

Political and Social Challenges of Female Education in Shabozai, Loralai District, Balochistan

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Abstract

This study explores the political and social challenges affecting girls' education in Shabozai, Loralai District, Balochistan. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and elders to understand barriers and possible solutions. Findings reveal that government policies have provided limited progress; while some schools were established, they remain poorly equipped, distant, and lacking female teachers. Social and cultural traditions, particularly Pashtun traditions and honor norms, further restrict girls' schooling, with families fearing gossip and humiliation. Poverty and parental illiteracy compound these challenges, leaving many girls excluded from education. Despite these problems, respondents expressed strong aspirations for change, emphasizing the role of family support, nearby schools, transport facilities, and scholarships. The study concludes that addressing both political neglect and cultural traditions is essential for empowering girls, enabling their participation in education, and fostering inclusive development in Balochistan.

Introduction

Education is the key to progress, but in many rural areas of Pakistan, girls still face serious problems in going to school. In Shabozai, Loralai District, Balochistan, female education is affected not only by social issues like poverty, traditions, and family attitudes, but also by political challenges such as weak government policies, lack of facilities, and limited support from local leaders. These barriers make it difficult for girls to continue their studies and limit their chances for a better future. At the same time, there are opportunities to improve the situation if families, communities, and political leaders work together. This study has explored the political and social challenges of female education in Shabozai and suggest possible solutions to strengthen girls' access to schooling.

Background of the Study

Education is recognized as a basic right and a key factor for social and political development. However, in many rural parts of Pakistan, especially Balochistan, female education remains weak as compared to other provinces (Kakar, Tobwal, Bareach, & Sultan, 2016). In Shabozai, Loralai District, girls face multiple barriers that limit their access to schooling. Social challenges such as poverty, family attitudes, cultural traditions, and early marriage often discourage parents from

sending their daughters to school. At the same time, political challenges like poor government policies, lack of school facilities, and limited support from local leaders make the situation worse. These combined political and social barriers not only reduce girls' chances of completing education but also affect their future role in society and politics. Without proper schooling, women remain less empowered to participate in decision-making and community leadership. Understanding these challenges is important to suggest practical solutions that can improve female education in Shabozai and contribute to the overall development of Loralai and Balochistan.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it highlights the political and social barriers that stop girls from getting education in Shabozai, Loralai. By exploring both government policies and community traditions, the research shows how these challenges affect female students' chances to study. The findings help families, teachers, and local leaders understand the problems more clearly and think about practical solutions. It also provides useful information for policy makers to improve education facilities and support programs for girls in rural Balochistan. In the long run, better female education can lead to stronger social development and more active political participation of women in the region.

Problem Statement

In Shabozai, Loralai District, female students struggle with both social challenges such as poverty, family attitudes, traditions, and early marriage, and political challenges including weak government policies, poor school facilities, and limited support from local leaders. These combined problems reduce girls' chances of completing their education and limit their future role in society and politics. Despite efforts by families and communities, female education in Shabozai remains low, creating a gap between policy goals and ground realities. Therefore, it is important to study the political and social challenges of female education in Shabozai and suggest practical solutions to improve access and opportunities for girls.

Research Objectives

1. To examine government policies and their impact on girls' schooling in Shabozai.
2. To identify social and cultural problems that stop girls from studying in Shabozai.
3. To explore the role of political and community leaders in improving female education in Loralai District.

Research Questions

1. How do government policies affect girls' schooling in Shabozai?
2. What social and cultural problems stop girls from studying in Shabozai?
3. How can politics and community leaders help improve girls' education in Loralai?

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited in several ways. First, it focuses only on Shabozai, Loralai District, so the findings may not represent all of Balochistan or Pakistan. Second, the research uses a small sample size due to time and resource constraints, which may not capture every perspective. Third, because the study relies on interviews and discussions, some participants may hesitate to share sensitive opinions about politics or culture. Finally, the study highlights political and social challenges, but it does not deeply examine economic or global factors that may also affect female education.

Literature Review

Pakistan's rural population makes up nearly 61% of the country, with women forming almost half of this segment. In these areas, women are often deprived of basic life necessities, including

education (Hemmoon & Symaco, 2025). In Shabozai, Loralai District, female enrolment at primary and secondary levels remains low compared to national averages. This reflects both structural weaknesses in the education system and deep-rooted social barriers.

Barriers to Female Education

Girls in Shabozai face multiple challenges that restrict their access to schooling. These include gender inequality, cultural and religious constraints, and financial problems such as high school fees and related costs. Infrastructure is weak, with long distances to schools and lack of qualified teachers. Social issues such as child labor, and early marriage, further discourage girls from continuing education. Political neglect, including failure to enforce compulsory education and poor resource allocation, compounds these problems.

Dreams of Parents and Girls

Despite these barriers, most parents in Shabozai express a desire for their daughters to be highly educated and have bright futures. Parents hope for free education to reduce financial burdens, but economic hardship often prevents them from supporting girls' schooling. Girls themselves aspire to empowerment and equality, yet their dreams are limited by structural and cultural constraints.

Female Education in Balochistan

Female education in Balochistan has long been constrained by political, cultural, and social factors. Scholars argue that access, enrolment, and retention of girls in rural schools remain low due to weak governance and limited state capacity (Anwar, Kelly, & Gray, 2022). The intersection of colonial legacies, Islamic governance, and neoliberal policies has shaped education systems in ways that often disadvantage girls, particularly in rural districts like Loralai (Anwar, 2025).

Patriarchy plays a central role in restricting female education. A case study in tribal Balochistan found that patriarchal norms and family attitudes often exclude girls from schooling, reinforcing gender inequality and limiting women's empowerment (Springer Nature, 2021). These cultural barriers are compounded by poverty, early marriage, and traditional expectations, which discourage parents from investing in girls' education. Research on political awareness among Pashtoon women in Loralai shows that cultural norms, family restrictions, low literacy, and misinterpretation of religious teachings severely limit women's participation in politics (Kakar & Ghafoor, 2025).

Political challenges also remain significant. Weak government policies, poor infrastructure, and lack of accountability hinder progress. Research highlights that governmental neglect and limited political will contribute to the persistence of educational exclusion in Balochistan (Anwar, 2025). Moreover, the absence of strong local leadership and inadequate resource allocation further deepens the gap between policy goals and ground realities.

Girls' Education in Balochistan

Studies show that girls in Balochistan encounter multiple barriers, including gender inequality, lack of resources, long distances to schools, poor infrastructure, and early marriages (Springer Nature, 2021). According to recent statistics, nearly 73% of girls remain out of school, with gross enrolment rates as low as 24% (Government of Pakistan, 2023). These figures highlight the severity of educational exclusion in rural districts. Cultural beliefs and traditions further reinforce restrictions, discouraging families from sending daughters to school (Anwar, 2025).

Girls' Education in Balochistan and Loralai

Education is the foundation of social and economic development. It provides quality learning opportunities that empower individuals with knowledge, rights, and skills. **Girl education** refers to the formal learning process that ensures girls have equal access to schooling, literacy, and vocational training. In Balochistan, however, female education faces more challenges compared to other provinces, with cultural, political, and economic barriers limiting progress (Kelly, & Gray, 2022).

Girls' Education in Loralai District

In Loralai District, female literacy remains significantly lower than male literacy. Reports indicate that only 34% of girls attend school compared to 58% of boys, with female literacy at the matric level recorded at 36.8% in 2023 (Government of Pakistan, 2023). Access and distance are major factors, girls mainly attend schools if they are close to home, while distant institutions reduce interest in higher studies. Cultural opposition to co-education, early marriages, and low socio-economic status further limit opportunities (Anwar et al., 2022).

Generally, the literature shows that female education in Balochistan is shaped by a complex mix of political governance and social traditions. Addressing these challenges requires both policy reforms and community-level interventions that empower families and leaders to support girls' schooling.

Gap in the Literature

Most studies on female education in Pakistan and Balochistan discuss poverty, patriarchy, and cultural traditions while some highlight policy weaknesses at the provincial level. Yet, there is little district-level research that links both political and social challenges in rural areas like Shabozai, Loralai. The literature often ignores how local politics, community perceptions, and an integrated view of political and social factors shape girls' schooling. This gap shows the need for a localized study that examines how political decisions and social traditions jointly affect female education in Shabozai, offering insights for policymakers and community leaders to improve schooling in rural Balochistan.

Main Argument

Political decisions and social traditions jointly restrict female education in Shabozai, Loralai District, Balochistan, and addressing both together is essential to improve girls' schooling.

Human Needs Theory and Female Education

John Burton's Human Needs Theory argues that people have basic needs, such as security, identity, recognition, and participation that cannot be ignored or negotiated. Education is one of these essential needs because it provides growth, empowerment, and the ability to participate meaningfully in society. In the context of Shabozai, Loralai District, when girls are denied schooling, their basic needs remain unmet. Without education, they lack recognition as equal members of society, lose opportunities for participation in community and politics, and face insecurity in their future roles. This leads to social inequality and weak community development, as half of the population is excluded from contributing fully.

Thus, Human Needs Theory explains that the barriers to female education in Shabozai are not just policy or cultural issues, they are a denial of fundamental human needs. Addressing these needs through better policies, community support, and cultural change is essential for peace, empowerment, and sustainable development in rural Balochistan.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the political and social challenges that restrict girls' education in Shabozai. The focus is on understanding lived experiences and perceptions rather than measuring numerical data. The participants include female students, parents, teachers, and local leaders. A purposive sampling was applied to select around 15–20 respondents who could provide rich insights into the issue. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, and direct observation of schools. This allowed participants to share their views openly while ensuring that key themes such as political neglect, cultural traditions, and family attitudes were addressed. Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns of meaning (themes) within data such as interviews, or documents. It helps researchers move beyond surface descriptions to uncover deeper insights about social issues, experiences, and perceptions, identifying recurring themes such as weak governance, poverty, tribal customs, and possible solutions. This method helped to organize findings into political and social dimensions.

Data Analysis/Result

Impact of Government Policies on Girls' Schooling in Shabozai

Government policies have had a mixed impact on girls' schooling in Shabozai. Sania (17, Class 9) explained that while some politicians, such as Babat Lala, established schools that allowed girls to study closer to home, most leaders have not taken meaningful steps beyond campaign promises. Sakina (75, no education) recalled that in earlier times there were no schools at all, and even when government schools were built, they lacked facilities and proper teaching, leaving children without real opportunities. Similarly, Amina Bibi (55, no education) noted that during her youth there were no schools, and although schools exist now, their condition remains poor and they lack female teachers. Naseeb Bibi (65, middle school) added that government schools are often far away, making access difficult, and she emphasized the need for more schools and qualified female teachers. Muskan Khairullah (16, matric) highlighted that only one high school serves 10–11 neighborhoods, which makes commuting nearly impossible for many girls, showing that government policies have not adequately addressed accessibility. Former Tehsil Nazim and tribal leader Malak Noorullah Shabozai emphasized that *“the government should provide accommodations and transport to female students for better education in Shabozai”* (Noorullah, 2026).

Social and Cultural Problems Preventing Girls from Studying in Shabozai

Social and cultural problems also play a major role in stopping girls from studying in Shabozai. Sania pointed out that strict Pashtun traditions discourage girls' education, with many families believing schooling is only suitable for boys, even though Islam does not forbid it. Sakina emphasized that tribal customs and honor culture prevent parents from sending daughters to school, as they fear gossip and dishonor. Amina Bibi explained that the distance to schools and poverty are major obstacles, as families refuse to send girls far away. Kainat and Naseeb Bibi observed that poverty and parental illiteracy limit opportunities, with some parents encouraging education but others discouraging it due to cultural beliefs. Muskan Khairullah described how traditions force girls into household chores and early marriages, while community gossip pressures even supportive parents to keep daughters at home, reinforcing inequality.

Political and Community Leadership in Improving Girls' Education in Loralai

Politics and community leaders can play a crucial role in improving girls' education in Loralai. Sania, Insa and Mima Bibi suggested that ministers should focus on improving existing schools and building new ones where none exist. Sakina argued that politicians should build schools close to villages, provide female teachers, and arrange transport to make education accessible. Amina Bibi stressed that leaders must establish proper schools nearby and appoint female teachers to encourage parents to send their daughters. Bibi Naseeba, Bakhtawar and Najma called for the establishment of degree colleges and the provision of highly qualified female teachers to guide girls. Muskan recommended that politicians build schools in every neighborhood, provide transport systems, and even establish colleges or universities to ensure equal opportunities for girls.

Conclusion

The study reveals that government policies in Shabozai have provided limited progress in female education. While some politicians have established schools, most efforts remain inadequate, with poor facilities, lack of female teachers, and schools located far from villages. Respondents such as Sania, Sajida and Muskan highlighted that only one high school serves multiple neighborhoods, making access nearly impossible for many girls. This shows that political neglect and weak governance continue to restrict opportunities for education, leaving rural communities underserved.

Social and cultural barriers further compound these challenges. Strict Pashtun traditions, tribal customs, and honor culture discourage families from sending daughters to school. Respondents like Rukhsana, Sakina and Amina Bibi emphasized that gossip, poverty, and fear of dishonor prevent parents from supporting girls' education, even when they personally value it. Although Islam does not forbid education, local interpretations and misuse of religion reinforce exclusion. These findings demonstrate that cultural norms and social pressures remain powerful obstacles to female empowerment in Shabozai.

Despite these barriers, there is strong aspiration among families and communities for change. Parents and elders expressed hope that their daughters could become doctors, teachers, or leaders if given proper opportunities. Respondents such as Bibi Nasiba and Muskan Khairullah stressed the importance of family support, nearby schools, transport facilities, and qualified female teachers. The conclusion is clear: addressing both political neglect and social traditions is essential to improving female education in Shabozai. By meeting these needs, girls can achieve empowerment, and women in Loralai can participate more meaningfully in politics and community leadership, contributing to inclusive development in Balochistan.

Policy Recommendations table

Actor	Policy Recommendation	Purpose
Government	Build more schools within villages and appoint qualified female teachers, provide transport and accommodation to female teachers.	Ensures accessibility and safe learning environments
Government	Provide transport facilities for girls	Reduces distance barriers and social criticism
Families	Stand firm against gossip and support daughters' right to education	Strengthens household commitment to girls' schooling

Community Leaders	Clarify that Islam encourages education for all	Counters cultural misconceptions and builds acceptance
Government & NGOs	Introduce scholarships, awareness seminars, and mentorship programs	Empowers girls to pursue higher studies and leadership

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