

Parental Attitude towards Girls' Higher Education: A mixed Methods Approach

Abstract

The research was conducted to investigate the attitude of parents towards girls' higher education in the District Chakwal by employing mixed-methods approach of research. The main objective of the study was to explore the significance of girls' education according to their parents. Population of the study was comprised of parents (both males and females) belonging to district Chakwal. The sample for quantitative part of the study comprised of parents (N=165), whereas for the collection of qualitative data, parents (n=15) were taken as study sample, who were also part of the quantitative study. Locally developed questionnaires (quantitative and qualitative) were used as research tools. The two sets of data were collected and analyzed concurrently. The cumulative results of both parts of the study indicate that parents have a very supportive attitude towards higher education of their daughters, with few discrepancies due to individual differences. Majority of the parents considered higher education as a significant indicator of better career for their daughters.

INTRODUCTION

Gender discrepancy has remained a vague issue from decades in Pakistan. This disparity exists in the educational contents also. If it is discussed in terms of higher education, the disparity and discrimination is much higher than other levels of education likewise primary and secondary education. In this regard Parents' attitude captures a very critical place in the educational matters of girls.

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Education is the basic human right of every individual irrespective of sex, race or region. Investment in human capital development while ignoring the women, half of world's population, is not a feasible approach. Education is one of the most important fields where women have been deprived traditionally (Hashmi, Zafar, & Ali, 2010).

Education is considered as a significant instrument of change having strong correlation with the overall economic and social advancement of the country (Siddiqui, 2007). In Pakistan, impartial access to higher education has always been remained a challenge. Yet remarkable achievements have been documented with increased access to higher education that is rising from 2.2% of 18-23 year age group in 2002 to over 4.7% in 2008 but still it remained lower comparatively from India (7%) and Malaysia (12%) (GoP, 2009-a). Pakistan's educational statistics 2007-2008 revealed that total participation rate at higher education is 741, 092 having male enrollment rate at 54 % and female enrollment rate 46% (Iqbal,2011).

Higher level of women education usually leads to higher level of income source for women (Stromquist, 2001). In this way if every women is educated she will encounter to employment field and her many problems could be solved (Sharma, 2005).

Parental Role for their Daughter's Education

Parental attitude towards the education of their children is determined when a child is enrolled in the school or is not enrolled (Weir, 2007). Parent's role is very significant in the education of their children as they make decisions that affect the future of their children (Haque, 2002). Ali and Buzdar (2011) argued that parents are aware about the significance of their daughters' education but resources restrict them to engage their daughters in education. However he stated that generally parents want to educate their daughters in rural areas.

Parents often not see education as a human right but they take it as their voluntary authority to make decision to give education to their daughters or not and because of this parental biased attitude in spite of several efforts of the government and other organizations, women participation in education is still far away from that of males in Pakistan (Qureshi, 2003-04). Ali, Hassan, Hussain, Mukhtar, and Zakaria, (2003) revealed the result of their study that majority of parents have a positive attitude

toward their daughters' education in rural areas of Pakistan. However there are some administrative obstacles which confine parents to oblige their daughters to not get education.

Moreover family background, education of mothers and fathers also play an important role to make decision related to their child's education and it is more significant in education of girls (Weir, 2007). However, Ali and Buzdar (2011) stated in their study that in rural areas of Pakistan parents prefer to educate their sons rather than daughters. Thus the condition of women education in rural areas is quite unsatisfactory. Although education for the girls in rural areas has been important issue now and then, however practically very little has been done to date.

Although gender discrimination could be seen in women education, as structure and practices both ensure that boys and girls experience different and consequently girls acquire the unequal educational opportunities (Sharma, 2005). Lloyd, Mete, and Sathar (2005) stated that parental perceptions play a vital role as they make decisions of their child's education. In rural areas there is a weak parental demand for girls education and they are more tended to accept status quo. There is a considerable evidence in this relation as parent's education together with other family distinctiveness such as family income, parent's occupation, and dwelling locality, predict their attitude towards their children's education (Eccles, 2005).

Keeping in view the above mentioned situation analysis, it can be concluded that that women education is a key for national prosperity all over the world and especially, higher education of the girls contributes significantly in the development process of the country. It is obvious that gender biasness exists in education but even though women educational attainments are slowly and gradually upgrading. Attitude and perceptions of rural parents regarding their daughters' education varies in different part of the world as culture, traditional attitude, religion, family background and financial constraints matter for the decisions they make. Therefore, the present study is designed to conduct a thorough investigation regarding attitude of parents from a rural area of Pakistan towards girls' higher education. Overall, this study would be helpful to identify issues related to this phenomenon particularly related to higher education system of a developing country like Pakistan where the majority of the population is still residing in rural areas and poverty and illiteracy are seen as a big obstacle on the way of girls' higher education.

Research Hypothesis

In the light of the above mentioned literature, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Parents' attitude towards girls' higher education is supportive.

Method

The study was descriptive in nature, and mixed method approach is used for the data collection. The “concurrent nested strategy” of data collection was employed in the study (Creswell, 2003, p.218). In order to collect primary data, two types of questionnaires were used. For the collection of quantitative data, a 5-point Likert scale was used, where as the qualitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview protocol. The research tools deals with following categories related to girls' higher education, i.e. importance of women education, gender specifications, financial resources, cultural and family traditional patterns, religious values and women education and development. The interview protocol was used to get more elaborative responses particularly related to the issue.

The researcher took this research as a case study, so the population of the whole study comprised of parents (both males and females) of district Chakwal. By employing purposive sampling technique, the study sample for quantitative part, was comprised of 165 parents of the girls of district Chakwal. Among this sample, 15 parents were selected randomly as respondents of the qualitative part of the study. In order to determine the content validity of the research tool, three different experts' opinions were taken on its validity. The feedback received from experts had enabled the researcher to improve test items for pilot run. In order to ensure the internal consistency of the quantitative part of the research tool, a pilot study was conducted and results of the analysis showed 0.86 Alpha reliability.

Data Analysis

Following the collection of complete data, the quantitative analysis techniques were employed to quantitative part in order “to determine the general trends in the data” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p.130). For the qualitative part, thematic analysis was being done by using “*Grounded Theory Approach*” (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Table 1: Importance of Women education

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. To get all levels of education is basic right of every child irrespective of gender.	58%	40%	0%	2%	0%
2. Education is important for girls.	54%	46%	0%	0%	0%
3. Girls should get higher education.	36%	62%	0%	2%	0%
4. Girls' should have free choice to decide for their education	10%	62%	2%	16%	10%
5. Girls can be sent out of station for higher education	20%	54%	6%	12%	8%
Average%	36%	52%	2%	6%	4%

The results of table 1 regarding importance of women education shows that 36% strongly agreed and 52% agreed that education is important for girls and to obtain all levels of education is their basic right and they allow their daughters to go and get education even at distant places. But meanwhile 6% disagreed and 4% are strongly disagreed with the importance of girls' education. Overall majority of respondents are aware with the importance of girls' education. So the results of table 1 indicated that parents who realize the importance of girls' education are in large proportion.

Table 2: Gender Specifications

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The education for the girls has equal importance as boys	40%	46%	2%	12%	0%
2. Girls are provided same opportunities as boys to get higher education	26%	48%	2%	20%	4%
3. You have same expectations for your son and daughter's education	36%	48%	4%	6%	6%
4. Your daughter has freedom to get education in co-educational institutions	12%	40%	14%	16%	18%
5. Girl should contribute more to the household work and boys in education	26%	16%	8%	44%	6%

Reverse scoring of the above statement	5	4	3	2	1
Average %	24%	46%	6%	14%	10%

Results of the table 5 regarding gender specifications shows that 24% strongly agreed and 46% agreed with the statements that gender based differences do not matter in the educational matters of their daughters. Girls and boys are provided equal opportunities to get education. Girls like the boys have a right to independently decide about their education. There are only 6% responses are uncertain. Results also indicated that there are 14% responses disagreed and 10% are strongly disagreed with the statements. These people believe in some kind of discrepancy in girls and boys education. Yet the majority of respondents does not believe in any discrimination in the education of their daughters and give equal importance to their daughters' education.

Table 3: Financial Resources

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Your financial status allows you to spend on your daughter's higher education	24%	54%	8%	14%	0%
2. Spending in girls' higher education has many positive effects on family's Economic status	22%	52%	14%	12%	0%
3. Investment of financial resources on girl's higher education upgrades their social status	34%	58%	4%	4%	0%
4. Money is equally spent on your children education irrespective of gender	24%	32%	18%	22%	4%
5. Insufficient family income is obstacle in girl's education	48%	44%	6%	2%	0%
Average%	30%	48%	10%	11%	1%

Results of the table 3 regarding financial resources revealed that 30% strongly agreed and 48% agreed with the statements. This shows that they invest in the education of their daughters so it can bring positive changes in their life and it can upgrade their social and Economic status. While there are 10% responses uncertain and respondents are not able to respond to any decisional statement. Meanwhile

11% responses are in disagreeing and only 1% is in strongly disagree with the statements. Table 3 further shows that insufficient family income is also a major obstacle in the higher education of their daughters. However, majority of respondents are those who willingly invest in their daughters' education for their prosperous life.

Table 4: Cultural and Family Traditional Patterns

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Your culture and traditions give freedom to girls to get higher education	16%	36%	18%	30%	0%
2. Educated girls follow their family traditions	40%	46%	4%	10%	0%
3. Your family traditions are in favor of girls' education	34%	38%	12%	12%	4%
4. Your family gives importance to girl's education	42%	38%	0%	20%	0%
Average %	33%	40%	8%	18%	1%

Results of table 4 related to cultural and family traditional pattern showed that 33% strongly agreed and 40% agreed with the statements. Thus they believe that their culture, family and family traditions are in support of girls' education. There are 8% responses uncertain and 18% disagreed while only 1% strongly disagreed with the statements of the table. Whereas dominance is of those respondents whose family, culture and traditions support girl's higher education.

Table 5: Religious Values

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Islam allows girls to get higher education	54%	42%	0%	2%	2%
2. Higher education keeps girls aware with Islamic values	44%	44%	6%	6%	0%
3. Only religious education is enough for girls to survive in the society	6%	12%	10%	60%	12%
Reverse scoring of the above statement	1	2	3	4	5
Average %	36%	47%	5%	6%	6%

Table 5 results' regarding religious values revealed that there are 36% responses strongly agreed and 47% agreed with the statements of the table. This means that parents consider this reality that Islam highly support women's all levels of education and there for they take their daughter's education as religious obligation. There are only 5% responses which are uncertain to the statements while 6% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed.

Table 6: Women Education and Development

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Girl's higher education upgrades their value in match making	40%	50%	4%	2%	4%
2. Highly educated girls can contribute constructively outside home, if needed	26%	26%	0%	8%	0%
Average %	33%	58%	2%	5%	2%

Table 6 illustrated women education and development showed that 33% responses strongly agreed and 58% agreed with the statements and only 2% are uncertain. Moreover, 5% responses disagreed and only 2% strongly disagreed with the statements of this table. As these respondents do not agree that higher education can increase their daughters' value in any way and it cannot be utilized further when needed. However, the respondents who agree with the statements are great in number.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Part of the Study

Open ended questions were asked by researcher in order to get a clearer picture of the situation. There were three open-ended questions asked from the parents. Several themes emerged during the thematic analysis. These themes were then grouped together into three main categories as follows.

Higher Education as Change agent in Women Life

Respondents conferred about the changes that higher education can bring in their daughters' life to some extent alike with little variation. The one point that was common in all respondents' responses was that they are absolutely agreed that higher education brings changes in their daughters' life.

Economic Stability

The respondents of the study expect that higher education will Economically empower their daughters. They can work in the field if they are needed and play a role of bread winner for the family as well. As one of the respondent Mr. T.H said

Higher education is very significant for their daughters as it will upgrade their Economic status by escalating their earning potential.

One more respondent Mrs N.K stated

I have enrolled my daughter in higher education so it will bring Economic independence in her life. So the Economic difficulties I have faced in my life she would not face.

Social adjustments

However, the respondents were of the view that as the world has been changed and is still in the changing process, circumstances which are prevailing in today's life may not exist in day after. Therefore, higher education must bring changes in their daughters' life that enables them to struggle with the challenging situation of the life in society. Mr. A.A said in this regard

Higher education should bring changes in my daughter which enables her to adjust in the social life.

Similar point of view was expressed by Mrs. M.A as

Higher education must bring such kind of changes which are socially acceptable.

Responsibilities of family

The respondents stated that higher education enables their daughters to be a good daughter-in-law, an excellent wife, a careful daughter and a loving mother in their later life. They have an attitude about higher education for their daughters that will bring and develop qualities of a true girl who is loyal to her parents, husband and parents-in-law. This is a common thinking which can be observed in everyday life by girls. Mr. A.R responded that

The primarily task of a woman is to look after her family

therefore higher education must inculcate sense of responsibilities of their duties in them.

One more respondent Mrs T.Z explained

Family nourishment is the department of women in social life so after getting education they must have qualities of a good housekeeper.

Suitable education for girls

Parents expressed that a balanced kind of education must be given to the girls that can bring moral, social and Economic developments in their life.

Moral Values

The respondents were of the view that girls must be provided higher education that makes them a good human being. They are in favor of education for girls which is according to the prescribed rules of propriety. It must bring the qualities of good women and respectable member of the society as well in them. One other respondent Mrs U.K stated

I expect that after getting higher education my daughter must be more civilized in her manners

At the same time, Mrs. I.C complained

Modern Education is not fulfilling the criteria of morality. Higher education is to be of kind which upgrades moral status of girls along with economic status.

Religious awareness

Respondents said that girls should be provided only religious education as religious education keeps them aware with their roles and responsibilities prescribed by God the Almighty. Mr. G.F believed

Our religion is a complete code of life so girls are not needed to provide any other kind of education.

Respondents said that girls must only be given Quran and Sunnah's education so they could perform their religious duties more devotedly as their first responsibility is to serve God. Mr. & Ms A.N expressed in this regard

Only religious education is enough for girls.

The respondents stated that they do not think that higher education is necessary for girls and therefore just provide them religious education and teach them religious subjects related to Fiqqa and Sunnah. In very contradiction to this the respondents said that girls must get all kind of education that could be scientific, technological, religious and art related education through this they could understand their religion more cohesively. Mr. S.H said

Balanced kind of education is necessary for girls which can be integrated with religious and scientific knowledge.

Conventional Role

Respondents said that girls should be given education different from boys as they have to perform different roles from that of boys. So education for girls must be according to their own roles and responsibilities. Mrs A.B stated in this regard

Girls and boys should be provided different education as they have to perform different roles and responsibilities in everyday life.

Respondents expected that higher education must enable their daughters to perform their traditional roles more honestly it should empower them morally, socially and Economicly so they can play a role of bread winner for the family as well. Mr Q.B stated

Girls' should be given education which enables them to work for the earning if they so need

Economic Empowerment

The respondents expressed that higher education for the girls must be job oriented and it must be of that type which gives them some kind of Economic gains. Mr. and Mrs. N.K said

Present's Economic crises demand that job oriented education must be provided to girls so they can earn for their family.

Similarly, Mrs T.Z expressed

Higher education should enable them to get a suitable job so they can spend from what they leave

The role parents desire to contribute for their daughters' education

Respondents were aware about their roles and responsibilities as parents for their daughters' education. There was variation in the responses of the participants as everyone had different experiences and preferences.

Role model

The respondents opined that they want to be a role model for their daughters' education and will do everything for their education. These people have a very distinct consideration for the education of their daughters. One of the respondents Mr. A.A said

I am employed in a government department and I am still a student with the age of 54 years. I have four daughters and I want to be a role model for my daughters so they can also engage themselves in education with best of their capabilities.

Constructive role

The respondents who said that even they were illiterate but they will do every possible effort for their daughters' education and will provide them education in the best institutes for higher education. The respondents expressed that higher education is the demand of today's complex world so they desire to contribute constructive role through financial and moral support for their daughters' education. Mr. and Mrs. N.K were of the view

I want to contribute a very constructive role for the education of my daughter as education is very much important for girls in order to survive in the society.

Similarly Mrs M.A said

Education of girls has become essential and in this regard I will take every positive step to highly educate my daughter.

One of the respondents Mrs A.B expressed her views

My husband has passed away. I have acquired education after my husband's death so that I could educate my three daughters and now I am a primary teacher in a government school and is trying to educate my daughters at best institutions so that in the future they would not face problems which I had faced in my life.

The respondents said that they will carry out every positive measure for which they have pace, for their daughters' education and they are ready to take every kind of risk in order to highly educate their daughters.

Supporter in case of religious education

Yet few of the parents' respondents revealed that they did not consider that higher education is acceptable for their daughters so they did not support for it in any way. However they will encourage their daughters to get only religious education and will not support them to get any other form of education that is contradicting to their religious ideology. They think that higher education keep their daughters away from their religion. One of the respondents Mr. S.H said

Education which is provided in colleges and universities is keeping girls away from Islamic principles of life.

Similarly Mr. T.H expressed

I support education for my daughter but only religious education.

Financial constraints

Respondents revealed that they are willing to play constructive role for the education of their daughters but financial constraints restrict them. They told that they have not enough money to spend it on the education of their daughters. Respondents expressed their views that although they want to contribute a very positive role for their daughter's education, less number of higher educational institutions in their area is the obstacle to afford their daughters' higher education. Moreover, transportation problems are there and institute of higher education are out of station in distant cities. This all force them not to enroll their daughters for higher education. One of the respondents Mr. A.R stated in this regard

We are willing to highly educate our daughters but higher education institutions are out of stations and we cannot afford expenses of these institutions.

Results and Discussions

The qualitative findings of the parents' perceptions regarding their attitude towards higher education of their daughters were integrated with the quantitative results of the study.

The quantitative data described overall significant positive attitude of parents towards higher education of their daughters. Whereas, the qualitative findings do support the quantitative results to a large extent, at the same time, a small number of discrepancies have also been emerged from both types of data due to individual differences among the respondents. They expressed unsatisfactory remarks in response to the queries related to their attitude towards higher education of their daughters. They believe only religious education is enough for girls. The overall results of the study revealed that majority of the parents agreed that it is the right of their daughters to get higher education.

The cumulative findings illustrate that parents do not make any difference between girls and boys by declaring that it is basic right of every child irrespective of gender to get all levels of education. They support them to get higher education and educational achievements of girls are acknowledged by their parents. Girls can be sent out of station to urban areas for higher education. The higher education for the girls of the rural areas is not considered glass ceiling any longer. These transformations could be seen as the changing attitude of the people for the girls' education, a change that is positive. Same results were revealed by Ali and Buzdar (2011) in their study as they indicated that parents had a positive attitude for their daughters' education.

The important findings obtained from the study were that parents understood significance of girls' education and there was not any significant discrimination made on the basis of gender in the education of the girls. The results of the study also showed that parents happily bore the expenditures of the girls' education and they were given enough money to fulfill their educational needs. Family traditions and culture was also supportive for the girls' education and parents take their daughters' education as religious obligation as they consider that Islam highly support girls' education at all levels. The findings of the study also indicated that parents are highly concerned about women education and development as they think that higher education upgrades their daughter's social, Economic and moral status. Parents wanted to play an important role for their daughter's education through moral and financial support. They also believed that higher education brings some positive and constructive changes in their daughters' life. Thus results indicate that parents' attitude is very supportive for girls' higher education.

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