether.	The cultural pressure for early marriage severely limits girls' opportunities for continued education, affecting long-term academic outcomes.	(Laevers & Verboven, 2000; Mbekenga, 2013; Rivera-Garrido, 2022))

Gender roles repeated among peer groups change how girls view education as an opportunity. According to Butler (1990), teachers' perspectives support the idea that gendered norms establish long-term patterns that instruct girls to view their future as domestic care rather than academic learning. The repetition of gender roles among friends results in internalized patterns that prevent girls from describing education as a central element of their identity. Lack of role models from the community who combine education with professional success intensifies the misconception that girls cannot achieve either aspect of their future. Rural communities already tend to restrict educational opportunities for girls, given their cultural and familial norms, and the absence of successful female role models who have managed educational barriers supports these gendered performances. The respondent C provided additional details on this subject:

"It's hard to stay motivated to continue school when you don't see any girls in your community who have gone through the education system and are doing something with it. When your peers leave school and get married or start working at home, you question whether education is worth it."

The lack of inspiring female examples causes other adolescent girls to lose interest in academic pursuits. Teachers' perspectives in this study emphasize that a deficiency of educated, successful women within the social group prevents girls from associating education with success or personal transformation. According to Jamal et al. (2023), the peer group social pressure to follow traditional gender roles intensifies because education does not seem valuable or achievable as a goal (Jamal et al., 2023). Teachers observe that girls base their view of their position in society and educational possibilities on the strong influence of their peers. The display of gender norms in these localities, which highlights housework and disregards female education, creates an atmosphere that blocks girls from pursuing educational goals because they believe their role is confined to home duties.

Gender performance dynamics are essential for understanding how effectively peer groups impact female educational performance outcomes. The repetition of how girls act in rural Punjab results in societal beliefs that shape their prescribed gendered social roles, determining their futures according to Butler (1990). Teachers' perspectives align with Butler's assertion that the belief that school dropout and academic disengagement are typical behaviors results in girls considering them as standard practices, making it harder for them to avoid this pattern. Butler (1990) explains that the repeated actions function as integral molds that form gender identity in social structures. Teachers highlight that girls in rural districts believe that education lacks value due to the extreme normalization of domestic work in their culture.

Peer actions to stay home and perform domestic duties strengthen the cultural belief that girls should avoid education and professional goals. Teachers observe that gendered cultural practices continue to make education unattainable for girls who wish to study because they enforce traditional social expectations. Such societal pressure hinders students' motivation to learn, thus continuing educational disparities in the community.

Rural Punjab peers create a strong impact that shapes female perspectives about education by enforcing gender-biased beliefs that hold household responsibilities more important than academic achievement. Butler's Gender Performativity Theory enables us to analyze how peer actions merge with cultural expectations to determine changes in female educational courses. Teachers in this study note that rural peer groups that reaffirm conventional gender stereotypes take away girls' ability to pursue education and design their future because they create barriers that prevent them from treating education as essential to their personal development. The persistent repetition of gender-related behaviors conducted by peers stands as a mechanism that reinforces these cultural expectations to such an extent that girls become less enthusiastic about their academic pursuits.

Girls' engagement in rural Punjab education requires solving unfavorable social expectations and creating successful leadership models that transform dated gender patterns. Teachers emphasize that

girls need to see successful educational examples from their peer groups and opportunities to develop visions of how education will define their future to dismantle these traditionally established gender norms.

5.2.2 Family Decision-Making and Its Impact on Girls' Education

Traditional cultural beliefs, along with societal customs, have a strong impact on family choices about girls' schooling because they consider formal education unnecessary for girls, since they should adhere to traditional gender expectations. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that many families prioritize domestic roles over academic opportunities for girls, reinforcing the belief that education is not essential for their future. Teachers observe that these traditional views are deeply ingrained in the community, leading to a lack of support for girls' education and perpetuating gender-based educational disparities. Respondent C shared:

"Many families believe that sending girls to school is unnecessary because, eventually, they will get married and take care of the house. The belief is that a girl's future lies in managing a home, so education becomes secondary to that."

According to Awan (2016), rural families resist changing gender roles, even though it overlooks individual abilities. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this finding, as they observe that females receive limited returns from their studies because traditional cultural expectations dictate that their domestic role should extend beyond marriage. The cultural belief system overlooks the educational value for girls because society presumes women will make their social impact through caretaking without pursuing professional careers or educational pursuits (Awan, 2016).

The Gender Performativity Theory presented by Butler (1990) explains how family choices create performative acts that strengthen gender norms. Teachers note that through performing social roles repeatedly, individuals establish their gender identity, as Butler suggests. Teachers' perspectives reveal that Punjab families repeatedly choose to prioritize education for boys rather than girls because they contribute to established societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Households that select marriage over education for young females conduct a recurring performance that establishes gender expectations, so girls become future caregivers and homemakers. Teachers emphasize that families normalize these gendered norms through frequent repetition, and the resulting institutionalization hinders their ability to see different life choices for girls outside of domestic work. The family members of rural Punjab structure educational decisions for children mainly through the influence of grandparents, uncles, and aunts, as teachers observe that extended family members often hold significant sway over educational choices in these communities. Respondent X explained:

"Extended family members, especially grandparents, can have a strong influence. In many families, grandparents are very traditional and may oppose girls attending school beyond a certain age. Their views often carry significant weight in decisions about girls' education."

Iqbal et al. (2023) found evidence that older family members, especially grandparents, display conservative beliefs about girls' societal roles since they think home management exceeds educational pursuits. According to teachers' perspectives, traditional family beliefs held by older generations create opposition with younger parents' progressive viewpoints, resulting in a decline in girls' educational participation. Teachers observe that multiple family members who reside in rural areas keep tight control of their family decisions, which causes traditional gender norms to gain a stronger hold (Iqbal et al., 2023).

The theory of Judith Butler proves successful for comprehending how traditional beliefs transfer between successive generations. Teachers' perspectives in this study suggest that gender performative roles surpass single-person behavior because they exist within family relationships and societal institutions. Girls who encounter gendered roles in their extended family receive continuous social placement as future wives and mothers, which strengthens traditional gender identities. Teachers note

that the beliefs of cultural and gendered nature regarding women's domestic destiny continue because extended family members function as social agents who maintain these norms outside of schools. The ongoing performance of gender expectations within these norms leads to their formal acceptance in culture and society, resulting in restricted access to education along with sustained gender bias.

The gendered dimensions of familial performances create limited options for girls since these social expectations actively form and restrict their achievable identities. Teachers observe that families who decide to lessen their focus on educating girls simultaneously communicate their belief that girls belong at home instead of studying at school. The deep cultural preference for domesticity over education makes it impossible for families and society to envision girls pursuing professional or academic careers, thus continuing their educational limitations.

Family choices regarding education for Punjabi girls in rural areas consistently follow cultural social standards along with traditional gender beliefs. Teachers' perspectives emphasize that multiple social performances in families and communities utilize Butler's Gender Performativity Theory to maintain traditional gender roles that delegate girls to household work instead of developing academic and professional goals. The educational prospects for girls receive additional restrictions through gendered cultural influences stemming from extended family members, especially grandparents. Teachers note that the repetition of traditional societal roles leads to their normalization, thus preventing families from achieving education and professional success for their girls. The elimination of cultural challenges needs deeper insights into how gender roles function through performance, while society requires educational access for all children, regardless of their sex.

5.2.3 Parental Education Levels

A parent's education is essential in deciding whether their daughter needs support to attend and succeed in secondary school. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that those who have received an education tend to understand how education creates improved social opportunities, individual strength, and economic freedom over time. Teachers observe that parents in this situation make education for their daughters their top priority, leading to better academic support and a greater emphasis on their daughters' long-term success. This understanding motivates parents to provide the resources and encouragement necessary for their daughters to excel in school. Respondent X explained:

"Parents with higher education levels are more likely to value and support their daughters' education. They understand the significance of education beyond just school—it's about empowering their daughters to succeed in life, both socially and economically."

Tusińska (2020) verifies that educated parents prioritize investment in their daughters' education since they have realized the extensive economic and social endowments that education creates. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this, noting that educated parents perceive education as a definitive life-changer for their daughters, granting independence alongside equal societal representation (Tusińska, 2020). The Gender Performativity Theory, explained by Butler, provides an understanding of how educated parents alter traditional gender roles through their educational attainment. Teachers observe that, according to Butler (1990), gender identities emerge from repeated social performances that construct and sustain them. These educated parents perform actions that fight against traditional norms related to gender. When parents prioritize female education, they establish a model of progressive sexuality which transforms girls' access to possibilities while challenging traditional social norms about women staying inside their homes.

Teachers' perspectives emphasize that parents who receive an education work to end generational gender norms by focusing on educating their female children. Through this investment, the parents demonstrate modern gender perspectives to their daughters and the following generation. Teachers highlight that parents who choose educational paths over housework demonstrate active resistance towards preserving the cultural norm that restricts girls to solely care for others and maintain the

home. Through their support of their daughters' education, these parents display a gender identity that opens up new possibilities for their daughters to pursue beyond domestic life while fighting against girls' societal limits. Parents who have received limited education typically fail to grasp the importance of girls' education because they judge educational investments as wasteful or superfluous costs, as teachers note. Respondent Y shared:

"Many parents with low education do not see the point in educating girls and feel it is a waste of money. They often believe that sending their daughters to school offers no tangible benefits, especially compared to the financial costs involved."

Tabassum et al. (2019) established that minimal education levels in parents result in undervalued education for their daughters. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this, as they observe that many parents consider education a wasteful expense because they believe female members do not play any role in household finances. These households choose to prioritize other expenses over girls' education, due to which traditional gender roles remain stronger (Tabassum et al., 2019). According to Butler's theory, the unwillingness to fund girls' education performs the cultural norm that requires girls to receive training for domestic activities instead of academic preparation. Teachers note that parents develop their understanding of their daughters' educational value through continuing traditional gender role performances. Parents who reject educational support participate in maintaining gender norms that restrict girls to caregiving roles, versus allowing them to achieve professional positions.

Under Butler's theory, gender identities emerge when society consistently performs activities like family education decisions. Teachers' perspectives reflect that parents who are educated demonstrate a gender identity that supports education against traditional beliefs, while parents with lower education demonstrate an identity that matches traditional beliefs about girls' lower educational worth. Multiple social routines guide how families develop gendered identities, which then dictate the academic results for girls.

Family decisions heavily depend on the assumption that girls make no financial contributions to household funds. Teachers observe that when families face economic scarcity, they dedicate their resources primarily to educating their male children instead of their female ones. Boys are positioned to become the primary money-earners of the household according to this belief system, while girls need to marry before taking on household duties. Limited financial understanding among parents leads them to choose not to support girls' education because they miss the full societal advantages of educating their daughters. The gender-based performance exists as a result of economic factors because traditional gender roles combine with the assumed educational monetary value of children.

5.2.4 Community Influence and Motivation

Rural Punjab community values and prevalent social practices influence how female students stay motivated in continuing their secondary education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that female education faces opposition from the local community, alongside social pressure to adhere to standard gender norms, creating tough circumstances for girls who want to study. Teachers observe that these societal pressures often lead to a lack of support for teachers' perspectives on girls' education, making it difficult for them to maintain the motivation needed to continue their schooling. The strong cultural emphasis on traditional gender roles often discourages girls from pursuing education, reinforcing the belief that their primary responsibility lies in domestic work. Respondent B shared:

"The community's attitude is often discouraging. When girls see their peers drop out of school or never even attend, it makes them feel like it's not something they should aim for. They end up internalizing the belief that education is not for them, discouraging them from attending school or trying to succeed academically."

Community values have a substantial effect on the educational goals that girls pursue. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with the findings of Nosheen et al. (2009), who demonstrated that young rural females undergo major peer pressure in their involvement with educational initiatives. Teachers observe that girls are likely to abandon their educational dreams while following their friends' educational abstention or withdrawal from school. Teachers highlight that girls experience recurring educational disengagement because they cannot find mentors who have mastered school challenges and achieved academic success (Nosheen et al., 2009).

The scholars of Fatima et al. (2024) observed how peers significantly determine the academic ambitions of girls. Teachers in this study agree, noting that girls from rural areas typically see few examples of females who completed their education beyond secondary school or enrolled in higher educational institutions, making them doubt whether schooling is realistic (Fatima et al., 2024). Without proper inspiration, teachers emphasize that girls experience powerlessness, which creates barriers to their school motivation. The educational motivation problem is greatly worsened by the ineffective social support and lack of independent role models in the community, as observed by teachers.

Through Gender Performativity Theory, Butler creates an essential framework to explain how social behaviors among peers, together with established community beliefs, form the educational identities of girls. Teachers' perspectives reflect Butler's (1990) view that gender identity does not exist as a permanent natural quality but emerges through ongoing social actions that shape its nature. The social actions portraying educational abandonment within peer groups, along with community members, create a collective understanding that education lacks importance for girls. Teachers note that young women experience various performative school events, such as watching friends leave school while hearing negative opinions about girls' education, which leads to the normalization of school avoidance. Teachers further observe that girls find it harder to see education as available because educational norms continue to be enacted by the community and their peers repeatedly. When girls internalize the social rule that academic success never belongs to them, their educational interest decreases substantially.

Gendered educational expectations work through performance because they are key elements for comprehending why social norms stop girls from reaching their academic potential. Teachers emphasize that people in rural Punjab repeat specific behaviors that continuously solidify the limited acceptable roles for girls into domestic work rather than academic studies, according to Butler's theory of gender identity construction. Educational disengagement shown by peers occurs as a shared social performance that restricts educational opportunities available to every girl in the community. Teachers agree that these gendered performances repeat until they evolve into social norms, which make it hard for girls to either fight against them or escape from them because these norms shape the area where their academic goals exist, according to Butler (1990). Traditional gender roles receive societal encouragement that intensifies the obstacles that prevent girls from getting educated. Respondent A observed:

"Society tends to prioritize boys' education, seeing them as the ones who will contribute to the family financially. Girls are often expected to stay home and help with chores. This societal expectation is reinforced by the community's belief that girls' primary role is to become wives and mothers."

According to Ijaz (2021), rural communities strongly believe that girls must perform marital duties and household management rather than attend school or build professional careers. Teachers' perspectives in this study reflect that the goal of healthcare services should be to empower girls in these communities by expanding their domestic gateways to earn basic education. This prevailing social attitude denies girls educational growth and establishes how they understand their value and capacity as individuals. Teachers observe that when girls accept their caretaking responsibilities as surpassing their educational priorities, they become disinterested in continued learning or higher education goals (Ijaz et al., 2021).

Through repeated social practices, Butler's Gender Performativity Theory demonstrates how traditional gender roles continue. The development of gender norms about housework and caring starts as process-based actions, which families, schools, and communities initiate and execute. Teachers emphasize that the rural population of Punjab reinforces the belief that women need not pursue education because they are supposed to perform home-based responsibilities and stay confined to their households. Attended social actions produce gendered performances that continue and institutionalize throughout society, thus influencing how people see their roles and conceivable possibilities (Butler, 1990). Teachers agree that the pressure from society, which compels girls to perform household work as well as arrange early marriages, transforms into a restrictive performance that blocks their academic possibilities.

Girls' domestic responsibilities take precedence over their education through active social performances, which become fundamental components of their identity. Teachers observe that social environments that repeat these gendered actions of parents and community members, alongside peer behaviors, generate an overwhelming societal message that devalues girls' education. According to Butler (1990), these social performances work as collective behaviors to develop and strengthen gender norms, thus making it challenging for female students to overthrow these constructs.

Table 4.3: Family dynamics affecting girls' education in Punjab

Theme	Sub-theme	Key Point	Analysis	References
Family Influence on Girls' Education	Parental Education Levels	Parents with higher education are more likely to support their daughters' education.	Families with higher education levels understand the value of schooling and are more likely to prioritize girls' education. However, families with lower education levels may not see the value of educating girls.	(Ullah, 2025)
		Many parents with limited education fail to recognize the importance of girls' education.	Parents' low education levels often lead to them underestimating the long-term benefits of education for girls.	(Saleemi & Kofol, 2022)
Financial Constraints	Family Financial Status	Families struggling financially may prioritize immediate needs over girls' education.	Families facing financial difficulty often cannot afford school-related expenses like uniforms, books, or transport. Education for girls is usually seen as a luxury.	(Sathar et al., 2013)
		Girls are pulled out of school to help with household duties or are married off early.	Financial strains often force families to remove girls from education to manage household chores or ease financial burdens.	(Ali et al., 2021)
Gender Roles and Sibling Influence	Gendered Educational Priorities	Boys' education is often prioritized over girls' education, leading to girls' education being neglected.	Gender bias in families can create disparities where boys are given more educational opportunities, discouraging girls from continuing their studies.	(Shah & Shah, 2012)

management, cooking, cleaning, and child care. The strong community norms restrict girls from obtaining schooling because numerous families remove their daughters from educational institutions when they reach a specific age, despite the belief that continuing education would not benefit girls. Teachers observe that, in many cases, educational personnel note that several girls must handle their household responsibilities alongside their schoolwork, creating physical fatigue while their academics suffer. This dual burden makes it increasingly difficult for girls to excel in school or continue their education long-term. The following remark about teacher challenges emerged from Respondent A's interview:

"Many girls, even if eager to study, must deal with the expectations placed on them at home. They are told to help with chores, take care of younger siblings, and manage the house, which leaves them little time or energy for their studies. This often leads to absenteeism, and many drop out because their families think that education beyond a certain point is unnecessary for girls."

Traditional gender expectations from centuries ago have evolved into the modern social pressures people face today. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with the research by Sattar et al. (2012), which establishes that the male and female division of society throughout South Punjab has caused significant obstacles for girls in receiving an education. According to their research, rural populations maintain domestic duties as more important than schooling for girls, resulting in higher educational abandonment rates (Sattar et al., 2012). Teachers note that rural Punjab female students must navigate restrictive gender-based social norms that compromise their freedom and educational potential. The researchers demonstrated that the ongoing social demand for girls to balance domestic chores instead of pursuing their studies creates substantial challenges to academic engagement. Teachers emphasize that societal expectations that girls should fulfill their assigned gender roles at home are major barriers to their education (Afzal et al., 2014). As Respondent B explained:

"Parents and extended families often believe that education is secondary for girls. They place much more importance on training them to be good wives and mothers. Once a girl reaches puberty, many parents start thinking about marriage rather than her educational progress. This leads to a loss of motivation among many girls, who begin to feel that school is less important than domestic duties."

Afzal et al. (2014) discovered in their research that rural Punjab girls face substantial barriers in continuing education because of their cultural responsibilities toward gendered roles. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this finding, as they observe that the deep cultural roots of girl caregiving norms within society lead many promising female students to face discouragement when they strive to continue education past primary-level studies (Afzal et al., 2014).

The theoretical perspective of Gender Performativity Theory by Butler helps analyze contemporary social processes. According to Butler (1990), gender exists beyond biology because it emerges through social performances that establish and maintain various gendered behaviors. Teachers highlight that such repeated behaviors evolve into institutionalized normal practices through time. The constant repeated traditional tasks that rural Punjab girls perform, such as cooking and cleaning alongside family care, perpetuate the public belief that household activities exceed education in importance.

Butler's theory demonstrates that rural Punjab's gender role rules for girls function beyond individual actor choice because they represent ongoing social performances. Teachers' perspectives reinforce this by explaining that the performance of girls being required to do household tasks instead of going to school operates as more than a personal choice, as it becomes a repeated social enactment. The cultural acceptance of domestic work by girls extends each time they perform house-related tasks and

withdraw from education, validating these gender norms. When girls repeatedly perform gender-specific behaviors, the societal norms solidify, reducing their ability to picture alternatives to the domestic sphere. Teachers observe that society's ongoing support of specific expectations helps them settle into the social consciousness, creating a prophetic feedback loop that further entrenches these gendered roles. Respondent C made an eloquent presentation of this matter:

"The pressure from society to conform to traditional roles is relentless. As soon as a girl is seen as old enough to marry, it's assumed that she should stop her education and start preparing for marriage. This expectation is ingrained in every part of the community—from the school to the family to the broader society. It's very hard to challenge that mindset."

The cultural norms restricting girls' access to education are best understood through Butler's (1990) analysis of performative gender roles. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this theory, noting that the binding social requirement for girls to care for home responsibilities above academics works through continuous group-based actions, constructing educational experiences for rural Punjab girls. Social gender performances that families, communities, and institutions such as schools conduct build an inflexible system that establishes female societal behaviors. The repeated execution of gender roles through social behaviors leads to declining possibilities for girls to consider education as an option when they reach their teenage years and encounter societal expectations.

Strong social pressure on girls intensifies because their community provides no structured support systems. Teachers observe that young women typically lack educational success models in their community, so many families discount the value of financing their daughters' school education. The high rates of school disengagement and dropout by young girls must be seen as a community-wide problem that stems from existing traditional cultural beliefs. Teachers' perspectives highlight that without role models who successfully combine education with other responsibilities, girls find it difficult to envision education as a realistic goal.

Rural Punjab society enforces strict gender-based societal norms, which create major educational hurdles for school-aged girls. Teachers emphasize that their educational practice faces significant barriers because Pakistani cultural expectations establish domestic responsibilities as girls' primary responsibility. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, society uses repeated social performances to create and maintain these normal behaviors. Teachers suggest that knowledge of how gender roles are performed through repeated actions enables us to develop solutions that eliminate educational barriers faced by female students while fostering improved learning environments.

5.3.2 Resistance from Parents and Communities

Teachers' perspectives in rural Punjab encounter major difficulties because parents and community members oppose female education. Due to their beliefs, parents in various regions choose not to educate girls since they see this as a useless spending of money. Teachers observe that many people accept that girls must ignore education after primary grades because they should prepare to be wives and mothers. The rural areas are marked by strong patriarchal principles, which degrade the importance of girls' academic achievement. Teachers struggle to explain the future advantages of female education to parents because families base their female parenting beliefs on traditional cultural norms, despite viewing women mostly as caregivers at home. The views presented by Respondent A show one side of this resistance:

"Many parents, especially in rural communities, believe educating girls beyond a certain age wastes money. They don't see the point in investing in their daughters' education when they're expected to get married and manage a home. Even when the benefits of education are explained, many parents still believe it's unnecessary for girls."

The objection against female education has existed across recent history. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with Hashmi et al.'s (2008) research, which focuses on the cultural and social factors

obstructing girls' education in rural Punjab. The research demonstrated how patriarchal beliefs directly influence family choices regarding education, with numerous families choosing to spend their educational resources on boys instead of girls (Hashmi et al., 2008). Teachers observe that people believe boys will become the future financial providers, so women should limit their focus to home chores. Traditional societal beliefs shape both educational choices and gender biases because the culture grants extra educational possibilities to boys and restricts girls to household work only.

Tajammal (2018) explained that opposition to educating girls persists throughout these communities, even with the implementation of financial perks such as school stipends. Teachers agree with this observation, noting that cultural values combined with family customs exert greater influence than monetary incentives on the education opportunities available to female students. Teachers in rural Punjab highlight that traditional cultural beliefs about female roles lead parents and the wider community to oppose girls attending school, even though girls are not pursuing studies (Tajammal, 2018). Generations of traditional social traditions continue to strengthen these cultural beliefs, as observed by teachers in their experiences with the local community. As Respondent B noted:

"Parents often say that once girls reach puberty, they should start preparing for marriage. They are taught their main role in life is to become a good wife and mother, not pursue a career or further education. This societal pressure makes it extremely difficult for girls to continue their education, even if they want to."

The Gender Performativity Theory, introduced by Butler, helps people understand how cultural behaviors create stability through repeated social performances. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with Butler's (1990) explanation that gender exists beyond natural biological features, emerging instead from social performance through successive actions. Teachers observe that rural Punjab citizens deliberately resist female education through performance because it maintains the widespread belief that girls must prioritize household duties over academic progress. Parents and community participants repeatedly perform this act to demonstrate that keeping girls at home is their core duty. Teachers highlight that the educational decisions made for girls lead to continuous validation of the social norms that place them in domestic roles. Repetitive actions within the community normalize these norms, which block girls from educational opportunities. Teachers emphasize that this creates a cycle, and girls struggle to break free from such limitations. Respondent C provided a detailed explanation on this matter:

"In our community, when girls are expected to drop out of school and prepare for marriage, it's not just the parents who reinforce this idea—it's the entire community. The immense societal pressure makes it hard for girls to imagine education as a viable path for their future. The whole community performs these gender roles, which makes it even harder to challenge them."

Butler agrees that gendered identities develop through continuous social actions that reconstruct their nature. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this view, noting that where parents oppose female education, it represents a widespread cultural practice that maintains itself through societal standards, becoming perpetuated in everyday customs. Teachers observe that gender inequality passes across generations due to constant social conduct and repeated performance. This cultural performance about female education exists to reinforce established gender roles that require girls to care for others instead of pursuing education.

According to Butler's theory, these gendered norms achieve social status because community members continuously perform them. Teachers emphasize that educational resistance toward female education, through methods including school withdrawal, marital direction, and discouragement from schooling, upholds traditional gender roles. Through repetition, teachers highlight that this societal learning makes gender norms permanent fixtures in community understanding, and it becomes nearly impossible for girls to picture themselves receiving an education or fighting against rigid gender roles.

According to Butler (1990), performative actions establish these societal expectations and thus determine how people adopt their social roles. Teachers agree that rural Punjab manifests its deep cultural norms through the public performance of denying girls educational opportunities. Teachers observe that parents' refusal to support girls' education demonstrates a societal performance that impacts the educational possibilities for these communities' female students.

The strong opposition female education faces in rural Punjab represents an overwhelming challenge that teachers must confront. Teachers' perspectives underscore that the repeated presentation of gender-based cultural norms that assign family work higher value than schooling determines the reduced access girls experience to educational possibilities. Social performances, as described in Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, explain the creation and institutionalization of gender norms by repeated social actions. Teachers emphasize that society needs fundamental changes in cultural practices that limit education for girls, as such changes require modifying negative attitudes about female education.

5.3.3 Cultural Resistance to Educating Girls beyond a Certain Age

The resistance toward female education grows stronger during adolescence in rural Punjab. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that girls typically leave educational institutions after hitting puberty or when marriage starts being considered. Teachers observe that this societal shift occurs as girls are seen as ready for marriage, with educational opportunities becoming secondary to domestic responsibilities. The pressure to conform to traditional gender roles intensifies during this period, leading many girls to abandon their studies. Respondent A shared:

"Once girls reach puberty, the focus shifts from their education to preparing them for marriage. Parents and extended family members often believe that continuing education beyond this point is unnecessary. Their role is seen as future wives and mothers, so education is considered irrelevant once they reach a certain age."

Society views a young woman's value through her capacity to fulfill housewife and mother roles, thus diminishing her need for increased education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that in sixth grade, they encounter substantial opposition from parents and their family networks, who support traditional beliefs that girls should become homemakers instead of pursuing academic or professional development. Teachers observe that early marriage and domestic responsibilities push so intensely into community awareness that they create swift educational withdrawal from school for girls when they reach their adolescent years.

Afzal et al. (2014) unveiled the concerning trend of high school dropout rates for rural Punjabi girls after they become teenagers, since community norms push them toward early marriage responsibilities. Teachers agree with this finding, noting that the cultural environment leads young females to withdraw from education because social norms view this action as natural instead of assessing the ability to benefit individually (Afzal et al., 2014). Teachers emphasize that the societal force for early marriage, which parents and community members actively promote, makes girls discontinue their education during pivotal academic periods. The cultural tradition opposes investing in girls' education beyond primary school, thus preventing their pursuit of higher learning opportunities.

The researchers at Sattar et al. (2012) discovered growing disparities between male and female education participation at secondary schools, mostly in rural settings. Teachers' perspectives confirm this, noting that the local social customs require young girls to prioritize household work instead of proceeding with their academic studies. Traditional perspectives combined with financial needs push girls into caregiving roles that shape the cultural expectations, making education unnecessary. Teachers emphasize that marital expectations, coupled with conventional beliefs promoting homemaking as girls' destiny, substantially increase learning differences between females and males, especially in rural Punjab areas (Sattar et al., 2012).

With reference to the Pakistani social system, this theory presents vital information for analysis. Based on Butler (1990), we can understand that gender exists outside our physical nature since it emerges from communal social activities which become performed repeatedly. Teachers highlight that the rural Punjab community performs gender norms through expectations that girls need to stop studying upon hitting puberty to concentrate on becoming housewives. Parents employ this gendered educational cutoff age for girls through parental choice, although this practice results from systematic performances which the community endorses and reendorses throughout time. According to Butler (1990), teachers agree that human beings perform gender-based activities which create their identities, and these performances subsequently transform into binding societal social rules. Relevant evidence comes from the actions of the interviewee B who shared her experiences:

"In our community, as soon as a girl reaches puberty, her educational journey is expected to stop. People don't just make that decision for her; it's a community-wide expectation that reinforces this idea. Girls are seen as future wives, and no one questions whether they should continue their education after that point."

The continuous process of social performances determines how girls are viewed by their community members, thus initiating a lasting cycle. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that the cultural norms that establish girls as caretakers instead of students produce the gendered performance that education becomes irrelevant during puberty. Teachers observe that continuous gender role reinforcement creates a perception in society that girls need to end their studies. The repeated execution described by Butler (1990) styles these performances into firmly established gender identity standards, which diminish education value for girls starting at a specific age. Teachers emphasize that society exhibits cultural resistance to educating girls because they view domestic home management as a girl's main purpose. Respondent C reflected:

"Girls are often told that their future lies in marriage and raising a family. As they reach puberty, education becomes secondary, and the societal focus shifts to domestic roles. The idea that education is unnecessary for girls becomes so ingrained that it's rarely questioned by the family or the community."

Parents, as well as grandparents and members of the community, repeatedly perform acts to prevent girls from attending school and to pressure them into domestic activities. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this, noting that these so-called societal performances block prospects for young women while shaping their personal identity against their quest for education. Teachers observe that rural Punjab emphasizes marriage as the primary purpose for girls, and gender expectations run deep, especially after girls become teenagers, making education unimportant.

Butler's theory demonstrates how teachers' perspectives on girls' educational progression depends heavily on the essential gender-stereotyped actions they perform. Teachers highlight that the repeated enactment of gender-based roles by the community consistently shows their belief that girls should leave formal education behind a certain age because they will become mothers and wives in the future. This normalization process, as teachers note, strengthens the barriers that prevent girls from pursuing higher education.

5.4 Teacher Strategies to Overcome Cultural Barriers

5.4.1 Community and Parental Engagement

Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that teachers in Punjab have successfully reduced cultural obstacles to female education by developing active partnerships with local communities and parental groups. Teachers emphasize that educational institutions organize group meetings and continuing education sessions to bring together parents and community leaders to discuss the importance of female education. These efforts, as observed by teachers, have played a crucial role in

fostering a positive shift in attitudes toward girls' education within the community. Respondent X shared:

"We hold community meetings where we explain to parents the long-term benefits of educating their daughters. We emphasize that it's not just beneficial for the girls themselves but also the entire community. Educated girls can contribute to economic growth, improve the health and well-being of their families, and help break the cycle of poverty. By getting parents involved, we aim to reduce their resistance towards sending their daughters to school."

The approach overcomes family objections regarding female education by fulfilling their realistic demands. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that educators engage in dialogues to reframe the incorrect belief about girls' schooling inactivity while working in areas where women are traditionally expected to perform domestic work. Teachers emphasize that educated girls function as investments, generating benefits that advance the entire community's future. Studies by Awan (2016) demonstrate that community participation programs decrease school abandonment rates because they create a supportive environment to teach girls (Awan, 2016).

Research by Tajammal et al. (2023) establishes that educational projects need active parental and community leader participation for their success. Teachers' perspectives reflect these findings, showing that leadership support from community members for girls' education produced better societal changes and improved enrollment rates among girls (Tajammal et al., 2023). Teachers agree that community advocacy effectively works against long-standing cultural beliefs which prevent girls from obtaining an education.

Butler's Gender Performativity Theory demonstrates how community and parental engagement strategies fight against cultural barriers. Teachers note that studies show gender identity develops through continuous social actions as described by Butler (1990). Traditional gender norms in rural Punjab continue to replay due to this repeated cultural practice and reinforce how girls naturally belong in domestic roles instead of education. Teachers emphasize that teaching staff who communicate with family members and community leaders as advocates for female education actively create resistance against prevailing gender norms. Gender performance as disruptive behavior operates against cultural limitations for girls' access to education in ways that challenge established patterns of gender behavior.

According to Butler (1990), the continuous gender performances eventually form and reinforce society's cultural expectations. Teachers' perspectives highlight that through their public activities, teachers establish alternative perceptions of gender, positioning girls as educational individuals with the freedom to pursue both marital and maternal and educational aspirations. The redefinition of gender expectations creates an expansive gender practice that upholds educational opportunities for girls by bringing community-wide endorsement. Teachers actively engage in societal gender perception transformation through their public teaching engagements to break traditional gender norms.

This initiative plays an essential role because it fights against societal perceptions which insist girls should only address domestic work, as teachers observe firsthand in their communities. Respondent Y remarked:

"When we hold meetings with parents, it becomes clear that many families don't fully understand education's long-term impact. We explain that educating a girl can provide her with the tools to break free from poverty, contribute to her community's growth, and achieve financial independence, empowering both her and her family. These meetings help shift the perception that education is a luxury for girls."

Tajammal et al. (2023) established that community involvement influences parents' attitudes toward sending their daughters to school. Teachers' perspectives in this study reflect this finding, as they note that teachers combat traditional beliefs about domestic work over education by presenting advantages to parents alongside their children's real achievements (Tajammal et al., 2023).

As a result of these collective initiatives, society develops a new gender performance that presents girls as future leaders alongside professionals and educated individuals who bring major value to society. Teachers observe that educating young girls in a new way allows society to question traditionally restricted gender norms that have prevented girls from attending school in rural Punjab areas. Teachers emphasize that these changes in gender performance challenge long-standing cultural expectations and create opportunities for girls to envision a future beyond domestic roles.

5.4.2 Safe Spaces for Girls

Educational institutions in rural Punjab must establish secure environments for girls as an important method to eliminate cultural impediments to their learning. Teachers' perspectives in this study emphasize that these protected environments deliver psychological comfort and physical safety that girls must have to overcome substantial societal and family pressures. Teachers highlight that the essentiality of establishing secure areas in rural environments depends on the presence of gender-based violence and harassment, as such areas lead to better academic outcomes and the overall welfare of girls. According to teachers who have established these areas, girls demonstrate greater attendance numbers and maintain longer school enrollment periods since they experience mental and physical security. Respondent Z shared:

"We create safe spaces within our school where girls can express themselves freely, talk about their challenges at home, and receive the emotional and academic support they need. It's not just about providing a secure place to learn, but also about allowing them to talk about the pressures they face from society, their families, and the community. These spaces help them navigate the cultural constraints often conflicting with their academic goals."

The need to develop supportive spaces goes beyond facilities because girls require a welcoming atmosphere where they can share problems and obtain useful recommendations. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that points of safety appear in different formats, including classrooms exclusively for girls, mentee programs, and specially assigned teachers who provide individual support for female students. Teachers observe that these educational programs enable young women to navigate between academic dreams and cultural expectations that society and their families enforce on them.

Various studies demonstrate that traditional beliefs, alongside safety concerns, prevent girls from pursuing education throughout rural Punjab. Teachers agree with Ullah (2011), who pointed out how traditional gender roles, combined with school safety concerns, jointly cause girls to leave their education. The study demonstrates that creating physical safety zones is essential to boosting female enrollment in educational programs (Ullah, 2011). Teachers' perspectives align with Jamal et al. (2023), who emphasize that academic retention and superior performance emerge from girls who find their educational institutions provide protection and respect. Correll and Fumagalli together emphasized that teachers must actively develop protected learning environments that ensure girls feel safe against harassment and cultural consequences (Jamal et al., 2023).

Gender Performativity Theory by Butler explains how safe spaces actively resist traditional gender norms. Teachers' perspectives support this, as they note that the rural areas of Punjab reinforce gender identities by continuously engaging in social activities that construct these roles. Teachers observe that these gender-based standards, enforced by families, communities, and educational institutions, consistently maintain their dominance by keeping girls within household duties and valuing marriage

above educational development. Safe spaces, as teachers highlight, are a deliberate challenge against gender norms that restrict people's behavior. A supportive educational environment created by teachers enables female students to challenge their assigned home duties while developing new gender roles. Respondent X further explained:

"When girls have a space where they feel secure and valued, they begin to see themselves not only as daughters and caregivers but as students, thinkers, and future leaders. This shift in perception is critical because it challenges the deeply embedded belief that girls' futures are limited to marriage and motherhood. In safe spaces, girls can imagine themselves in careers and as contributing members of society, which is vital in overcoming the cultural barriers to their education."

The educational evolution enables young women to conceive possibilities outside conventional household duties. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that becoming part of safe spaces enables girls to present alternative identities free from traditional gender constraints, thus enabling them to pursue academic and professional goals. Teachers emphasize that when they establish such learning spaces, they teach students and redefine societal beliefs about female capabilities.

According to Butler (1990), individuals develop their gender identities through continuous social activities, which build up with time. Teachers' perspectives align with Butler's assertion, observing that gender role performance in rural Punjab traditionally restricts girls to domestic responsibilities that control their success potential. Teachers note that by creating safe learning spaces, they encourage female students to perform a new educational identity, allowing them to recognize their right to study. Teachers further explain that safe spaces create a social environment where girls may perform alternative gender roles by taking on intellectual, academic, and professional identities. Creating such spaces enables girls to transcend the societal restrictions that normally control their behavior.

5.4.3 Mentorship Programs

The rural areas of Punjab have established mentorship programs that effectively assist female students through cultural limitations stopping them from pursuing education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that academic mentorship programs link female students from different age groups to establish supportive educational relationships where older females and younger girls provide guidance and academic support. Teachers emphasize that these mentorship programs create a sense of community and solidarity, helping to overcome societal and familial pressures that traditionally discourage girls from continuing their education. Through these relationships, female students receive both academic and emotional support, making it easier for them to navigate the challenges they face in pursuing their educational goals. As Respondent X explained:

"Mentorship programs are vital because they allow older girls to share their experiences with younger ones. Many teachers reported that girls face tremendous pressure from their families and society to conform to traditional roles, but mentors help them realize that education is not only an escape from these roles but also a path to empowerment. They show that it is possible to balance education and domestic responsibilities, and in doing so, provide a sense of solidarity and hope."

The mentors provide both emotional and practical guidance to girls about facing the obstacles related to being female in rural Punjab. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that the women mentors face three main obstacles: home duties versus academic commitments, opposition from their parents, and traditional cultural pressure for early marriage arrangements. Teachers observe that mentors showcase academic success because they successfully navigated through the obstacles they encountered, offering valuable insights and motivation to younger girls. These mentors not only guide their mentees in academics but also provide emotional support, helping them resist cultural pressures and family opposition, encouraging them to pursue education despite societal barriers. Respondent Y emphasized:

"Mentorship helps girls see that they can pursue higher education and are not limited to being wives and mothers. Mentors show them that education opens doors to new opportunities, and that they can contribute to society in meaningful ways, which shifts the mindset of younger students and empowers them to remain in school."

Fundamental research confirms that mentorship programs help tackle cultural obstacles blocking girls from attending school. Teachers' perspectives align with this, as they observe that female role models from older generations successfully lower female student dropout thresholds through professional mentoring programs, as demonstrated by Shah and Shah (2012). Teachers note that complementary academic guidance from mentors helps girls fight against cultural expectations of traditional gender behavior. This educational method proves very helpful for rural regions because girls often oppose their schooling persistence. The research by Fatima et al. (2024) demonstrates how mentorship initiatives create teamwork among female students, teaching them to break free from societal restrictions in their educational pursuits. Teachers emphasize that these programs develop educational and psychological strength in young women, helping them fight against the social acceptability standards they encounter (Fatima et al., 2024).

Through Gender Performativity Theory, Butler establishes an effective method for studying how mentorship programs influence female students at school. Teachers' perspectives reflect Butler's view that gender is a constructed identity, as Butler (1990) maintains it emerges from repeating performed actions. Through mentorship programs, teachers observe that girls obtain inspiring role models who help them adopt different gender-based actions in contrast to cultural norms. The mentoring experience proves to girls they can achieve academic success through career paths that can coexist with traditional roles of domestic activity if they decide to take that path. Teachers highlight that girls can transform their gender concepts by looking beyond domestic roles through this process. As Respondent Z shared:

"Mentorship changes the way girls see themselves. When they see their mentors, who have navigated the same cultural barriers, excelling in education and careers, they imagine themselves in roles beyond being wives and mothers. These mentors demonstrate that girls can achieve anything, and that education is the key to that achievement."

The mentorship programs enable girls to adopt gender identities that exceed household chores and conventional social roles. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that the girls start to perceive themselves as qualified individuals pursuing careers while continuing higher education and seeking leadership positions, thus going against the social restrictions that suppress women's potential. Teachers emphasize that such gender identity transformations are vital in dismantling cultural barriers that resist women's education.

Teachers observe that mentors and educators promote changes in established gender norms that have limited the traditional position of girls in rural Punjab societies. Strategies for gender performance transformations emerge through constant social acts, according to Butler (1990) in his work. Teachers agree that mentorship programs create entry points that allow girls to surpass traditional gender expectations while they follow career paths through different female role models who demonstrate new ways to express gender. The restructured gender norms enable girls to reach their academic best while advancing general social transformations that support gender equality.

5.4.4 Teacher-Community Engagement for Girls' Education

Rural Punjab teachers employ direct parent and community leader interaction as their most successful method to diminish cultural obstacles blocking girl students from learning. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that trials focused on reforming existing community views about girl education prove crucial for teachers who want to maintain their academic progress. Teachers emphasize that by engaging with parents and community leaders, they can address cultural misconceptions and shift attitudes, thereby creating a more supportive environment for girls' education. These efforts play a key

role in overcoming societal barriers that traditionally hinder girls' academic advancement. As Respondent A pointed out:

"Teachers organize community meetings where we engage parents and community leaders to educate them on the importance of girls' education. These workshops aren't just about convincing parents that education is good for their daughters and showing them that educated girls contribute to the community. They improve family health, increase economic participation, and foster social cohesion—benefits that extend beyond the individual."

Community leaders serve as essential components in this particular process. Teachers' perspectives in this study emphasize that rural leaders possess substantial power, and their backing can powerfully transform how the public views matters. Teachers observe that support from respected community figures about educating girls produces a chain reaction, enabling teachers to champion girls' educational access more easily. Teachers highlight that when community leaders advocate for female education, it not only enhances the credibility of teachers' efforts but also encourages broader community support for breaking cultural barriers to girls' schooling. According to Respondent B:

"Community leaders are incredibly powerful. When they speak out in favor of educating girls, it helps shift the community's mindset. Suddenly, education for girls becomes a more acceptable and supported idea. It removes some of the resistance that parents might feel."

Ali (2022) and Awan (2016) provide evidence about the essentiality of community participation. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with their findings, noting that research data revealed that teacher participation with parents and community leaders significantly positively affected girls' educational participation and school attendance rates. Teachers emphasize that leaders and teachers collaborated to prove that female education had crucial societal benefits beyond conventional expectations by establishing new perspectives of expanded value. Teachers agree that community collaboration eliminates established societal rules that give boys preferential access to schooling instead of girls (Ali, 2022).

The paper of Purewal and Hashmi (2015) highlights the essential role of communal participation in solving obstacles that prevent girls from receiving education. Teachers' perspectives reflect this, as they state that teacher participation in community-wide education initiatives allows educators to develop environments that promote collaborative support for schooling girls past private family interests (Navtej Purewal & Naimatullah Hashmi, 2015). Teachers observe that such initiatives create a network of support that strengthens the community's commitment to providing equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls. Respondent C elaborated:

"When the community begins to see educating girls as something that benefits everyone, it changes the game. It's no longer just about a few parents; it's about the collective good of the entire community. This kind of engagement makes girls' education a communal goal."

According to Butler's Gender Performativity Theory, the educational involvement of communities runs against conventional gender-based standards, which control rural Punjab girls' activities. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that a culture that forces girls into housework requires families, along with community members and social establishments, to perform gendered activities regularly. Teachers observe that those who actively work with parents and leaders to argue for female education break down established gender norms in their communities. According to Butler (1990), gender emerges from continuous actions called performances. Teachers emphasize that the repeated theatrical enactments determine the social boundaries men and women must respect as established behavioral norms.

Schools teach a new gendered narrative to parents and community leaders, showing the worth of educating girls while redefining their traditional roles to include professional growth and leadership beyond housework responsibilities. Teachers in these schools play a vital role in fostering this transformation of gender performances, enabling girls to expand their conception of future professional options. Teachers note that this shift not only benefits the girls but also challenges the broader community to reconsider and reshape traditional gender expectations. As Respondent D noted:

"When we talk to parents about the benefits of educating girls and when leaders in the community speak up, it changes how girls see their future. They begin to understand that they are not confined to being wives and mothers—they can be doctors, teachers, engineers, and anything else they want."

Butler's theory explains how new gender performances transform the identity structure of rural Punjab's girl population. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that teachers' and local community representatives' participation in education programs is helping to generate modern definitions of womanhood. Teachers observe that the new gender roles create scenarios where girls can build mental pictures of themselves acting beyond traditional child-rearing duties by taking part in social and economic developments within their communities. Teachers emphasize that these changing roles allow girls to envision themselves as leaders and professionals, not just caregivers. Repeated gender performances will continue to break down established restrictions that traditionally prevent girls from pursuing education and professional and personal goals, as teachers in rural Punjab work alongside community leaders to reshape these societal norms.

5.5 Policies and Initiatives for Increasing Enrolment

Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that their essential efforts to break educational barriers for girls have obtained significant support from government and NGO interventions. Teachers observe that external resources, particularly financial rewards, infrastructure development, and outreach programs, are key elements that boost the number of girls in secondary education. Teachers emphasize that rural Punjab families benefit from government stipends, scholarships, and NGO-led programs because these measures help parents afford female education despite financial challenges. Teachers believe that such initiatives are instrumental in increasing girls' enrollment and retention in schools by alleviating the financial burden on families and encouraging a cultural shift toward supporting girls' education.

The programs developed by external organizations play a vital role, according to Respondent A:

"Without the financial support from government programs like the Girls' Stipend Program (GSP), many families simply would not have the means to send their daughters to school. These stipends have made a significant difference in helping families overcome financial barriers. Scholarships, in particular, have helped ease the pressure of school-related costs, making education more accessible for girls who might otherwise have been kept at home."

Tajammal et al. (2023) performed research demonstrating that the Girls' Stipend Program (GSP) plays an essential role in fighting student dropouts and raising student participation rates. Teachers' perspectives in this study align with this finding, as they observe that rural families in Punjab choose school enrollment for their daughters once they receive financial support, even if they need the money immediately for survival. Teachers highlight that the GSP has proven to be a key factor in encouraging families to prioritize education despite economic hardships.

According to Sattar et al. (2012), financial aid designed for girls substantially improved female access to education within rural areas through subsidies for transportation and educational materials. Teachers emphasize that such financial support enables girls to overcome logistical and financial barriers to attending school. The instrumental functions of NGOs include providing financial backing

alongside solving cultural and academic challenges, as teachers note that NGOs' support helps to address both the financial and societal factors that hinder girls' education. Respondent B shared:

"NGOs provide much-needed resources for both students and teachers. They offer training workshops that help educate families and communities about the long-term benefits of girls' education. NGOs also provide educational materials and sometimes funding for infrastructure development, like building schools in remote areas where girls otherwise wouldn't have access to a safe learning environment."

The comprehensive program supplies financial backing, instructional workshops, and educational materials to fight cultural restrictions that prevent girls from pursuing education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that training programs evolve community perspectives about education from a privileged commodity to an absolute requirement, leading to socio-cultural changes. Teachers observe that these programs play a significant role in shifting the community's attitudes and helping to break down traditional barriers to girls' education.

The gender performativity concept of Judith Butler demonstrates how these programs break down traditional gender requirements. Teachers' perspectives reflect Butler's (1990) theory, noting that the financial assistance schemes provided by these programs represent gender-oriented institutional performance methods that undermine traditional girl-oriented social structure norms. Teachers emphasize that gender does not exist as a natural quality, but rather emerges from repeated social performances. This government and NGO support challenges conventional beliefs about female domestic roles, as teachers observe that it provides an opportunity for girls to transcend those limitations.

These educational initiatives enable young women to participate in masculine domains that were previously excluded to them, including educational advancement and workforce participation. Teachers agree that through these programs, the financial support given to girls lets them develop beyond approved social frameworks that inhibit their capabilities. Teachers further note that financial backing for girls' education teaches young women to imagine social roles that do not require them to make sacrifices between familial responsibilities and external success. The studied policies encourage an important change in worldview, according to Respondent C:

"When families see their daughters going to school with the help of scholarships, they begin to understand that girls can achieve something beyond being housewives. The scholarships make it easier for families to send girls to school; this can change how the entire community views girls' roles over time. These policies don't just provide money—they provide hope and show that education is an option for girls as much as it is for boys."

Changing social attitudes is crucial for rural Punjab to achieve enduring transformations in gender norms. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that successful female students serve as role models within their communities, aiding in the shift of traditional societal expectations. Teachers emphasize that these role models inspire others to challenge gendered norms and pursue education. Financial subsidies provided by these programs and expanded educational initiatives promote the establishment of new gender norms that position education as a fundamental right and equal opportunity for girls rather than as a privilege reserved for boys. Teachers observe that these changes are critical in reshaping how girls are viewed in terms of their educational potential and societal roles.

Table 4.4: Teachers' Strategies and Challenges in Promoting Girls' Education

Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Point	Analysis	References
Cultural Barriers to Girls' Education	Gender norms and societal expectations	Teachers face societal pressure and cultural expectations that limit girls' education, such	Cultural norms prioritize domestic roles over education for girls, which teachers must	(Ali, 2022; Hashmi et al., 2008; Sattar et

		as balancing school with domestic duties and family resistance.	navigate. A lack of community support and societal resistance to female education exacerbate the pressure.	al., 2012; Shah & Shah, 2012)
Teacher Strategies to Overcome Cultural Hurdles	The teacher's role in encouraging education	, which provide resources and support, to promote the importance of girls' education.	Teachers are crucial in bridging cultural gaps by offering mentorship, support, and educating families on the long-term benefits of educating girls.	(Awan, 2016; Iqbal et al., 2023; Tajammal et al., 2023)
Teacher-Community Engagement for Girls' Education	Community and parental involvement	Teachers engage parents and communities through meetings, awareness campaigns, and collaboration with community leaders to promote the importance of girls' education.	Community engagement and parental involvement are pivotal for increasing enrollment and retention. Teachers work to shift traditional views by emphasizing the value of educating girls.	(Ali, 2022; Awan, 2016; N. Purewal & N. Hashmi, 2015)
Support Programs for Girls' Education	Special programs to support girls	Mentorship programs, workshops, and community outreach help girls navigate cultural hurdles and stay in school.	Programmes such as mentorship and parent workshops directly address cultural barriers, helping girls overcome challenges and stay in school.	(Ali, 2022; Awan, 2016; Ullah et al., 2018)
Role of Female Faculty Representation	Impact of female faculty on girls' participation	Female teachers act as role models, encouraging girls to stay in school by demonstrating career possibilities beyond traditional roles.	Having female school teachers increases girls' comfort level and is an important motivator, demonstrating that women can succeed in education and careers.	(Awan, 2016; Fatima et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2019)
Policies and Initiatives for Increasing Enrollment	Policy recommendations for better retention	To reduce cultural and economic barriers, policymakers should introduce financial support, more female-only schools, and free school supplies.	Policy reforms should focus on financial incentives and infrastructure changes, like female-only schools and free school supplies, to ease the burden on families and reduce resistance.	(Hashmi et al., 2008; Sattar et al., 2012; Tajammal et al., 2023)

6 Conclusion & Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study, grounded in the direct perspectives of secondary school teachers, offer a valuable and original framework for understanding the cultural barriers limiting girls' secondary education in rural Punjab. Unlike many broad, theoretical accounts, this research reveals the nuanced, lived realities teachers observe daily—bringing clarity and depth to how cultural norms, family dynamics, and social expectations actively shape teachers' perspectives on girls' educational journeys.

Teachers' accounts illustrate that girls' household responsibilities are not just background factors but central obstacles that consume their time and limit school participation. This practical insight deepens our understanding by showing how cultural expectations are continuously enacted within families, making education a secondary priority. Furthermore, teachers' recognition of the intertwined effects of economic hardship and traditional gender roles highlights how resource allocation is gender-biased at the family level, a complex interaction often overlooked in wider studies. The study also exposes the persistent social pressures faced by teachers as they navigate community resistance to teachers' perspectives on girls' education, especially as girls approach marriageable age. Teachers emerge not only as observers but as active agents striving to counter these pressures through engagement, mentorship, and the promotion of female role models within schools. These concrete strategies enrich existing theoretical frameworks by demonstrating how cultural performances can be challenged and transformed from within the educational environment.

By centering teachers' voices, this research provides a powerful, context-specific lens that captures the everyday cultural negotiations shaping girls' access to education. This approach shifts the focus from abstract barriers to the tangible realities teachers confront and address, making the findings highly relevant for policy and practice. Ultimately, the study underlines the critical role of teachers as cultural mediators and change-makers who hold the potential to bridge gaps between traditional norms and educational aspirations. The comprehensive framework derived from their experiences offers actionable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to dismantle cultural obstacles and promote gender equity in education. Supporting teachers through culturally sensitive policies, community partnerships, and resource allocation will be essential to sustaining progress and ensuring that girls in Punjab can fully realize their right to education.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Community-Wide Awareness and Cultural Change

Community-wide awareness programs should be initiated to address the cultural obstacles that prevent girls from obtaining an education. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that these programs should involve key stakeholders such as community leaders, religious figures, and local influencers who can demonstrate the long-term benefits of female education. Teachers think that highlighting successful female role models from the community can motivate girls and families to invest in education. They believe that community engagement can break down the traditional gender norms that restrict girls' access to education.

2. Financial Incentives and Support for Families

The government, in partnership with NGOs, should provide financial incentives, including scholarships, stipends, and free school supplies, to alleviate the economic burden on families. Teachers' perspectives indicate that these financial supports should cover essential costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation, enabling girls from low-income households to access education. Teachers think that such financial support is crucial in ensuring that girls can continue their education without being held back by financial pressures at home.

3. Expansion of Female-Only Schools and Safe Educational Spaces

Additional schools designed for female students in rural areas should be formed because they help resolve cultural apprehensions against mixing genders in education. Teachers' perspectives highlight that female-only schools create learning environments that ensure the safety of girls who face no risk of social stigma or harassment. Teachers believe that schools that create protected areas, where girls receive counseling and mentorship, act as essential tools for retaining students who wish to achieve their academic objectives. Teachers think that these safe spaces provide the necessary support for girls to overcome societal pressures and stay in school.

4. Parental Education and Engagement Programs

Parents need active involvement in their daughters' educational journey to boost both enrollment rates and student attendance. Teachers' perspectives stress that schools and non-profit organizations should develop programs for girls' education that provide parents with information focused on financial opportunities, along with the societal and healthcare benefits of schooling. Teachers think these programs should aim to confront gender stereotypes and demonstrate how education can create significant changes for girls. They believe parental involvement is crucial for ensuring long-term educational success for girls.

5. Teacher Training and Mentorship Initiatives

Teachers require instruction about overcoming cultural classroom barriers while advocating for gender equality. Teachers' perspectives suggest that mentorship programs, which pair older female students with younger ones, create supportive academic spaces that help girls stay in school and guide them through academic challenges. Teachers believe that mentorship can be a powerful tool for providing encouragement and support to girls, ensuring they feel motivated and supported throughout their educational journey.

6. Government Policies Supporting Gender Equality in Education

To promote gender equality through education, the government must create financial aid programs and improve girls' educational access. Teachers' perspectives emphasize that educational support for girls should include unlimited free tuition, transportation costs coverage, and additional educational settings with female-only participation. Teachers think that national campaigns should initiate efforts to educate people about the significance of teaching girls while fighting societal influences meant to stop them from attending school. They argue that government action is vital to ensuring girls' equal access to education.

7. Strengthening the Role of Female Faculty

The presence of more female teachers at rural schools produces substantial effects on girls' enrollment in school. Teachers' perspectives in this study highlight that female educators are indispensable role models who provide academic guidance and emotional support. Teachers believe that when female educators maintain their presence in classrooms, they help dismantle cultural barriers that limit women's development while encouraging girls to continue their educational journeys.

8. Addressing Societal Pressure and Gender Norms

Society needs continuous effort across every sector to combat sexual stereotypes and community pressures. Teachers' perspectives emphasize that schools must join community leaders, NGOs, and government bodies to reshape societal views about marriage and family roles. Teachers think that such efforts will create an environment where girls can pursue their educational objectives without experiencing discrimination. They believe a collective approach is essential to creating lasting change in gender norms.

6.3 Limitations and Contributions

Although several important restrictions were observed, this research unveils important cultural obstacles to education for women in rural Punjab. Teachers' perspectives acknowledge that semi-structured interviews served as the study's research method, yet they could introduce participant biases that limit the thorough comprehension of societal perspectives on female education. The research examined rural locations in Punjab, but the investigators acknowledged that the identified results might not apply consistently to the urban Pakistan population. Teachers suggest that further research must examine the ways these obstacles shape and appear in various geographic locations and native groups as a method to achieve a complete understanding.

Research between Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and rural Punjab gender role social construction adds valuable knowledge to current academic research. The study proposes applied solutions that guide politicians and teaching professionals to challenge social obstacles preventing girls from receiving an education. Implementing community-related commitments, financial backing, and gender-sensitive instructional approaches creates prospects for rural Punjab girls to receive better education while boosting their region's long-term social and economic growth potential. Teachers think that supporting teachers through culturally sensitive policies, community partnerships, and resource allocation will be essential to sustaining progress and ensuring that girls in Punjab can fully realize their right to education.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Letter of Consent for Participating in Research

Dear

My name is Sidra Mukhtar, and I am conducting a research study as part of my thesis for the Faculty of Education, Department of Education and Special Education at University of Gothenburg. This study aims to explore the barriers and challenges faced by female students in accessing secondary education in rural Punjab, Pakistan, focusing on cultural, societal, and familial influences.

As part of this research, I would like to conduct an in-depth interview with you to gain insights into your experiences and perceptions regarding the cultural barriers that affect girls' access to secondary education in your community. The interview will be conducted via Zoom and will be recorded for transcription and analysis.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I will ensure that all information shared during the interview remains confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any explanation or consequence. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and all identifying information will be removed from the transcripts.

I will provide you with a copy of the interview transcript, and you may suggest any changes or clarifications to ensure that your views are accurately represented and that your identity is fully protected.

Please find the attached consent form for your review and signature. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at any time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Sidra Mukhtar

University of Gothenburg

Faculty of Education, Department of Education and Special Education

8.2 Appendix 2: Consent Form for Participating in Research

Dissertation Title: Teachers' Views of Cultural Factors Impacting Secondary Education for Girls in Punjab, Pakistan.

Researcher: Sidra Mukhtar

Contact Information: -----

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, and I can refuse to answer any individual questions without providing reasons.
- I understand that I can withdraw my consent for the use of my interview data within two weeks of the interview and request for it to be deleted.
- I understand the purpose and nature of the study, and I have had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to the researcher.
- I agree to have the interviews recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis.
- I understand that I will receive a copy of the interview transcript and have the right to suggest corrections or clarifications.
- I understand that any identifying information will be removed from the report to ensure confidentiality.
- I understand that I have the right to access the final report of the research.

Participant's Name:

Participant's Contact Information:

Date:

8.3 Appendix 3: Semi- Structured Interview Questions

Below are the semi-structured interview questions designed to gather qualitative data:

Research Question 1: How do cultural factors influence female students' access to and engagement with secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?

1. What are the main cultural barriers that prevent girls from attending secondary school in Punjab?
2. How does societal perception about female education impact school attendance and participation?
3. In what ways do religious or traditional beliefs affect girls' access to education?
4. How do community attitudes toward female education influence girls' motivation to continue secondary education?
5. Have you witnessed cases where cultural expectations have directly caused school dropout among female students?

Research Question 2a: How do traditional gender roles impact girls' access to secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?

6. What are the expected roles of girls in your community, and how do these roles affect their ability to continue education?
7. How does household work or domestic responsibilities impact a girl's attendance at school?
8. Do parents or guardians in your community prioritize boys' education over girls'? If so, why?
9. How does early marriage or pressure to marry at a young age influence girls' education?

Research Question 2b: How do family dynamics influence girls' participation in secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?

10. What role do parents' education levels play in their decision to send their daughters to school?
11. How does family financial status affect a girl's ability to attend secondary school?
12. Do siblings' education status influence whether a girl continues her education?
13. How do family members, including grandparents or extended relatives, impact educational decisions for girls?
14. Have you encountered families who actively support or oppose girls' secondary education? What were their reasons?

Research Question 3: How do teachers overcome cultural hurdles, and what are some effective strategies for increasing girls' secondary education in Punjab, Pakistan?

15. What challenges do teachers face in ensuring female students' participation in secondary school?
16. How do teachers engage with families and communities to encourage girls' education?
17. Have you implemented any special programs or strategies to support girls in overcoming cultural barriers to education?
18. What role does female faculty representation play in encouraging girls to attend and stay in school?
19. What policies or initiatives do you think should be introduced to increase girls' enrolment and retention in secondary education?