

## **Barriers and Enablers to Participation in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study**

Muhammad Awab-us-Sibtain \*  
Ahmed Usman \*\*  
Baqir Husnain \*\*\*

### **Abstract**

This article draws from narratives of 14 slum dwellers of Christian Colony, Islamabad, Pakistan, to explore their struggle through a web of barriers and enablers to participate in higher education. Using the qualitative approach, primary data was collected through in-depth interviews. The respondents were mostly from the families where males worked as sanitary workers or unskilled laborers while the females worked as sanitary workers or housemaids. The interview data was transcribed, labelled and thematically analyzed. As a result, various themes around the barriers and enablers to participation in higher education emerged. For the most recurrent themes that emerged from the data, a second round of interviews was conducted and four illustrative examples were chosen that richly provide contextual information about their respective themes. Thus, the study used narrative storytelling technique under Systems Theory Framework to depict the struggle of individual slum dwellers within multiple intrapersonal and social systems. The study concluded that lack of guidance and dearth of financial resources were the key barriers that the slum dwellers faced to participate in higher education. Also, the study concluded that the coping strategy for the key barriers could be affirmative interventions of career counselling and financial assistance to support egalitarian participation of the slum dwellers in higher education.

**Keywords:** higher education; marginalization; slums; social reproduction; poverty

---

\* Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Pakistan  
Email: awabarts@gmail.com

\*\* Assistant Professor, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Pakistan Email: ahmedusmaan@hotmail.com

\*\*\* Project Manager, Higher Education Commission, Islamabad, Pakistan.  
Email: baqirhusnain@hotmail.com

## **Introduction**

Participation in higher education is considered to be a major discussion in sociology of education, as expansion of higher education is directly linked to the economic prosperity of a nation (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2008; Douglass, 2015; OECD, 2012; Paulsen & Smart, 2013). According to statistics provided by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2018), in the United States, 48% of the population, between the ages of 25-34, has attained higher education, making it one of the most educated and richest countries in the world. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also acknowledge the importance of higher education and the target 4.3 of SDG-4 is to “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (Owens, 2017). Also, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, ‘Everyone has the right to education’ and ‘higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’ (The United Nation [UN] 1949, p. 26). Higher education is considered to be important not only for economic development but also for overall improvement of society (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 1998).

Although, globally, the scale of higher education institutions and disciplines has expanded in the last two decades, participation of the marginalized communities has not expanded proportionately. Shifting of financial costs of higher education to students adversely affects those at the bottom of the financial hierarchy (Usher, 2005). The link between access to higher education and social class has been found in studies conducted in various countries including the US (Bureau, 2004), China (Li & Bray, 2006), Japan (Fuwa, 2009), and Ireland (Asplund, Adbelkarim, & Skalli, 2008). Young people from disadvantaged families tend to apply more for vocational courses, guaranteeing immediate job, so that they can pay off their debts incurred during the studies.

In Pakistan also, the overall expansion of higher education institutions and disciplines has been evident in the last two decades. However, compared to the access rate of developed countries, the access rate of Pakistan is less than ideal. In 2002, the access level to higher education in Pakistan, for the age group of 18-23, was only 2.2%. Significant efforts were made to raise the access rate. Higher Education Commission (HEC), opened up several new universities and the access level was enhanced to 4.7%. In 2009, the government announced a new National Education Policy and set the target of access to 10% for 2015

(Ministry of Professional and Technical Training, 2011). Pakistan has been very close to achieve this target as its access to higher education rate reached 9.5% in 2014 (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2015).

Inequality in access to higher education within the urban landscape of Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, is a striking case of social apartheid. The slum of Christian Colony is a case in point. It is situated in Sector G-8 of Islamabad. It comprises of about 700 households (Capital Development Authority [CDA], 2014). Most of the inhabitants here are sanitary workers by profession (Chouhan, 2014). While they make the capital city clean, their own living conditions are devoid of any cleanliness.

A study by police department considers the slum a hub of drug dealers (Hussain, 2014). Many of the young inhabitants, who belong to the third generation of the migrants to this slum, continue to be sweepers (Chouhan, 2014). Therefore, it is important to systematically understand the barriers and enablers that the slum dwellers face with regard to participation in higher education.

This study is significant as it is the first attempt to investigate the answer to this pertinent question as to why the slum dwellers do not get higher education so that they could choose careers other than sanitary work, in a city that is host to more than 20 universities (Khattak, 2016) and burgeons with economic opportunities. It draws from the narratives of 14 slum dwellers; both female and male, non-participants as well as rare participants of higher education, to explore the complex nature of the struggle of slum dwellers through a web of barriers and enablers to access higher education.

The study has a long-lasting implication for it not only identifies the key barriers and enablers to participation in higher education but also, based on its findings, warrants some necessary recommendations to introduce affirmative interventions for ensuring equitable participation of the slum dwellers in higher education. The findings of the study suggest that the slum dwellers face to key barriers to access higher education: lack of guidance and lack to financial resources. To overcome these two barriers, affirmative interventions are required to provide career counselling and financial assistance so the marginalized slum dwellers so that they can have equitable participation in higher education.

## **Literature Review**

Among the barrier to participation in higher education, financial barrier has been most repeatedly mentioned (Spielhofer et al., 2008; The

Educational Policy Institute, 2008). The marginalized communities complained of having family related financial difficulties in access to higher education (McWhirter, 1997). Also, researchers find that higher education and financial poverty are linked to each other in a vicious circle (Colclough, 2012). Another important barrier to higher education is lack of information and guidance (Foskett & Johnston, 2010). A family's lack of ability to provide information and guidance adversely influence participation in higher education (Beauregard, 2007; Fuller, 2008; Geier, 2007; Hirschi & Lage, 2007; Johnston, 2007). There are other barriers such as ethnicity (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002), distance to school (Frenette, 2004), perceptions of cost and returns of higher education (Hutchings & Archer, 2001), school experience (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001), discussed by various studies but they do not generally bear fundamental importance.

There are a limited studies that focus on enablers to participation in higher education (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey, & Wickham, 2008; Swail, 2003). Mentioned among the top enablers to participation in higher education is the availability of financial resources (Ehrenberg, Zhang, & Levin, 2005). Next, among the enablers, comes the availability of information and guidance (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Heath & Johnston, 2006; Jones et al., 2008).

The current situation of slum dwellers of Islamabad can be viewed from the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. However, the case of slum dwellers shows the flip side of the theory of social reproduction. The social reproduction theory emphasizes the reproduction of the dominant class and, only by implication, suggests the social reproduction of the marginalized communities when they are deprived of education. It places too much emphasis on class conflict and misses out so many other factors involved as barriers or enablers of slum dwellers' participation in higher education such as gender, information, guidance, and ethnic and religious identities. Therefore, social reproduction theory is, by no means, comprehensive enough to fully explain the barriers and enablers to participation in higher education. It is for this reason that, while keeping in view the social reproduction theory, this study has also relied on Systems Theory Framework (STF). As the individuals work within multiple intrapersonal and social systems, this study proposes the theoretical explanation of barriers and enables through systems theory framework because of its ability to offer a more holistic approach.

The STF is an overarching framework within which all concepts of career development can be positioned and utilized. The STF approach

encourages the use of narrative storytelling because this method explains the connectedness of an individual with various systems while deciding among the career choices (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Various researchers have analysed the barriers and enablers to participation in higher education using the systems approach. Although, they did not explicitly mention the STF, they acknowledged the contribution of social systems and interconnected networks and sub-systems in providing access to higher education (Paulsen & Smart, 2013; Smart & Paulsen, 2011). The approach is important in understanding the overall life story of individuals facing barriers and enablers in access to higher education.

After reviewing the above literature on barriers and enablers to participation in higher education, it is revealed that there are two most common barriers to participation in higher education: lack of information and guidance with regard to higher education and lack of financial resources. As marginalized communities often lack information and guidance with regard to higher education, they do not participate in higher education (Fuller, 2008; Heath, Fuller, & Johnston, 2010; Jones et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2008). And somehow if they have information and guidance, lack of financial resources becomes the next big barrier. Thus, among the families of marginalized communities, very few from the second generation of the slum dwellers could access higher education. The generations without higher education are often unable to guide the following generation about participation in higher education (Geier, 2007; Heath et al., 2010; Spielhofer et al., 2008). The initial findings of this study are also congruent with the above-cited learning from the literature review. Therefore, in the following section, the two most common barriers to participation in higher education will be illustrated through in-depth interviews of the slum dwellers. Also, the flip side of the two barriers, i.e. the availability of information and guidance and financial resources will be illustrated to increase understanding of the context of barriers and enablers to higher education, in the slum of Christian Colony, Islamabad.

## **Methodology**

### **Sampling**

The research is based on two rounds of interviews. As for the first round of interviews, purposive sampling was used that is considered to be the best methodology where the study is exploratory and inductive in nature (John W. Creswell, 2013; Marshall, 1996). Also, the research was

based on thematic sampling and, thus, no specific sample size was considered. For a closed community, where access is difficult, assistance of Gatekeeper is recommended (Given, 2008). The sample was accessed with the assistance of a Gatekeeper, the Elder of the local Church. The Gatekeeper was requested to arrange interviews with the respondents from a diverse range of males and females, participants and non-participants to have a balanced opinion. As a result, the interviews were conducted with a total of 14 respondents; six females and eight males among which half the respondents were participant in higher education.

The emergent themes were noted and the list of themes was updated and refined after each interview. It is advisable in qualitative studies that the sample size should be expanded until a saturation point is reached (Saunders et al., 2018). The 10th interview did not contribute any new theme and it was felt that thematic saturation had been achieved. The sample of ten interviews is considered rich enough for qualitative studies (Judger, 2016). However, the researcher decided to conduct four more interviews: two with participants and two with non-participants, keeping the gender balance, to ensure that thematic saturation had truly been reached.

As for the second round of interviews, four persons were selected from the participants of first round of interviews, based on the criterion that the interviewees should be able to present illustrative examples of one of the four most recurrent themes in the previous interviews data. Also, they should have discussed the same theme most emphatically during their first interview. These four themes included two barriers and two enablers. Naturally, the two themes about barriers are illustrated by two non-participants and the two themes about enablers are illustrated by two participants. The sample of four is big enough for a qualitative research providing illustrative examples. (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2018) who provide only three illustrative examples to present the case of migrant adult students in Sweden.

## **Data Collection**

For the first round of interviews, two questionnaires were designed; one for the participants and the other for the non-participants. Both the questionnaire had some common questions about the topics such as life history, views about education and ambitions about careers. However, the questionnaire for the participants was mostly focused to solicit information about the enablers of access to higher education while the

one for the non-participants, was mostly focused on barriers to higher education.

During the first round of interviews, the participants discussed their carrier dreams and the challenges they faced. They also talked about the opportunities and challenges they had experienced to participate in higher education. The body language of the interviewees and other cues that supported their narration were also observed to note emphasis of participants on certain points. The interviewees openly described their migration to Islamabad, different phases of settling into the new city and how they viewed opportunities for education and prospects of adopting new careers. Interestingly, it came out that all of those who had not participated in higher education, were from the families where at least one of the parents was a sanitary worker.

For the second round of interviews, new questionnaires were designed for each one of the respondents, after review of their previous interview data and to ask specific questions to solicit the details missed out in the first interview. These details were mostly relevant to the specific theme; the respondent was supposed to present an illustrative example of. The author had also compiled a story of each one of the respondents of the second interview and read it to them to validate the previous understanding and to allow the respondents to make corrections and fill in the missed-out details.

## **Analysis**

For analysing the in-depth interviews, there are two important traditions that are useful: cross-case analysis and individual case illustration. Collective cross-case study approach is useful when the purpose is to analyse a cross-case phenomenon (Stake, 1995). The tradition of individual case narration is useful when the purpose is to illustrate the unique experiences of individuals (Clandinin et al., 2010). This study uses both the traditions. To explain the overall barriers and enablers of higher education, the study briefly presents a cross-case analysis. Then, in order to highlight the key enablers and barriers, the study presents the individual case illustrations of four persons. This combination has previously been used by various researchers to have the best of both the traditions (Clandinin et al., 2010; DeVilbiss, 2014 ). For both the cross-case analysis and individual case-illustration, thematic analysis techniques have been used.

## **Thematic Analysis**

‘Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within Data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A detailed six-step procedure of thematic analysis has been prescribed for in-depth interviews by Braun and Clarke (2006). The procedure is useful in maintaining rigour in qualitative research and ensuring validity of the conclusions drawn on the basis of qualitative data (Judger, 2016). The step-wise application of the thematic analysis procedure has been adopted and explained below.

### ***Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with Your Data***

The first step in thematic analysis is transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The novel approach adopted for transcribing the interview data was the use of TranscriberAG, a software that allows to mark the audio clip at different points so that the whole interview can be divided into segments and sections (Barras, Geoffrois, Wu, & Liberman, 1998). It empowers the researcher to go back to the original audio clip for clarity any time. Also, it makes it redundant to transcribe the whole interview and focuses only on the meaningful parts that need to be transcribed and relevant analysis notes can be added to the audio clip while transcribing. According to Braun and Clarke (2002), all details of conversation are not needed for a constructionist thematic analysis. However, the details of conversation were recorded to the extent that the original verbal and non-verbal details are documented. At the end of each interview, the researcher repeatedly listened to the recording and, using TranscriberAG, marked the audio file into smaller segments and sections. The interviews were originally conducted in Urdu or Punjabi. The interpretation starts while the meaning of the text is understood by the researcher and transcribed in a second language (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher translated the transcription into English. The significant quotes from each one of the interviews was noted verbatim, in the original language i.e. Urdu or Punjabi, with English translation.

### ***Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes***

Once the interview data was transcribed and placed into segments, the researcher imported all the segments into MS Excel. The MS Excel enabled the researcher to arrange data in a systematic manner, ready for coding. Labels were assigned to different segments of the transcribed data. The labels were guided by the research questions and the researcher looked for the meanings that could be gathered around the enablers and

barriers to higher education. For each meaning unit, a label was created. All the coding was done manually. However, the entire data set was searched through the spreadsheet to ensure that the meaning units are not missed out without labelling. In order to avoid the criticism that codes lose the context (Braun & Clarke, 2006), each code was assigned a timeline stamp in the audio file, so that the context can be tracked back at any stage.

### ***Phase 3: Searching for Themes***

After labelling all the meaning units, the codes were divided into two broader categories: barriers and enablers to higher education. Then, all the codes under the two categories were arranged into broader meaning units or themes. For example, the codes such as poor earning, expense on disease and expense on house rent and expense on construction of house were arranged under the theme of financial constraints. Then, the theme of financial constraint was placed under the broader category of barriers to access higher education. Some of the themes could be related to both the categories of barriers and enablers, in different contexts. Such paradoxes were especially noted, and their context was reviewed to figure out the fine lines of convergence and divergence. For instance, the theme of gender could be related to both barriers and enablers, depending on the context.

### ***Phase 4: Reviewing Themes***

The selected themes were once again checked across the interviews so that the author fully understands the categories and can explore further the contextual complexity of the themes. For instance, under the theme of financial poverty as a barrier to higher education, the author figured out that the critical stage in the lives of most slum dwellers, soon after migration, had been to construct a house. Constructing a house involved huge expenses that seriously challenged their ability to support higher education for their children.

During the refinement process of themes, theme maps were generated. All data was once again reviewed to see if the original text matched with the thematic map. The main database was further analysed through pivot table to identify the repeated patterns and emphasis on certain meaning units by the respondents.

### ***Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes***

The final refinement was done by identifying the essence of each barrier and enabler that each theme captured. At this stage, instead of

increasing the number of barriers and enablers, the author attempted that the true spirit and the points of interest in the narrative are highlighted. The sub-themes under the barriers and enablers were reanalysed to see what stories each theme has to tell and how it fits into the bigger story. Then, based on the story, each theme was named with a title that told the whole story.

The MS Excel, through pivot tables, kept track of the number of times a label was repeated under a theme. Based on the analysis, it was found that financial constraints (63 times) and lack of awareness (39 times) were the most repeated theme among the barriers, while awareness, information & guidance (AIG) (43 times) and financial support (28 times) had the most repetitions among the enablers of access to higher education. Incidentally, these four themes were found repeated across all the 14 interviews, without a single exception.

The list of themes was updated and refined after each interview. Under the list of enablers, the researcher came up with 10 themes under the list of barriers and 9 themes under the list of enablers. The final list of theme maps under the categories of barriers and enablers can be viewed at Figure A and B, respectively.

For the purpose of this study, two each from the most significant categories of enablers and barriers were selected. The most significant barriers were lack of awareness and financial crisis. Among the enablers, the most repeated themes mentioned by the participants were AIG and availability of financial resources. Further analysis was made about how the participants and non-participants experienced these four themes in their lives with regard to access to higher education. Therefore, these four themes were chosen for further investigation and illustration through examples. The persons who had emphasized on these themes more than others, were contacted again and a second interview was conducted with specific questions related to one of the four themes to capture all the related minute details.

Prior to conducting the second interview a brief illustrative story of the respondents, based on their first interview was written and presented to them individually so that the findings of the first story can be validated by the respondents.

### ***Phase 6: Producing the Report***

The final step in thematic analysis is to tell a convincing story to the readers in a manner that they understand the situation without visiting the target population and without reading the full text of the interviews (Baskarada, 2014). The purpose of the report is to promote a rich

understanding of the phenomenon through a thick description of the context (John W Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In qualitative research, the researcher himself is an instrument. Therefore, sometimes, data extracts and quotes were used to tell the whole story. Other than quoting the text, the themes were also interpreted by the researcher and conclusions were drawn from the themes. The analytic comments by the researcher were given by making a clear distinction between what has been reported by the interviewees and what the analytical voice of the researcher is.

## **Results and Discussion**

As a result of first round of interviews, various themes emerged around the barriers and enablers of participation in higher education. The lists of barriers and enablers are congruent with various previous studies on the subject (Colclough, 2012; Fuller, 2008; Grodsky, 2010; Heath et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2008; Reimer & Jacob, 2010; Roksa, 2008; Spielhofer et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2008; Ule, Živoder, & du Bois-Reymond, 2015; UNESCO, 2009; Wilkins & Burke, 2015). A total of four illustrative examples of barriers and enables were collected through the second round of interviews. The second interview was also important because these were used as a validity check for the earlier interviews by asking the interviewees if the essence of their stories were truly captured by the researcher.

Previously, the illustrative examples have been used by various researchers to explain the contextual details of a social issue (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2018; DeVilbiss, 2014; Heath, Fuller, & Paton, 2008). However, the technique to illustrate only one significant aspect in each interview has been used here to place a certain aspect of enablers and barriers in focus, while the issue may be common in most of the stories. The most significant change (MSC) technique in evaluation is closely related to this technique (Dart & Davies, 2003; Davies & Dart, 2005). The illustrative examples do not claim to be generalizable to the whole population or a justification for deducing any statistical conclusions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). They are only depictions of contexts of different factors that are reported recurrently in the narratives of slum dwellers and answer the question of what happened and how it happened rather than of why it happened. The importance of why questions is undeniable but beyond the scope of this study and therefore it should not be expected here.

The four illustrative examples of barriers and enablers are presented here by four persons named Mishi, Qadir, Saeed, and Tasleem. Illustrating the key barriers, Mishi and Qadir, two of the non-participants explain how the key barriers hindered their participation in HE. As for the enablers, Saeed and Tasleem, the two, rare but lucky, participants in HE illustrates how the key enablers helped them to participate in HE.

***Mishi: An Illustrative Example of Lack of Guidance as a Barrier to Education***

Mishi is a 20 years old female who could not participate in education beyond grade three. She was married to Bieber, a sanitary worker, early at the age of 17 and has two-year-old son. She works as a housemaid to support her family.

Mishi recalls that her family was unable to guide her with regard to education. 'Education had never been a topic of discussion in our home' Mishi tells. Mishi's mother has been a housemaid and her father a sanitary worker. The income of both the parents was hardly enough to feed their seven children; six daughters and a son. 'Helping mother in house chores is what daughters are supposed to do in our families, Mishi told about a normal course of life in slums. 'First, they help the mother in house chores. Then, they start working with mother outside the house.' Thus, Mishi and her sisters were trained to be housemaids at a very early age. Mentioning the reason for her not continuing the education. When asked if it had ever occurred to her to get education so that she could become something else other than becoming a housemaid, she plainly said, "No, there was no one to tell us to go to school."

Mishi's father and mother migrated to Islamabad in 1986, from Sialkot, in search of work. Both the parents were illiterate and unskilled. The easiest job available for them was the job of sanitary worker for males and the job of housemaid for females. They did not have enough time to attend the increasing number of children. "The parents were too busy managing the basic needs of the family. When there were so many mouths to feed, Education could not be a priority," told Mishi.

Before her marriage, Mishi lived in a single-room house that accommodated her with eight other persons; two parents, five sisters and one brother. Mishi tells, "In such a congested house, one could not even think of studying." Even after marriage, Mishi works as a maid and earns around 8,000 rupees a month. Her husband works for a private firm as a sanitary worker and earns around 10,000 rupees a month. They have a three-year-old son and a one-year-old daughter. They leave the kids locked in home while they go for work. She can't leave the kids at her

mother's house, which is just a few meters away, because her mother still works as a housemaid. Mishi understands the need to give more time to her kids but finds it hard to take more time out of her busy work hours.

What we find replicated for Mishi, after a generation, is the same level of information about the pathways of education, the same career choices, the same financial compulsions, and the same kind of single-room house that serves as bedroom, kitchen and activity room for kids and day's long labour that leaves very limited time to attend the kids. One can only guess if the next generation of Mishi's family will be able to break this vicious cycle of social reproduction.

***Qadir: An Illustrative Example of Financial Poverty as a Barrier to Education***

Qadir, is a young man of 22 who had to discontinue his education after grade six due to financial constraints. Currently, Qadir works as a sanitary worker and earns around Rs. 15,000 a month.

Explaining the financial constraints of his family, leading to his drop out of school, Qadir told, "We lived in a rented house. We were four brothers and sisters. Both the parents worked. However, the income was not enough to pay the house rent, feed the family of six and also pay for education of the four kids." Qadir's father worked as a sanitary worker and his mother worked as a maid. Qadir left the school to follow the career path of his father to offer financial support to his family when it was needed the most. While one might think that his decision to drop out of school was unreasonable, to him it was the most reasonable thing he could ever do. Recalling his decision to drop out of school at the age of 12 only, Qadir told, "*Jab samajhdar ho gaey to parhai chhor dee aur kaam shuru ker dia* (When I became sensible enough [to understand what was happening around me], I quit education and started working)." He told that he felt ashamed that his parents had to do so much for him. Therefore, as soon as he realized the financial constraints his family, he dropped out of school and became a helping hand for the family. Narrating the story of his family, Qadir further told that his father had sent his two siblings to a boarding missionary school in Abbottabad. However, after grade eight, they both had to leave studies and come back because the family could not afford the hostel expenses, though the education was subsidized by a missionary organization.

Qadir complained that for the slum dwellers the opportunities for economic growth were very limited. "If you walk around the colony, you see a few small shops and a few street vendors with low quality fruit and

vegetables. That is all the businesses opportunities they have,” told Qadir.

What is evident from the illustration of Qadir’s story is that the remuneration from the labour work of sanitary work and housemaid are so low that the slum dwellers cannot afford education for the kids. When a family is stricken by acute poverty, education becomes an unaffordable luxury.

### ***Saeed: An Illustrative Example of Guidance as an Enabler of Education***

Saeed is a 22 years old male and has successfully reached higher education. He comes from one of the very few fortunate families of Christian colony who could attain higher education. Currently, Saeed is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in computer sciences from Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU).

Access to advice, information and guidance (AIG) played a significant role in Saeed’s successful journey to higher education. Saeed’s father migrated to the Christian Colony in 1990. He had a distinct status among other illiterate slum dwellers for being matriculate. While others migrated to the slum for finding any type of work to make the both ends meet, Saeed’s father migrated to the slum so that he could provide better education to his children. Initially, he worked in Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). Later on, he started to work for Turkish Embassy, first as a chef and then as a manager. Working at the embassy provided him with a broad exposure to different avenues and careers and he was able to guide Sameer and his siblings to go for education in computer sciences. Another source of advice and guidance was Saeed’s elder brother. He worked as a teacher after getting his bachelor’s degree in education (B. Ed.). Thus, information, advice and guidance from the family landed the young Saeed into a career distinct from the rest of his fellow slum dwellers. Saeed joined an NGO to develop his community. Also, with the help of a missionary organization, he opened up an early education school in the slum.

Saeed observes that most of his friends dropped out of education because they did not have appropriate guidance to access higher education. He considers advice and guidance the key success factors in leading to better career trajectories. “Currently, most parents only think of menial jobs for their children and can't think beyond that,” laments Saeed. Expressing his ideas about the way forward Saeed suggested, “The slum dwellers should be supported for various careers. However, the support should not be in the form of financial support alone that often

makes people beggars. Instead, it should be mostly in the form of guidance that sensitizes them and opens up their minds to bigger opportunities.”

***Tasleem: An Illustrative Example of Financial Support as an Enabler of Education***

Tasleem is a young woman of 22. She was able to successfully make her way through various challenges to reach higher education. Currently, she is studying in a top class local university to pursue the master's degree in Governance and Policy.

Tasleem's father works as a sanitary worker in a government office. After grade eight, the financial situation of the family was not good enough to allow her regular education. Recalling the difficult times when her family needed to build a house after the government had allotted them land in the slum, Tasleem tells, “Although my father worked in a government office where the salaries were much better for sanitary workers than in the private sector, building a house drained all their resources and left no room for regular education. The immediate basic need for shelter overshadowed the need for education.” She left the school but continued her education through the distance learning system of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) that was much cheaper. She had only one sibling, a brother, who started his career as a labourer and then as a driver after dropping out of school in seventh grade. Later on, when the financial conditions of the family ameliorated, Tasleem got admission in the university to pursue a master's degree. The semester fee here is Rs. 28,000 which her father can happily afford now. Tasleem feels blessed to have the necessary financial resources to enrol in a university that most of her fellow slum dwellers cannot afford.

From the story of Tasleem, it transpires that availability of financial resources is an important success factor in continuing education. However, availability of financial resources alone cannot be decisive in reaching the higher education. Tasleem's only brother did not study beyond seventh grade and now works as a driver despite the fact that he had access to the same financial resources later in life. There are other preconditions, such as availability of information, advice and guidance that affect progress to higher education. Tasleem's elder brother had a role in supporting the family. The fact that Tasleem's father worked in a government office also ensured that the salary was better than those who worked in small private firms. Also, Tasleem lived in a small sized family of four persons and her brother started earning early. Thus, the financial support added with gendered role played a role in facilitating

her pursuit of higher education. Tasleem's father affords Rs. 28,000 per semester for Tasleem's education at the university. This is definitely not what an average family, with bigger family size, in the slum, can afford.

## **Conclusions**

From the above discussion of illustrative examples, it is concluded that the slum dwellers of Christian Colony face two types of key barriers to higher education. The first barrier is their limited information and lack of advice and guidance for education. The mostly illiterate parents and other family members are unable to provide any meaningful advice and guidance for acquiring higher education. Thus, the parents contribute to continue the family legacy of career as sanitary workers. This finding is in line with various previous studies that confirms a continuous trend in the last 50 years that education of parents affects the chances of the next generation to participate in higher education (Foskett & Johnston, 2010; Fuller, 2008; Geier, 2007; Grodsky, 2010; Heath & Calvert, 2011; Heath et al., 2010; OECD, 2017). The second key barrier is their limited financial resources. The chronic poverty and low-income jobs of the slum dwellers do not leave enough savings to invest in higher education. This finding also endorses the previous similar studies (Asplund et al., 2008; Callender & Jackson, 2008; Colclough, 2012; Jones et al., 2008; OECD, 2016; Spielhofer et al., 2008). The presented examples have also illustrated the rare cases where these two key barriers have been removed and participation of the slum dwellers into higher education has been enabled.

The illustrative examples do not claim to be generalizable to the whole population or a justification for deducing any statistical conclusions. They are only depictions of contexts of different factors that are reported recurrently in the narratives of slum dwellers and answer the question of what happened and how it happened rather than why it happened.

## **Recommendations**

The illustrative examples lead us to recommend that affirmative interventions need to be made to enhance participation of the slum dwellers in higher education. As also pointed out by Saeed, in the above quoted illustrative examples, the slum dwellers should be provided with career counselling services so that they know both the importance of acquiring higher education and the pathways to reach there. Also, as

illustrated in the example of Tasleem, affirmative interventions such as scholarships and study loans can help to make higher education affordable for the slum dwellers.

The above recommendations can help in mainstreaming of the slum dwellers by providing an equitable share in higher education. This will further enable them to have access to other career opportunities they have been deprived of for long and help them come out of the marginalization they have been facing for generations. As for the future research on the topic, using the systems theory framework, the intra-personal and societal systems can be further explored that led to the situations where participation of slum dwellers in higher education remains extremely low.

## References

- Asplund, R., Adbelkarim, O. B., & Skalli, A. (2008). An equity perspective on access to, enrolment in and finance of tertiary education. *Education Economics*, 16(3), 261-274. doi:10.1080/09645290802338102
- Ball, S. J., Reay, D., & David, M. (2002). 'Ethnic Choosing': Minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice. *Race ethnicity and education*, 5(4), 333-357.
- Barras, C., Geoffrois, E., Wu, Z., & Liberman, M. (1998). *Transcriber: a free tool for segmenting, labeling and transcribing speech*. Paper presented at the First international conference on language resources and evaluation (LREC).
- Baskarada, S. (2014). Qualitative case study guidelines. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(40).
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13, 544-559.
- Beauregard, A. (2007). Family influences on the career life cycle. In M. F. Ozbilgin & A. Malach-Pines (Eds.), *Career choice in management and entrepreneurship: a research companion* (pp. 01-126). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2008). *Education, globalisation and the knowledge economy*. Retrieved from
- Buchmann, C., & Hannum, E. (2001). Education and stratification in developing countries: A review of theories and research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 77-102.
- Bureau, U. C. (2004). *American factfinder* (Vol. 3): US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, US ....

- Callender, C., & Jackson, J. (2008). Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4), 405-429. doi:10.1080/03075070802211802
- Capital Development Authority [CDA]. (2014). *The Slums of Islamabad*. Retrieved from Islamabad:
- Chouhan, A. (2014). *Presentation on Kachi Abadis*. Kachi Abadis Cell, CDA, Islamabad. Islamabad.
- Clandinin, D. J., Steeves, P., Li, Y., Mickelson, J. R., Buck, G., Pearce, M., . . . Stewart, M. (2010). Composing lives: A narrative account into the experiences of youth who left school early. Retrieved April, 12, 2010.
- Colclough, C. (2012). Education, poverty and development – mapping their interconnections. *Comparative Education*, 48(2), 135-148. doi:10.1080/03050068.2011.608891
- Connidis, I. A., & McMullin, J. A. (2002). Sociological Ambivalence and Family Ties: A Critical Perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(3), 558-567.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Third ed.).
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*: Sage publications.
- Dahlstedt, M., & Fejes, A. (2018). Futures in line? Occupational choice among migrant adult students in Sweden. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 1-12.
- Dart, J., & Davies, R. (2003). A dialogical, story-based evaluation tool: The most significant change technique. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24(2), 137-155.
- Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). The ‘most significant change’(MSC) technique. *A guide to its use*.
- DeVilbiss, J. M. (2014). *Narrative case studies exploring homelessness and education*.

- Douglass, J. (2015). The global higher education race. *International Higher Education*(49).
- Ehrenberg, R. G., Zhang, L., & Levin, J. M. (2005). *Crafting a class: The trade off between merit scholarships and enrolling lower-income students*. Retrieved from
- Foskett, R., & Johnston, B. (2010). 'A uniform seemed the obvious thing': experiences of careers guidance amongst potential HE participants. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34(2), 223-238. doi:10.1080/03098771003695486
- Frenette, M. (2004). Access to College and University: Does Distance to School Matter? *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, 30(4), 427. doi:10.2307/3552523
- Fuller, A. (2008). Non-participation in higher education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice. *Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP)*.
- Fuwa, K. (2009). Is the expansion of higher education in Japan for young students only or for all? A critical analysis from a lifelong learning perspective. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 28(4), 459-471.
- Geier, J. L. (2007). *Finding their way: Navigating social class barriers to higher education*. (3271358 Ph.D.), The University of Texas at Austin, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304814642?accountid=135034> ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: Social Sciences database.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*: Sage Publications.
- Grodsky, E. (2010). Those Who Choose and Those Who Don't: Social Background and College Orientation.
- Heath, S., & Calvert, E. (2011). *The role of family and friends in the housing pathways of single young adults*. Retrieved from Southampton:

- Heath, S., Fuller, A., & Johnston, B. (2010). Young people, social capital and network-based educational decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(4), 395-411. doi:10.1080/01425692.2010.484918
- Heath, S., Fuller, A., & Paton, K. (2008). Network-based ambivalence and educational decision-making: A case study of 'non-participation' in higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2), 219-229.
- Heath, S., & Johnston, B. (2006). *Decision-making about employment and education pathways as an embedded social practice: Methodological challenges*. Paper presented at the SRHE annual conference, Brighton.
- Hirschi, A., & Lage, D. (2007). The Relation of Secondary Students' Career-Choice Readiness to a Six-Phase Model of Career Decision Making. *Journal of Career Development*, 34(2), 164-191. doi:10.1177/0894845307307473
- Hussain, D. (2014). Slum survey: Over 80,000 people living in capital's katchi abadis. *The Express Tribune*.
- Hutchings, M., & Archer, L. (2001). 'Higher than Einstein': constructions of going to university among working-class non-participants. *Research Papers in Education*, 16(1), 69-91. doi:10.1080/02671520010011879
- Johnston, B. (2007). *Methodological Review: mapping the literature in relation to the challenges for the non-participation project*. Retrieved from
- Jones, B., Coetzee, G., Bailey, T., & Wickham, S. (2008). *Factors that facilitate success for disadvantaged higher education students*. Retrieved from
- Judger, N. (2016). The thematic analysis of interview data: An approach used to examine the influence of the market on curricular provision in Mongolian higher education institutions. *Retrieved*, 10, 16.
- Khattak, K. (2016). Mapping Higher Education in Pakistan.

- Li, M., & Bray, M. (2006). Social class and cross-border higher education: Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 7(4), 407.
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522-525.
- McWhirter, E. H. (1997). Perceived barriers to education and career: Ethnic and gender differences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 50(1), 124-140.
- Ministry of Professional and Technical Training, G. o. P. (2011). *Pakistan education statistics: 2010-11*. Retrieved from Islamabad:
- OECD. (2012). Returns on higher education for individuals and countries. *Education indicators in focus*.
- OECD. (2016). Trends Shaping Education.
- OECD. (2017). *Educational Attainment: A Snapshot of 50 Years of Trends in Expanding Education*: OECD, Paris, France.
- Owens, T. L. (2017). Higher education in the sustainable development goals framework. *European Journal of Education*, 52(4), 414-420.
- Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). The systems theory framework of career development and counseling: Connecting theory and practice. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 28(2), 153-166.
- Paulsen, M. B., & Smart, J. C. (2013). *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*: Springer.
- Reimer, D., & Jacob, M. (2010). Differentiation in higher education and its consequences for social inequality: introduction to a special issue. *Higher Education*, 61(3), 223-227. doi:10.1007/s10734-010-9373-z
- Roksa, J. (2008). Structuring access to higher education: The role of differentiation and privatization. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 26(1), 57-75. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2007.11.002

- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., . . . Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, 52(4), 1893-1907.
- Schwab, K., & Sala-i-Martin, X. (2015). World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, 2014-2015. *Retrieved from*.
- Smart, J. C., & Paulsen, M. B. (2011). *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 26). London: Springer.
- Spielhofer, T., Golden, S., Evans, K., Marshall, H., Mundy, E., Pomati, M., & Styles, B. (2008). *Barriers to participation in education and training*. Retrieved from
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*: Sage.
- Swail, W. S. (2003). *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series*: ERIC.
- The Educational Policy Institute. (2008). *Access, persistence, and barriers in postsecondary education: a literature review and outline of future research*. Retrieved from
- Tomlinson, M. (2008). 'The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29(1), 49-61. doi:10.1080/01425690701737457
- Ule, M., Živoder, A., & du Bois-Reymond, M. (2015). 'Simply the best for my children': patterns of parental involvement in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(3), 329-348.
- UNESCO. (2009). *Reaching the marginalized: Educational marginalization in national education plans*. Retrieved from Paris:
- Usher, A. (2005). A Little Knowledge is A Dangerous Thing: How Perceptions of Costs and Benefits Affect Access to Education. *Online Submission*.

Wilkins, A., & Burke, P. J. (2015). Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(3), 434-452.

***Citation of this Article:***

Sibtain, M. A., Usman, A., & Hussain, B. (2019). Barriers and enablers to participation in higher education: An exploratory study. *Pakistan Journal of Distance and Online Learning*, 5(2), 17-40.