



## Reversing Educational Migration: A Strategic Study of Establishing High-Quality Schooling in Small-Town, District Pakpattan, Punjab Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

*Educational Migration from small town settings to metropolitan cities is a recurrent process in most developing nations due to the belief of academic excellence and future prospects. This paper investigates the strategic methods of reversing the educational migration process by improving the quality of the schooling in the small-town setting with the information collected from in The Pakpattan Grammar School in District Pakpattan, Pakistan. The total number of population including students, parents and teachers were 110 (N = 110) The research design is based on mixed method by using Human Capital Theory and Educational Quality Frameworks. The study collected the perception of students and other stakeholders to the quality of schooling, academic performance and the institutional strategies. Findings have shown that teacher specific development, resource development and community participation are key strategies that enhance the quality of schooling and student retention. The paper has ended by providing the practical policy implications on educational planners, school administrators, and government agencies.*

**Keywords:** Educational Migration; Small-Town Schooling; School Quality; Strategic Interventions; Pakistan.

### Introduction

Educational migration refers to the process of moving the students of rural areas and small towns to the urban areas in search of better education which has become a critical developmental issue in most of the developing nations. This is an indicator of structural differences in education access, infrastructure, teacher quality and academic opportunities. Instead of an entirely individual decision, educational migration is usually a logical reaction to the systemic inequalities of urban and rural education systems (UNESCO, 2023). In unequally resource endowed countries like Pakistan, the gaps in educational provision have only enhanced the rural-urban migration trends leading to not only drainage of human capital in the marginal areas but also strain on the educational centres in urban areas.

The current statistics according to the Pakistan Education Statistics Report (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT, 2023) shows that in rural schools, there is still a lack of qualified teachers, scarce laboratory and library facilities, and indicators of poorer academic performance, in comparison with their urban counterparts. Similarly, the Global Education Monitoring Report highlights the fact that educational disparities inside nations are also a major contributor to migration decisions, especially when parents view urban education to be the best in their academic quality and future career growth (UNESCO, 2023). The World Bank (2022) also highlights that the lack of an equal investment into secondary education adds to the internal migration flows since the families are in search of the environments that will yield a greater profit on the invested education level.

This dynamic is extremely clear in such small towns like Pakpattan in the Pakistani context. Although the enrollment rates in the country have been improving, the issues of the quality of instruction, extracurricular activities, and technological access are still present in most non-urban schools (ASER Pakistan, 2023). This leads to families frequently considering moving or commuting to the cities close to their home to find what they believe are superior educational prospects of their children. Although, in a way, this strategy can serve the interests of individual households, it reinforces the disparities on the regional level and hampers the opportunities to develop communities in small towns, destabilizing local educational ecosystems.

The solution to the problem of educational migration is thus to adopt a strategic approach to change the reactive mobility to a proactive quality improvement in the schooling system of small towns. Enhancing institutional functioning, teacher professional growth, infrastructure modernization, and community interest are all established as the keystones of sustainable educational reform (OECD, 2022). Quality local school education does not only retain students but also it also leads to balanced regional development through the development of human capital within the community.

### **Literature Review**

Migration of education has also been formulated as structural effect of inequality between rural and urban education. Instructions (UNESCO, 2023), infrastructure (UNESCO, 2023), academic performance, and long-term opportunity's structure are some of the differences that families rely on to make schooling decisions (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2022). In developing countries like Pakistan, the schools in rural and small towns are often deficient in quality subject experts, lab and library services, and other technology. According to the national education statistics, the rural secondary schools have lower transition rates and worse performance indicators to higher education than the urban ones (MoFEPT, 2023). This is a source of serious disparities that affect the decision making in a household.

According to the Annual status of Education Report (ASER Pakistan, 2023), rural and urban students continue to have varying levels of achievement with gaps in both English and maths proficiency frequently between 15-20% at both the middle and secondary levels of education. These gaps serve to strengthen perceptions of urban schools as being academically prepared and having a better chance to get to university and to be employed. The World Bank (2022) estimates the impact of education-related factors on internal youth mobility at the global level almost to one-third of the developing countries. In addition to infrastructure and instructional shortages, socio-psychological variables, such as the prestige of institutions, peer networks, and perceive the opportunity routes to elite universities, are also migration pull factors (OECD, 2022).

The studies on school effectiveness indicate that in small-town situations the educational quality can be enhanced to significantly reduce the outward migration. It is considered that educational quality is a multidimensional concept that involves the inputs (teacher qualifications, facilities, funding), processes (instructional practices, leadership effectiveness, school climate), and outputs (academic achievement, retention rates) (UNESCO, 2015). It has been empirically shown that teacher effectiveness by its own can be used to explain up to 30% of the student achievement variation, with effective school leadership explaining about 25% of the variation that occurs at the school level in terms of learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020; OECD, 2022). Examples of such strategic interventions as continuous professional development, well-organized mentoring protocols, and performance feedback have been linked to quantifiable increases in educational achievements and student satisfaction.

Moreover, digital infrastructure and extra curricular programming have been found to have substantial effects in student retention. In similar developing experiences, research suggests that

an all-inclusive quality enhancement program may decrease the student migration intentions by about 20-35 percent in the event that both academics and institutional plausibility are augmented at schools (World Bank, 2022). The involvement of the community is also one of the key activities; schools with healthy parent-teacher relationship and open system of governance demonstrate greater levels of trust, as well as better retention rates (UNESCO, 2023). This is a significant implication of these findings, showing how quality improvement is not necessarily resource-dependent but needs to occur through coordinated leadership, reform of governance, and involving the stakeholders.

This study is based on the theoretical framework of the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) which empowers the concept of education as an investment that has economic and social payouts. In this view, families compare the anticipated returns in schooling choices. Migration is a logical economic choice where urban institutions are seen to offer a better quality of education and hence greater future economic payoff. It is estimated globally that every additional year of high-quality secondary education can earn a person about 8-10 per cent more throughout their lifetime, which once again supports the priority of education quality that households consider significant (World Bank, 2022). As such, when the academic quality and career advancement in small-town schools are similar, the benefit-cost analysis would favor local retention.

In line with this perspective, Educational Quality Framework (UNESCO, 2015) understands schooling as a systemic process which entails interconnected dimensions of inputs, processes, outputs and long-term outcomes. Such gains have been linked to 1015 percentage point gains in the secondary completion rates in reform-oriented systems (UNESCO, 2023). Combining all these theoretical approaches, the current research formulates the conceptualization of educational migration as the solution to the perceived shortcomings in the education quality and hypothesizes that the systematic, strategical improvement of the educational inputs and processes in the small-town settings can reverse the outward mobility trends.

### **Research Questions**

There are following research questions:

1. How much significant to evaluate the quality of education in The Pakpattan Grammar School?
2. What is the relation between schooling quality and the educational migration ambitions?
3. What are the strategic interventions to enhance the quality of schooling in order to diminish migration?

### **Research Methodology**

The research design applied in this study was a mixed methods research design to bring out a holistic view of educational migration and quality of schooling in a small-town setting. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods made the triangulation of results possible and enhanced the validity of the interpretations. The quantitative segment involved structured survey questions that were given to all the enrolled from montessori to secondary students (N = 110) of The Pakpattan Grammar School. The questionnaire expressed the perceptions of the students with the quality of the schools, academic satisfaction, and migration intentions as Likert-scale items. The qualitative part was used as the supplement to the statistical analysis in terms of semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and school administrators (n = 15). Such a two-sided method was enabled to make a statistical generalization at the institutional level and also to more thoroughly study the dynamics of a particular context within the migration process. To achieve a sense of balance, stratified categorization was used to analyze the data which is properly represented across gender and grade levels. In the qualitative stage, purposive sampling was used to sample participants who

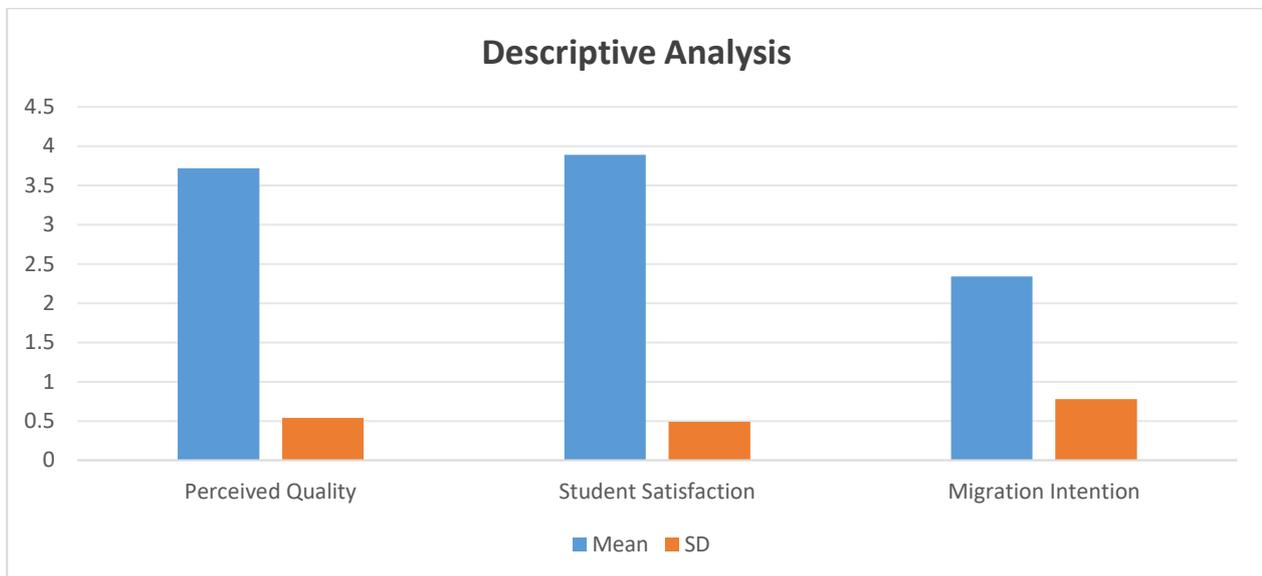
would have had pertinent information on the institutional strategies, parental decision making and student retention patterns.

**Results**

Standardized and researcher adapted data collection instruments were used to ensure that the data collected were reliable and valid. The measures that were used in the School Quality Questionnaire included effectiveness of teachers, adequacy of infrastructures, academic atmosphere, leadership support, and extracurricular opportunities. The quantitative scales of reliability and the qualitative inquiry, which was also extensive, guaranteed methodological rigor and total data coverage in accordance with the study goals.

**Table 1 Descriptive Profiles**

Variable	Mean	SD
Perceived Quality	3.72	.54
Student Satisfaction	3.89	.49
Migration Intention	2.34	.78



The descriptive statistical analysis was performed to investigate the perceptions of students in terms of the quality of the schooling, their satisfaction with their schooling, and their intention to migrate in The Pakpattan Grammar School (N = 110). The scores show that the average value of Perceived School Quality was 3.72 (SD = 0.54) in a five-point Likert, which implies that overall students have positive impressions of the academic climate and teaching efficiency and facilities of the institution. Likewise, Student Satisfaction had a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.49) which is relatively large in comparison with the perceived quality mean. This result implies that this group of students does not only recognize the institutional quality, but they also feel the high level of academic satisfaction and interest. The lower standard deviation (.49) also points to the levels of homogeneity in the level of satisfaction which means that pleasant academic experiences are widely distributed among students of different grades. on the other hand, Migration Intention, had a mean of 2.34 (SD = 0.78), indicating that it is below the midpoint of the scale on the neutral. This reduced average indicates that students have little intent to migrate in the urban schools to acquire education. Nevertheless, the standard deviation (.78) is relatively higher, which implies that the migration intentions are more varied than the perceived quality or satisfaction because most students would stay, but there is the group of students that thinks about the possibility of educational mobility.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The results of the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents and administrators resulted in the identification of three themes that are interconnected and help to understand the educational migration in the small-town setting of Pakpattan. To begin with, respondents repeatedly stressed the necessity of ongoing teacher professional growth as a precondition breaking down into the quality of schools. Educators admitted that frequent training sessions, the topic-related pedagogical development, and exposure to modern instructional techniques are very effective in creating better classroom performance and interaction among students. Parents also linked well-trained and qualified teachers with academic excellence and feel confident in schools that invest on staff development. The theme helps to emphasize the fact that instructional competence is not only viewed as an inner institutional issue but as one that contributes to the development of parental trust and student retention.

Second, the issue of resource constraints became one of the main factors of migration consideration. The interviewees pointed out limited access to digital learning as well as limited extracurricular facilities as some of the factors that contributed to comparative judgments between small towns and urban schools. Although the stakeholders were able to identify positive changes in the institution, they also admitted that the differences between facilities when compared to metropolitan schools can also make some families think of moving. These results imply that the intentions to migrate have some ground in concrete infrastructural distances that define the impressions of competitiveness and future academic preparedness.

Third, schooling decisions were also determined to be highly informed by community perceptions. Some parents stated that the social discourses equate urban education with status, improved board examination outcomes, and improved prospects of occupational roles. These perceptions lead to social pressure of pursuing urban education despite the performance of the local institutions. Administrators observed that the effective establishment of a positive institutional reputation among the population is possible only through the system of stable academic performance and publicity on the level of performance. All these qualitative perceptions suggest that a turnaround in educational migration requires both the efforts to change the structure and also the approach to changing community perceptions to build up institutional trust on the local front.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the study support the applicability of the Human Capital Theory, because families prefer local schooling through the prism of expected returns on education. Strategically, the findings suggest reversing the trend of educational migration can only follow specific interventions, such as structured and ongoing professional development courses to build capacity or competence in the field of pedagogy, the sustained investment in teaching and learning facilities like laboratories as well as digital tools in order to decrease the perceived infrastructural gaps, the active community engagement initiatives to recreate the perceived prestige of urban schooling, and the overall school climate improvement strategies that could encourage academic motivation and organizational trust. All these steps emphasize the fact that the solution to the lack of educational migration is not in the single reform, but in the comprehensive implementation of the quality improvement plan, which is capable of raising the perceived and actual value of the small-town schooling. This paper shows that the process of enhancing the quality of schooling in small-town settings, such as Pakpattan, can plan the statistics on the migration of education. With the help of targeted interventions and

collaboration with the stakeholders, small-town schools should be turned into academic excellence centers, which will minimize the push factors that push students to migrate.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The research study is restricted to one institution The Pakpattan Grammar School and therefore the findings might not be applicable to other small-town settings. Future studies can be extended with regards to the geographical area to cover various schools in various districts in order to increase the external validity and comparative analysis. Also, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal interpretation, thus longitudinal research of the change of student migration patterns over time would give greater credibility to the long-term effects of quality improvement strategies on student retention.

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