

CONNECTING THE DISCONNECTED: FROM SCHOOL EXCLUSION TO EDUCATIONAL TRANSITION THROUGH ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAMS IN BALOCHISTAN, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Globally, an estimated 272 million children and youth remain out of school, obstructing progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2025). Balochistan has the highest proportion of out-of-school children among all provinces in Pakistan. To address this challenge, Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) provide coverage out-of-school children with an alternative pathway to complete primary education and transition into formal schools. Despite the growing implementation of these programs, limited evidence explains why children remain out of school before enrolling in ALPs or the barriers they encounter when transitioning from ALPs to mainstream education. This study examined both questions through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design in the Quetta Division. Quantitative data were collected from 315 students (212 who had never attended school, 103 who had dropped out) and were analyzed using chi-square tests and McNemar's test, followed by semi-structured interviews with 16 key informants. Among children who had never enrolled, access and environmental barriers were most common (45.5%), followed by socioeconomic (31%) and sociocultural constraints (15.5%); among those who had dropped out, institutional and administrative failures dominated (42.7%), followed by learning and engagement problems (21.3%), access barriers (13.7%), and socioeconomic pressures (12.6%). These differences held across all six reason categories examined (χ^2 ranging from 9.47 to 103.60, $p < .01$), and the categories themselves were unevenly distributed overall ($\chi^2(5, N = 543) = 125.94$, $p < .001$). Reasons for exclusion (prior enrollment in ALP) and expected transition barriers diverged significantly across five of six categories, the exception being sociocultural constraint ($p = .213$), while key informants cited to Poverty & economic deprivation, Access, poor education quality and lack of facilities in schools, gendered norms, low parental awareness & educational prioritization, and governance neglect running consistently through both stages. Exclusion and transition thus demand separate policy responses: expanding access and strengthening educational quality alone are insufficient without a properly resourced government-led transition mechanism and sustained, gender- and culture-focused attention across the educational journey.

Keywords: out-of-school children, Accelerated Learning Programs, educational transition, Balochistan, mixed-methods research

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is widely regarded as a foundation for individual development and national progress, yet millions of children across the world continue to grow up without access to it. The persistence of out-of-school children remains one of the most stubborn obstacles to inclusive development, standing in the way of commitments that governments and international bodies have made toward equitable schooling for every child. Recent estimates place the global out-of-school population at roughly 272 million children and youth, a figure that has risen rather than fallen in the years since the pandemic and that continues to obstruct progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2025). The burden is not distributed evenly; it concentrates most heavily in developing and conflict-affected settings, where poverty, displacement, fragile infrastructure, and entrenched social norms combine to keep children away from the classroom (Mughal, 2018). The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic compounded an already fragile picture, deepening inequalities that had existed long before the crisis began (UNESCO, 2021). Beyond its place in international development targets, the pursuit of knowledge also carries a longstanding moral and religious weight in the communities examined in this study, rooted in an Islamic teaching that treats learning as an obligation rather than an optional pursuit a framing that lends local, culturally

resonant force to the same imperative driving global education agendas.

Pakistan occupies a troubling position within this global picture. Close to 22.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 16 are out of school, amounting to nearly 44% of the country's school-age population (Mughal, 2018), and more recent figures put the number at approximately 25.152 million, comprising 12.179 million girls and 12.972 million boys (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024). This persists despite the constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education under Article 25-A, a provision that has not translated evenly into access on the ground; rural and marginalized communities continue to face disparities rooted in weak governance, limited public financing, and inconsistent implementation of education policy (Coşkun, 2023).

Balochistan illustrates this national challenge in its most acute form. The province records the highest proportion of out-of-school children in the country, with an estimated 3.476 million children, nearly 47% of those of school age excluded from formal education (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024). Poorly equipped or non-functional schools, chronic shortages of trained teachers, security concerns that disrupt attendance, and cultural expectations that weigh especially heavily on girls' participation together sustain low enrollment, frequent dropout, and long-term disengagement from schooling across large parts of the province (Coşkun, 2023; Arif et al., 2025).

Alternative education approaches such as Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) are used widely to meet the needs of out-of-school children (Adams et al., 2009; Charlick, 2003; Menendez et al., 2016). These flexible, age-appropriate programs compress the curriculum into a shorter time frame, enabling over-age or out-of-school children whose schooling has been disrupted by poverty, social upheaval, or natural disaster to fast-track their (re-)entry into mainstream education or attain certified competencies equivalent to the formal system (Boisvert et al., 2017; GCPEA, 2020). Typically delivered through non-formal learning centres with small classes and learner-centred pedagogy, ALPs schedule classes flexibly to accommodate learners balancing household or income-generating responsibilities, and their curricula range from condensed national syllabi to context-relevant subjects such as literacy, numeracy, peacebuilding, gender equality, and health education (Charlick, 2003; Menendez et al., 2016; Shah, 2015). In conflict-affected contexts such as northeast Nigeria, ALPs also incorporated social-emotional learning components to protect children's wellbeing against the toxic stress associated with poverty, violence, and displacement (Perkins & Graham-Bermann, 2012; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012; Zuilkowski & Betancourt, 2014). It is against this backdrop that ALPs were introduced in Balochistan in 2015 as a targeted response to the province's out-of-school crisis. Several ALP models have since been implemented, with thousands of learners completing primary education through this condensed curriculum, and a meaningful proportion transitioning into formal schools, strengthening the case for ALPs as a genuine bridge back into mainstream education (Batezai & Kiazai, 2022). Today, more than 300 ALP centres operate across the province, about 55 of them in the Quetta Division alone under the Education Support Program, each delivering a condensed primary curriculum within a compressed three-year cycle rather than the standard six. The model nonetheless continues to grapple with challenges common to accelerated and non-formal education more broadly, including curriculum condensation and limited teacher preparation time, both of which shape how smoothly children move from ALP centres into regular classrooms (Menendez et al., 2016; Shah, 2015).

The literature bearing on this problem falls into two related strands. The first addresses why children drop out of, or never enroll in formal schools, and converges on a picture of overlapping economic, social, institutional, and geographic pressures rather than any single cause. Poverty is the most consistently cited of these, forcing households to weigh the cost of schooling against the more immediate returns of a child's labour, an effect well documented in Pakistan, where the inability to absorb even ancillary costs such as uniforms and transport routinely precipitates dropout (Rumberger, 2001; Hussain et al., 2011). Sociocultural norms compound this pressure unevenly by gender: girls are more often withdrawn for domestic duties as they approach puberty amid concerns over safety and marriageability, while parental education levels shape how far a family sees continued schooling as a worthwhile investment at all (Rao, 2010; Lewin, 2009; Holmes, 1999). A further set of causes sits inside the school system itself: chronic teacher shortages, harsh discipline, and curricula experienced as disconnected from daily life, compounded by poor infrastructure, long and unsafe distances to the nearest functioning school (Hussain et al., 2011; Shami & Hussain, 2006; Sabates et al., 2011). Governance and financing shortfalls sit above all of this, with education spending in Pakistan persistently below international benchmarks and provincial devolution widening rather than narrowing disparities in fiscally weaker regions such as Balochistan (Coşkun, 2023).

The second strand of literature addresses what happens once a child re-enters education through a nonformal pathway, and specifically the difficulty of transitioning from that pathway into a formal school. This is treated in the literature not as a single administrative step but as an extended process in which learners must adapt to unfamiliar pedagogical expectations and a sharp reduction in individualized support (Bagnall et al., 2024; Symonds & Galton, 2014). Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa shows this mismatch operating at scale, where the near-total absence of formal bridging arrangements, equivalency frameworks, recognized certification, and agreed transition protocols leaves accelerated learning programs and receiving schools functioning largely in isolation from one another (Maigida & Alero, 2018). A longitudinal study from Bangladesh offers the most granular account of how learners actually experience this fragmentation, describing the shift from the relational, flexible pedagogy of non-formal centres to the exam-driven rhythm of formal schools as a jarring discontinuity that leaves many feeling inferior or insecure rather than simply challenged (Mahruf et al., 2011). Gender resurfaces at this stage as well: the same pressures that pushed girls out of school in the first-place early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and

restricted mobility tend to reappear at the point of transition, while formal schools' continuing lack of gender-responsive infrastructure does little to ease parental hesitation (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994; Shami & Hussain, 2006). The literature reviewed above converges on a central premise: a child completing an Accelerated Learning Program does not enter the formal school system as a blank slate, ready to pick up where a typical student would. Rather, that child brings a distinct learning history, coping strategies developed within a non-formal instructional environment, and, often, a family who has already tried formal schooling once before and been let down by it. This premise, however, rests mainly on evidence from settings with more stable infrastructure and stronger governance capacity than Balochistan's, and it offers little insight into how these dynamics play out in a context shaped by poverty, geographic isolation, and constrained institutional reach.

1.2 Research Gap, Objectives, and Hypotheses

This gap is nowhere more evident than in Balochistan, and in the Quetta Division in particular. Despite extensive ALP activity there, little is known about why these children were excluded from school to begin with, or about what shapes their move from ALPs into formal schooling.

This study addresses that gap by examining why children in the Quetta Division of Balochistan were excluded from school to begin with, and what challenges they face in moving from ALPs into formal schools. The aim is to generate focused, ground-level evidence that can inform policymakers, education planners, and program implementers about where accelerated learning is working as intended, and where targeted improvement is needed to strengthen children's transition into formal education in keeping with Pakistan's constitutional obligations and its commitments under SDGs.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the reasons for being out of school among children enrolled in Accelerated Learning Programs in Balochistan, Pakistan.
2. To examine the key challenges faced by children transitioning from Accelerated Learning Programs to formal schools in Balochistan, Pakistan.

The following hypotheses, stated in null form, guided the quantitative phase of the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the reasons for being out of school prior to ALP enrollment between children who had never attended school and those who had dropped out of school.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the frequency of different categories of reasons contributing to children's out-of-school status prior to enrollment in ALP centres.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the reasons for being out of school prior to enrollment and the expected barriers to transitioning into formal schooling following completion of the ALP program.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

This study adopted a pragmatist research paradigm, considered appropriate because the research questions required the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence to address different dimensions of the same problem. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, in which quantitative data collection and analysis preceded and informed a subsequent qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). A survey strategy was used for the quantitative phase and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative phase, with data collected during a single, defined period rather than through repeated observation over time (a cross-sectional time horizon). Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27, applying descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and McNemar's test; qualitative interview data were analyzed using NVivo, version 15, through systematic coding and thematic analysis. The overall methodological structure was organized using Saunders et al.'s (2020) research onion framework, which situates research philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and technique within a single coherent design.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The quantitative population comprised 2,012 students (1,068 girls, 944 boys) enrolled in 55 Accelerated Learning Program centres across the four districts of the Quetta Division: Quetta, Pishin, Chaman, and Killa Abdullah. Sampling proceeded in two stages. First, 27 of the 55 centres (approximately 50%) were selected through proportionate random sampling to preserve district-level balance. Second, students within these centres were selected through proportionate stratified sampling by district and gender, consistent with the principle that probability-based sampling enhances representativeness (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Applying Yamane's (1967, as cited in Umar & Wachiko, 2021) formula at a 5% margin of error yielded a target sample of 315 students, allocated proportionately to the sampling frame's gender composition as 145 boys and 170 girls.

The achieved sample retained the target total of 315 but shifted marginally in gender composition, to 133 boys and 182 girls (Table 1). This divergence arose during fieldwork, when a small number of sampled boys were unavailable at the time of data collection, largely on account of part-time labour and seasonal work commitments common among boys of this age group in the sampled districts, and were substituted within the same district stratum by the

next eligible students on the centre roster, to preserve the target sample size. Because eligible substitutes were more often girls, the achieved sample skews slightly more female than the proportionate allocation. This kind of shift is common in field-based sampling and does not reflect a flaw in the sampling design itself. The imbalance is also small, affecting fewer than 4% of the total sample, and is addressed in the limitations section of the study. More importantly, it does not threaten the study's main comparisons, since these are organized around whether a child had previously attended school, not around gender.

The qualitative population consisted of 16 purposively selected key informants (12 males, 4 females), including District Education Officers, Education Support Program managers, education experts, and representatives of child rights organizations, whose experience positioned them to speak authoritatively on the determinants of children's exclusion and on their transition from ALPs to formal schools. Sample adequacy was established through data saturation, an approach considered appropriate for homogeneous participant groups yielding rich, relevant data (Creswell, 1998; Levitt et al., 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2018).

3.3 Instruments

Data were collected through a combination of self-structured quantitative and semi-structured qualitative instruments, developed through a literature review, expert evaluation, and pilot testing. A closed-ended survey questionnaire for students captured demographic profiles, reasons for exclusion, future education aspirations, and expected transition barriers, using a mix of multiple-response items and dichotomous items. Reasons for being out of school were recorded as categorical, multiple-response items rather than a unidimensional scale; because these items represent independent, non-correlated causes of exclusion rather than indicators of a single underlying construct, Cronbach's alpha does not apply to this section. For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, an approach well suited to balancing structured inquiry with the flexibility to probe emerging themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2018). The interview guide addressed the drivers of out-of-school status, transition challenges, institutional coordination, and policy gaps affecting the ALP-to-formal-school pathway.

3.4 Procedure

Quantitative data collection was conducted first, through structured questionnaires administered at the 27 selected ALP centres, following institutional approvals and informed consent procedures. The qualitative phase followed once preliminary patterns in the quantitative data had been identified and expected transition barriers. Given the geographic dispersion of key informants across the Quetta Division and the constraints on their professional availability, qualitative interviews were conducted remotely, by video call or telephone, as per the key informant preference, and were audio-recorded with informed consent before being transcribed verbatim. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point without consequence, and the measures adopted to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity; interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used exclusively for this research.

3.5 Data Analysis Approach

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, version 27, beginning with descriptive statistics to characterize respondents' demographic profile and the distribution of responses across the study variables, and proceeding to inferential tests aligned with the study's hypotheses. Because students could select more than one reason or barrier, each broad reason category and sub-reasons within the main category, Access & Environment, Socioeconomic, Sociocultural, Institutional & Administrative, Learning & Engagement, and Conflict & Mobility were represented as a binary indicator of whether a respondent had cited at least one reason within that category, and it is these categories-level coding that underlies the inferential tests reported below.

Three tests correspond to the three hypotheses. A chi-square test of independence was applied to each of the six reason categories in turn, to determine whether the likelihood of a category being cited differed between children who had never attended school and those who had subsequently dropped out (H_{01}). A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was applied to the combined distribution of reasons category citations, to establish whether the six reasons categories occurred with equal frequency or whether categories predominated (H_{02}). Finally, McNemar's test, suited to paired categorical responses drawn from the same respondents, was applied to each category in turn to examine whether the reasons reported for children's earlier exclusion diverged from the barriers those same respondents expected in their subsequent transition to formal schooling (H_{03}). Because six separate tests were run under both H_{01} and H_{03} , results are interpreted with appropriate caution regarding the cumulative risk of Type I error across multiple comparisons, a point revisited in the limitations of the study section.

The qualitative data generated through the sixteen semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically, following the six-phase procedure of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with coding and thematic organization conducted in NVivo, version 15. The themes derived from this analysis were used, consistent with the explanatory sequential logic of the design, to elaborate and contextualize the statistical patterns established in the quantitative phase, and to address the study's second objective directly.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents the study's findings in the sequence established by its explanatory design: quantitative results are reported first (Section 4.1), including the formal tests of the three study hypotheses (Section 4.1.1), followed by the qualitative findings drawn from the sixteen key informant interviews (Section 4.2), which were generated specifically to explain and contextualize the statistical patterns identified in the quantitative phase. Consistent with convention, the results are reported here without interpretive commentary; their meaning in relation to the study's objectives and the wider literature is taken up separately in the Discussion (Section 4.3).

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Distribution of Sampled Students by District and Gender

District	Male	Female	Total
Chaman	41	42	83
Killa Abdullah	33	16	49
Pishin	33	45	78
Quetta	26	79	105
Total	133	182	315

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 315 sampled students across the four districts of the Quetta Division. Quetta district contributed the largest share of respondents ($n = 105$, 33.3%), followed by Chaman ($n = 83$, 26.3%), Pishin ($n = 78$, 24.8%), and Killa Abdullah ($n = 49$, 15.6%). Female respondents ($n = 182$, 57.8%) outnumbered male respondents ($n = 133$, 42.2%) in the achieved sample, a modest departure from the proportionate target of 170 girls and 145 boys, discussed in Section 2.2. This proportion varied by district; Killa Abdullah was the only district in which male respondents outnumbered female respondents.

Table 2. Prior School Attendance Status of Sampled Students

Status	F	%
Never been to school	212	67%
Dropped out of school	103	33%
Total	315	100%

As Table 2 shows, two-thirds of the sample (67%) had never attended formal school before enrolling in an ALP, while the remaining third (33%) had attended formal school at some point before dropping out.

Table 3. Reasons for Never Having Attended School, by Category ($n = 212$; multiple responses permitted)

Category	Reason	F	%
Access & Environment	No school nearby	48	23%
	School was far or unsafe	37	17%
	Fear of harassment on the way to school	11	5%
	No proper classrooms or toilets	1	0.5%
Socioeconomic	Education was unaffordable	21	10%
	Had to work and earn for the family	18	9%
	The family had financial issues	17	8%
	Had to do housework	5	2.5%
	Had to care for younger siblings/elderly	3	1%
	School is perceived as for rich children only	1	0.5%
Sociocultural	Culture/family did not allow attendance	11	5%
	Preference for madrassa/religious education	10	5%
	No female teachers available	7	3%
	The family did not value formal education	5	2.5%
Institutional &	No teachers in school	6	3%

Administrative	There was no support for learning needs	1	0.5%
	No proper classrooms or toilets	1	0.5%
	Teachers didn't make lessons interesting	1	0.5%
Learning & Engagement	Not interested in school	5	2.5%
Conflict & Mobility	Nomadic lifestyle / frequent relocation / social stigma	3	1%

Among students who had never attended school (n = 212), access-related and environmental factors accounted for the largest share of reasons cited (97/212, 45.5%), with “no school nearby” (23%) and “school was far or unsafe” (17%) the two most frequently reported individual reasons. Socioeconomic factors (65/212, 31%), principally the unaffordability of education (10%) and the need to work (9%), formed the second-largest cluster of responses, followed by sociocultural reasons (33/212, 15.5%), of which cultural or family restriction (5%) and preference for madrasa or religious education (5%) were most prominent. Institutional & Administrative reasons were reported by 9/212 respondents (4.5%), Learning & Engagement reasons by 5/212 (2.5%), and Conflict & Mobility reasons by 3/212 (1%).

Table 4. Reasons for Dropping Out of School, by Category (n = 103; multiple responses permitted)

Category	Reason	F	%
Institutional & Administrative	Teachers didn't make lessons interesting	14	13.6%
	Corporal punishment at school	12	11.6%
	No support for learning needs	10	9.7%
	Didn't understand the language of instruction	7	6.8%
	No teachers in school	1	1%
Learning & Engagement	Not interested in school	15	14.5%
	Found studies difficult	7	6.8%
Access & Environment	School was far or unsafe	8	7.8%
	Fear of harassment on the way to school	3	2.9%
	No proper toilets or classrooms	2	2%
	School itself felt unsafe or unclean	1	1%
	Had to work and earn for the family	5	4.8%
Socioeconomic	Education was unaffordable	3	2.9%
	The family had financial issues	3	2.9%
	Had to do housework	2	2%
	No female teachers available	3	2.9%
Sociocultural	Culture/family did not allow attendance	2	2%
	Nomadic lifestyle	2	2%
Conflict & Mobility	Frequent relocation disrupted schooling	1	1%
	Conflict/ disaster displaced us	1	1%
		1	1%

Among students who had dropped out after enrolling (n = 103), institutional and administrative factors accounted for the largest share of reported reasons (44 citations, 42.7%), led by teachers failing to make lessons engaging (13.6%) and the use of corporal punishment (11.6%). Learning-related disengagement was the second most-cited cluster 22 citations, 21.4% overall, principally a lack of interest in school (14.5%). 13.7% of reasons cited were for access and 12.6% for socioeconomic reasons cited by dropout children. This pattern differs markedly from that

observed among students who had never attended school, where access-related barriers predominated; among those who dropped out, in-school experiential and institutional factors were considerably more prominent than physical access.

Table 5. Expected Barriers to Transitioning into Formal Schools (n = 315)

Category of Barrier	F	%
Access & Environmental	117	37.1%
Socioeconomic	94	29.8%
Sociocultural	79	25.1%
Institutional & Administrative	12	3.8%
Learning & Engagement	8	2.5%
Conflict & Mobility	5	1.6%
Total	315	100%

The categories of barriers respondents expected in transitioning from ALPs into formal schooling are set out in Table 5. Access and environmental barriers were the most frequently expected (37.1%), followed by socioeconomic barriers (29.8%) and sociocultural barriers (25.1%); institutional, learning-related, and conflict/mobility-related barriers together accounted for less than 8% of expected barriers.

4.1.1 Tests of the Study Hypotheses

H₀₁: Reasons for Exclusion, by Prior Schooling Status

A chi-square test of independence was conducted for each of the six reason categories to determine whether citation of that category differed between children who had never attended school (n = 212) and children who had dropped out after enrolling (n = 103). All six tests reached statistical significance, indicating that the profile of reasons differs markedly depending on whether a child's exclusion took the form of never enrolling or of enrolling and later leaving.

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests of Independence: Reason Category by Prior Schooling Status (N = 315)

Category	χ^2	df	P
Institutional & Administrative	103.60	1	< .001
Learning & Engagement	78.30	1	< .001
Access & Environment	30.47	1	< .001
Sociocultural	25.41	1	< .001
Socioeconomic	20.12	1	< .001
Conflict & Mobility	9.47	1	.002

Institutional & Administrative reasons showed the strongest association with prior schooling status ($\chi^2(1, N = 315) = 103.60, p < .001$), followed by Learning & Engagement ($\chi^2(1, N = 315) = 78.30, p < .001$) and Access & Environment ($\chi^2(1, N = 315) = 30.47, p < .001$). On this basis, H₀₁ is rejected: the reasons underlying exclusion differ significantly between children who never attended school and those who dropped out.

H₀₂: Equal Distribution of Reason Categories

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted on the combined citation counts across all six reason categories (N = 543 citations across 315 respondents, reflecting the multiple-response format) to determine whether categories were cited with equal frequency.

Table 7. Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Test: Distribution of Reason Categories (N = 543 citations)

Category	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Access & Environment	162	90.5	+71.5
Socioeconomic	123	90.5	+32.5
Sociocultural	92	90.5	+1.5
Institutional & Administrative	82	90.5	-8.5
Learning & Engagement	57	90.5	-33.5
Conflict & Mobility	27	90.5	-63.5
Total	543		

$\chi^2(5, N = 543) = 125.94, p < .001$.

The observed distribution departed sharply from the frequency expected under equal distribution (90.5 citations per category): $\chi^2(5, N = 543) = 125.94, p < .001$. Access & Environment (162 citations, +71.5 above the expected value) and Socioeconomic reasons (123 citations, +32.5 above expected) were cited well above what equal distribution would predict, while Conflict & Mobility (27 citations, -63.5 below expected) and Learning &

Engagement (57 citations, −33.5 below expected) fell well below it. H_{02} is therefore rejected: categories of reasons clearly predominate over others.

Interpretive note: because respondents could select more than one reason, the 543 citations analyzed here are not fully independent observations — a subset of the 315 respondents contributed more than one citation each. This is the correct basis for the test (rescaling the counts to sum to 315 would distort, rather than clarify, the true category pattern), but the non-independence means the result is best read as describing the shape of the response pattern across categories rather than as a strict independent-trials significance test. This is discussed further in the Limitations section.

H₀₃: Reasons for Exclusion versus Expected Barriers to Transition

McNemar tests, appropriate for paired categorical data drawn from the same respondents, were conducted for each of the six categories to compare whether a category cited as a reason for prior exclusion was also cited as an expected barrier to transition. The results were mixed.

Table 8. McNemar Tests: Reason for Exclusion vs. Expected Transition Barrier, by Category (N = 315)

Category	χ^2 (corrected)	P
Institutional & Administrative	52.90	< .001
Learning & Engagement	37.77	< .001
Access & Environment	11.59	.001
Socioeconomic	7.06	.008
Conflict & Mobility	15.75	< .001
Sociocultural	1.55	.213 (n.s.)

For five of the six reason categories, Institutional & Administrative, Learning & Engagement, Access & Environment, Socioeconomic, and Conflict & Mobility, the difference between a reason's role in prior exclusion and its role as an expected transition barrier was statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected for each. For the Sociocultural category, however, the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.55$, $p = .213$): sociocultural considerations appear with comparable weight at both the exclusion and expected-transition stages, rather than intensifying or receding significantly between the two. This is a genuinely mixed result for H_{03} rather than a uniform one: the null hypothesis is rejected for five of six categories but retained for the sociocultural category specifically.

A methodological caveat applies to the results in Tables 6 and 8. Because six separate significance tests were conducted under H_{01} and six under H_{03} without a formal correction for multiple comparisons (e.g., Bonferroni), the cumulative probability of at least one false-positive result across each family of tests is higher than the nominal .05 threshold implies. Applying a conservative Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = .05/6 = .0083$) does not change the substantive conclusions for H_{01} , where all p-values remain below this stricter threshold, nor for the non-significant Sociocultural result under H_{03} . It does mean that the Socioeconomic result under H_{03} ($p = .008$), while still below the corrected threshold, is closer to it than the uncorrected p-value alone suggests and should be interpreted with correspondingly greater caution.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Sixteen key informants, among them District Education Officers, District and Provincial Managers of the Education Support Program, education experts, and child rights activists, were interviewed to explain and contextualize the statistical patterns reported above. Their interviews were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure. Two sets of themes emerged, corresponding directly to the study's two central questions: why children become excluded from school to begin with, and what obstacles they encounter when moving from an ALP into a formal classroom.

4.2.1 Reasons for Out-of-School Status

Table 9. Key Themes on Reasons for Out-of-School Status

Theme	Prevalence Among Key Informants
Poverty and economic deprivation	Cited by virtually all key informants
Physical and geographical inaccessibility	Cited by a substantial number of key informants
Poor education quality and institutional failures	Cited by a large group of key informants
Social, cultural, and gender-based exclusion	Cited by a considerable number of key informants
Low parental awareness and educational prioritization	Cited by several key informants
Governance failures and structural neglect	Cited by a smaller group of key informants
Lack of basic school facilities and recurring disruptions	Cited by several key informants

Poverty and Economic Deprivation

Poverty was the reason nearly every key informant cited, though two described it in very different ways. One explained it as a catastrophic situation, where families are simply too consumed by daily survival for schooling to

matter. The other pointed to something more hopeful: a school meal program in Quetta that visibly pushed enrolment up, showing that even a barrier this severe can be loosened with the right support.

"Nearly 70% of the population is living below the poverty line, and poverty is the mother of all evils. Families struggle to meet even their basic needs. Parents cannot provide milk, food, nutrition, clothes, medicines, or treatment for their children. Malnutrition among children is common, while mortality and morbidity rates remain high. In such circumstances, education becomes a secondary concern for families struggling for survival." (KI 16)

"A successful example demonstrating the influence of social support interventions was the introduction of a one-time meal program in some schools of Quetta. Through this initiative, approximately 100,000 additional children were enrolled, indicating that food insecurity and poverty are significant barriers affecting school participation." (KI 1)

Physical and Geographical Inaccessibility

A substantial number of key informants pointed to Balochistan's size and terrain as a barrier that operates on its own, independent of poverty. What distinguishes their accounts is what exactly makes a school out of reach. One grounded the problem in the sheer physical absence of school buildings across thousands of settlements. The other is located instead in the seasonal and nomadic movement of entire communities, which disrupts schooling even in places where a school does exist.

"The geographical landscape of Balochistan, which covers approximately 347,190 square kilometers, further intensifies this issue. Recent data indicates that there are around 22,000 hamlets and settlements in the province, out of which schools are available in approximately 14,000, while nearly 8,000 hamlets still lack any school infrastructure." (KI 3)

"In remote areas, there are fewer schools, and those that exist often lack basic facilities. Many areas have nomadic populations, where children migrate seasonally, arriving in districts in April and returning to Sindh by the end of October, which disrupts continuity in education." (KI 5)

Poor Education Quality and Institutional Failures

A large group of key informants placed the blame for exclusion inside the school system itself, though they disagreed on where exactly the failure lies. One key informant described that low learning outcomes in school discourage both children and parents. One traced it to teacher shortages that erode parental confidence and push families toward child labour instead. A second offered a pointed comparison between madrassas and government schools, arguing that madrassas, despite far weaker infrastructure, sustain more consistent daily instruction, which is precisely why they retain community trust that government schools have lost. A third went further still, arguing that dropout after enrolment is not a matter of family choice at all but unambiguous evidence that the system has failed the child.

"Low learning outcomes in schools discourage both children and parents, as education is not perceived to deliver meaningful results. Children often lose interest due to boring classroom environments, inappropriate teacher behavior, and the use of corporal punishment. Structural issues such as single-teacher schools and weak monitoring systems further reduce educational quality." (KI 9)

"The incomplete delivery of the curriculum in schools, caused by vacant teacher positions and shortage of teaching staff, results in incomplete courses. Due to poor academic progress, parents lose confidence in schools. Some parents prefer sending their children to markets or labour activities rather than allowing them to continue in what they perceive as low-quality education." (KI 7)

"Madrassas operate in one or two rooms with one or two teachers, but they ensure regular teaching for up to three hours daily. The teaching-learning process actively takes place in madrassas, which builds community trust in madrasa education over formal schools. Government schools have buildings and teachers assigned, but teacher attendance remains a major issue." (KI 11)

"For children who drop out after enrolment, the education system itself is responsible. When a child enters school but later leaves, it reflects a failure of the system in retaining that child. The school system functions like a jail rather than a learning milieu. Children learn at different speeds, yet all are forced into the same rigid classroom structure." (KI 13)

Social, Cultural, and Gender-Based Exclusion

Social and cultural expectations, particularly as they bear on girls, were cited by a considerable number of key informants as an exclusionary force. The contrast between two accounts is instructive. One located the root of the problem in patriarchal control, arguing that families restrict girls' schooling to guard against any loss of authority over inheritance and household decisions. The other pointed to a distinct religious narrative that frames formal schooling itself as spiritually suspect, one that actively steers girls toward madrassas instead.

"The society in Balochistan is semi-feudal and deeply patriarchal. Many parents believe that if girls leave their homes for education, the family's respect and honor will be compromised. There is fear that if girls become educated, they will become aware of their inheritance rights and personal decision-making. Families fear that educated girls may demand their rightful share in property, which is perceived as dishonor for the family." (KI 14)

"Girls are increasingly being sent to madrassas because of religious influences and the narrative that worldly life

is temporary, while schools provide a Western education. There is clear segregation between sons and daughters in many families, and dropout rates are particularly high during the transition from primary to middle school." (KI 15)

Low Parental Awareness and Educational Prioritization

Several key informants raised a factor distinct from affordability altogether: whether families see continued schooling as worth pursuing at all. Their accounts diverge in what they identify as the cause. One tied the problem to the absence of any coherent government strategy alongside parental attitude. Another traced it instead to mismanagement inside the schools themselves, compounded by the number of school-age children many families are trying to educate at once. The sharpest departure came from a third key informant, who argued that what looks like a lack of awareness is often nothing of the sort, but a rational response from parents who can see for themselves that education has not delivered visible returns in their community.

"The major reasons for children never enrolling in schools are primarily associated with poverty, limited accessibility, parental attitudes, and lack of effective government interventions. At the policy level, the government has not yet developed a comprehensive and effective strategy to address the increasing dropout rate." (KI 2)

"Many parents have lost confidence in government schools due to concerns regarding educational standards, quality of teaching, and the overall learning environment. Population growth also contributes to the problem, as many families have multiple school-age children, making it difficult to manage educational expenses." (KI 4)

"Many parents have little trust in schools and teachers. Since the future of education appears uncertain and employment opportunities are limited, parents often question the value of sending children to school. Poor families observe their surroundings closely. They see unemployment, lack of healthcare, hunger, and the absence of basic services." (KI 16)

Governance Failures and Structural Neglect

A smaller but analytically important group of key informants moved the explanation away from households entirely and toward the state. One described in detail how tribal elites capture school buildings and budgets for their own use, leaving communities with schools that exist only on paper. The other located the same failure at a different level altogether, describing a teaching workforce that actively resists the accountability reforms, such as biometric attendance, meant to correct it.

"The major reason behind out-of-school children is the failure of the government to fulfil its responsibilities. Many schools in peripheral areas only exist on paper. Some school buildings are being used as guesthouses by influential tribal figures such as Khans, Nawabs, and Malaks. This is a give-and-take system between departments and influential figures." (KI 16)

"Ghost teachers are widespread, and corruption exists throughout the education system. Teachers resist reforms such as biometric attendance and monitoring systems. Administrative problems, tribal conflicts, lack of accountability, absence of merit, and non-transparent recruitment and budget utilization are major systemic failures forcing children, especially girls, to leave school." (KI 14)

Lack of Basic School Facilities and Recurring Disruptions

A further group of key informants pointed to chronic facility gaps that receive far less attention than they deserve. One tied the absence of functioning WASH facilities directly to girls being withdrawn from school. The other shifted attention to children with disabilities, arguing that the lack of ramps, adapted washrooms, and flexible provision excludes them outright rather than merely disadvantaging them, a problem made worse by a budget cycle so slow that a school's needs can change entirely before funding ever arrives.

"The lack of WASH facilities, particularly access to drinking water and functional washrooms, is a major issue in remote schools. Most schools do not have proper bathrooms, which discourages girls from attending school." (KI 5)

"Children with disabilities face severe challenges because schools lack wheelchairs, ramps, commode systems in washrooms, and flexible facilities for disabled students. As a result, many disabled children eventually drop out of school. Budget preparation begins in March, and schools submit their demand lists. The budget is approved in June, but by the time departmental procedures are completed, the process may continue until the following March." (KI 15)

4.2.2 Barriers to Transition from ALPs to Formal Schooling

Table 10. Key Themes on Barriers to Transition from ALPs to Formal Schooling

Theme	Prevalence Among Respondents
Poverty and economic constraints	Cited by most key informants

Physical distance and absence of nearby formal schools	Cited by a significant number of key informants
Weak coordination and undefined institutional responsibilities	Cited by several key informants
Social, cultural, and gender-specific barriers	Cited by a significant number of key informants
Academic unpreparedness and psychological challenges of transition	Cited by one key informant
Comfort-zone effect and low transition motivation	Cited by one key informant

Poverty and Economic Constraints

Poverty resurfaced here as the barrier most key informants cited first, though their accounts point to three different mechanisms at work. One described the same financial pressure that kept a child out of school in the first place simply reasserting itself the moment an ALP is completed. A second showed that poverty does not only block transition outright, but it also actively redirects children toward madrassas as a more affordable alternative, particularly where an ALP has no middle level extension to retain them. A third pointed to the compounding weight of registration procedures on top of affordability itself.

"The major barrier affecting the successful transition of ALP students is poverty and household financial constraints. In many cases, after completing ALP packages, parents still require support from their children to contribute to household income." (KI 7)

"Poverty also plays a significant role, as parents often prefer madrassa education due to its affordability. When ALP centers are upgraded to middle level, students tend to continue their education within ALPs. Otherwise, many parents shift their children to madrassas." (KI 12)

"Accessibility, affordability, and the complicated process of registration are certain barriers regarding transition." (KI 8)

Physical Distance and Absence of Nearby Formal Schools

A significant number of key informants described a structural contradiction built into the ALP model itself: centers are placed precisely in communities that lack schools, which often means no formal school exists nearby once a child is ready to move on. One key informant detailed this contradiction directly, alongside tribal tensions and harassment fears that compound it in certain districts. A second took a narrower view, tracing the same distance problem to a shortage of qualified teachers rather than to the absence of buildings alone.

"ALP centers are established in areas where government schools are not available. Despite efforts through School Development Projects, transition remains challenging due to the absence of nearby schools. Additional barriers include tribal enmities, which prevent children from travelling to nearby villages, and fear of harassment, particularly for girls. These issues are especially evident in districts such as Killa Abdullah and Chaman." (KI 11)

"Key barriers include the lack of well-qualified teachers in government schools and long distances to available schools. Limited access and infrastructure continue to hinder the transition." (KI 10)

Weak Coordination and Undefined Institutional Responsibilities

Several key informants identified a coordination gap as a barrier distinct from either poverty or distance. One placed the failure among specific actors, namely parents, teachers, the Education Support Program, and education authorities, whose respective responsibilities have never been clearly defined. The other framed the same absence more broadly still, arguing that the problem is not simply unclear roles but the complete absence of any government strategy for retention in the first place.

"The major challenge affecting the successful transition of ALP students is the lack of clearly defined responsibility regarding who should ensure the enrolment and mainstreaming of these children. There is no fully developed mechanism for monitoring whether they transition into formal schools." (KI 1)

"There is currently no comprehensive government strategy that effectively addresses retention and prevents children from leaving school. Poverty, distance, and limited accessibility continue to be the major barriers affecting successful transition and long-term educational continuation." (KI 2)

Social, Cultural, and Gender-Specific Barriers

A significant number of key informants highlighted barriers that compound the structural obstacles above specifically for girls. One linked overcrowded classroom and the absence of counselling directly to the risk of re-dropout, alongside the safety concerns and domestic expectations that weigh most heavily on girls. Another introduced a dimension the rest did not raise at all, namely age and cross-border mobility, showing that many ALP graduates are already overage by the time they reach transition, and that migration among Afghan refugee families disrupts continuity in ways entirely separate from gender.

"Overcrowded classrooms are one of the major challenges, particularly at the high school level. The absence of adequate counselling and additional academic support further increases the risk of re-dropping out. For girls, distance and safety concerns during travel to school are significant barriers. Traditional expectations regarding domestic responsibilities continue to influence girls' continuation in education." (KI 6)

"Many ALP students are overage, having missed initial schooling opportunities. Social factors also affect girls, including early marriages, although middle-level ALPs with skill development components attract some continued participation. Migration, particularly among Afghan refugees, further disrupts continuity." (KI 9)

Academic Unpreparedness and Psychological Challenges of Transition

One key informant raised a dimension of the transition barrier discussed far less often at the policy level, though significant in practice: the conceptual gaps left by an ALP's condensed curriculum, and the discouragement they produce once a graduate sits in a formal classroom without the additional support needed to close them.

"Since ALP follows a condensed curriculum, students may lack understanding of basic concepts in different subjects. When they enter formal schools, they experience differences in curriculum, teaching approaches, and learning environments. These changes can make students feel discouraged and develop a sense of inferiority compared to their classmates. The absence of adequate counselling and additional academic support further increases the risk of re-dropping out." (KI 6)

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Objectives and Prior Literature

This study set out to understand why children in the Quetta Division are out of school in the first place, and what stands between an ALP graduate and a lasting transition into formal schooling. Read side by side, the statistical results and the interview data point to a picture more layered than either would suggest on its own. At the aggregate level, exclusion looks like a story about poverty and distance. Access & Environment and Socioeconomic reasons dominated the overall citation counts, and the interviews bear this out: key informants described families forgoing school fees for food and medicine (KI 16) and noted that roughly 8,000 of Balochistan's 22,000 hamlets lack any school at all (KI 3), a pattern consistent with what Rumberger (2001) has argued about poverty-driven exclusion in comparable settings. This aggregate view, however, obscures an important distinction once the sample is split by prior schooling status. Institutional and administrative reasons: the weakest category overall produced by far the strongest association with dropout of the six categories examined, and the interviews explain why: children who never enrolled speak predominantly of distance and cost, while children who dropped out speak of teacher absenteeism, corporal punishment, and classrooms that felt punitive rather than supportive (KI 14). Never enrolling and dropping out thus appear to be driven by substantially different mechanisms, one governing whether a child enters school at all, the other governing whether a child who has entered stays. A distinction much of the wider ALP literature overlooks by treating out-of-school children as a single, undifferentiated group (Adams et al., 2009; Charlick, 2003; Menendez et al., 2016).

A related pattern emerges once children attempt to move from ALPs into formal schools. Five of the six reason categories differ significantly between the exclusion stage and the transition stage, indicating that the struggle to transition is not simply a continuation of the problem that kept a child out of school in the first place, but a separate challenge. This is consistent with research elsewhere showing that moving from a non-formal programme into a formal school constitutes a substantial adjustment rather than a procedural step (Bagnall et al., 2024; Mahruf et al., 2011). The interviews help explain why this transition proves so difficult. No single agency is clearly responsible for ensuring that ALP graduates enrol in, and remain at, a formal school, since the Education Support Programme and the Education Department lack a shared tracking mechanism (KI 1). ALP centres, moreover, are typically built precisely where a nearby formal school does not exist, leaving even a well-prepared graduate with nowhere to go (KI 11). And because ALPs deliver a necessarily faster, condensed curriculum, some graduates struggle once they reach formal school, arriving with gaps that leave them feeling behind classmates who progressed through the standard six-year system (KI 6).

The category that breaks from this pattern, and arguably the most instructive result in the study, is Sociocultural constraint, which showed no significant difference between the exclusion stage and the transition stage. The interviews suggest why: concerns about girls' safety, family honour, and community expectations that keep girls from enrolling in the first place (KI 14) recur in almost identical terms as reasons they later fail to transition, compounded in some districts by tribal restrictions on travel (KI 11). Some of the transition literature reports gendered barriers intensifying specifically at the point of transition (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994; Shami & Hussain, 2006); the present findings suggest instead that sociocultural constraint does not spike at either stage it remains with a child across the entire pathway, which may make it harder to address than the other five categories, since there is no single point at which a targeted intervention could be aimed.

4.3.2 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

Taken together, these findings suggest that exclusion in Balochistan is not the product of a single factor, but of several distinct problems surfacing at different stages of a child's schooling. Poverty and physical access largely determine whether a child enters school at all; institutional quality, teacher conduct, discipline, and curriculum delivery largely determine whether a child who has entered stays; and sociocultural constraint sits beneath both, comparatively constant, shaping outcomes for girls regardless of where they are on that path. The ALP model in Balochistan appears to be functioning well by its own measure, drawing children back into structured learning and carrying them through a condensed curriculum, with thousands of graduates and a meaningful share moving on into formal schools (Batezai & Kiazai, 2022). What the qualitative evidence indicates, however, is that the model

does comparatively little to resolve the institutional and sociocultural barriers still standing on the far side of that success, and that some features of its own design centres built in underserved areas, a fast-paced curriculum, and proximity to home may inadvertently make the move into formal school harder rather than easier once a child is ready for it. For policy and practice, this points toward two distinct sets of interventions rather than a single expanded ALP model. Continued investment in physical access and school quality remains necessary to reduce non-enrollment, but on its own it will do little to resolve the institutional failures driving dropout, or the sociocultural constraints that persist across the entire pathway. A formal, resourced transition mechanism linking ALP centres, the Education Department, and receiving schools something the present findings suggest does not yet meaningfully exist together with sustained, pathway-wide attention to gender- and culture-related barriers, would be a necessary complement to continued investment in access, if accelerated learning is to translate more consistently into lasting formal-school enrollment. These implications are developed into specific recommendations in Section 5.2.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to achieve two objectives: to identify the reasons behind children's exclusion from school prior to their enrollment in Accelerated Learning Programmes, and to examine the barriers expected in their subsequent transition into formal schooling, within the Quetta Division of Balochistan. Against the first objective, the evidence shows that exclusion is not a uniform phenomenon: access and environmental barriers, above all the physical absence of a nearby school, dominate among children who never attended, while institutional and administrative failures, above all teacher absenteeism and punitive discipline, dominate among those who dropped out after enrolling; and the overall distribution of reasons for exclusion is far from uniform, concentrated instead in access-related and socioeconomic categories. Against the second objective, the transition from ALP into formal schooling was found to involve a largely distinct set of expected barriers rather than a simple continuation of earlier exclusion reasons, with one notable exception: sociocultural constraint, which showed no significant difference in its weight between the exclusion and transition stages, indicating that it operates as a persistent, structural barrier rather than one tied to a specific point in a child's educational progress. Overall, these findings indicate that ALPs, while a valuable and evidently functioning response to Balochistan's out-of-school crisis, cannot on their own resolve the transition challenge; sustained, targeted attention to institutional quality, physical access, and the persistently stable barrier posed by sociocultural norms will be necessary if accelerated learning is to translate more consistently into lasting formal-school enrollment.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below are organized around the study's two objectives, followed by one cross-cutting recommendation that applies across both stages of a child's educational progress.

5.2.1 Addressing the Reasons for Out-of-School Status

- i. Establish new schools, ALP centres, and temporary learning spaces in the estimated 8,000 hamlets in Balochistan that currently have none, paired with transport support for children who live too far to walk safely.
- ii. In settlements where government capacity alone is insufficient to establish new schools, pursue public-private partnership models, drawing on private-sector and non-governmental resources to expand infrastructure and staffing beyond what the public system can deliver unaided.
- iii. Where middle or high schools lie at a considerable distance and no separate provision exists for girls and boys, existing government primary school premises should be used for middle-level education on a two-shift basis, with one sex attending in the morning and the other in the afternoon. In areas where only a single-sex primary school is currently available, the same premises should likewise be shared across both shifts, so that the absence of nearby, gender-appropriate schooling no longer compounds distance as a barrier to continued enrollment.
- iv. Map out-of-school children in each locality before opening new provision, so that new schools and ALP centres match demonstrated need rather than administrative convenience.
- v. Evaluate any pilot mosque-based provision arising from the recommendation above, examining both learning outcomes and community reception.
- vi. In the roughly 8,000 hamlets of Balochistan states mentioned in this study as lacking any school infrastructure, the mosque already functions informally as the only shared, structurally sound, and trusted community space a pattern reflected in this study's finding that families in such areas often turn to madrasa-based religious education by default, rather than necessarily by preference (Section 4.2.1). Building on this existing trust, the Education Department, in partnership with mosque committees and local community and religious leadership, could explore a voluntary, locally negotiated arrangement making mosque premises available on a scheduled basis for supplementary literacy and numeracy instruction, delivered by government-supported itinerant teachers. Given that mosques in Balochistan are typically held as community or waqf property rather than government or private assets, any such arrangement should remain strictly consultative and voluntary, initiated through dialogue with religious and community leadership rather than administrative directive, and should serve as an interim access point pending the construction of a permanent school or ALP center, rather than as a substitute for one.

- vii. Link education to existing social protection programmes, stipends, and scholarship support covering stationery, uniforms, transport, and meals, so that cost stops being the reason a child never starts school.
- viii. Prioritize teacher accountability, the reduction of punitive discipline, and improved instructional quality alongside infrastructure investment, since institutional failure, not access, is the dominant driver of dropout among children who have already enrolled.
- ix. Establish a formal government policy assigning clear responsibility for the ALP-to-formal-school transition, supported by a single, real-time tracking system that follows each child across government schools, private schools, madrassas, and non-formal programmes alike.
- x. Resource receiving formal schools to provide brief bridging or orientation support, and access to basic counselling, for incoming ALP graduates during their first term, given that academic unpreparedness following a condensed curriculum was identified as a distinct risk factor for re-dropout after transition.
- xi. Sustain pathway-wide sociocultural and gender-focused awareness work, including door-to-door engagement with local leaders and child-led peer-encouragement clubs within schools, as a necessary complement to the access- and institution-focused recommendations above.
- xii. Any such arrangement should remain strictly consultative and voluntary, recognizing that mosques in Balochistan are typically held as community or waqf property rather than government or private assets; it should be initiated through dialogue with religious and community leadership rather than administrative directive, and should function as an interim access point pending the construction of a permanent school or ALP centre, rather than as a substitute for one.
- xiii. Adopt a longitudinal design capable of tracking whether the transition barriers identified here as expected are, in practice, the barriers ALP graduates encounter.
- xiv. Extend this study should be replicated in Balochistan's other divisions to determine whether the patterns identified here also hold elsewhere in the province, given its considerable ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity. Such replication would allow future policy responses to be tailored to each division's specific circumstances, rather than generalized from evidence limited to Quetta Division alone.

4.4 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations qualify the findings reported above.

1. The cross-sectional design captures expected, rather than realized, transition barriers; whether these barriers materialize once students attempt to enrol in formal school was not tracked, and a longitudinal follow-up would be needed to confirm that expected and realized barriers coincide.
2. The questionnaire's multiple-response format means the category-level frequencies in Tables 3 through 5 are not mutually exclusive counts of individual students; comparisons across tables should be read as comparisons of citation patterns rather than of discrete, non-overlapping subgroups.
3. For the same reason, the 543 citations analyzed under the H_{02} goodness-of-fit test (Table 7) are not fully independent of one another, since some respondents contributed citations to more than one category; the result is best read as describing the overall shape of the response pattern rather than as a strict test on independent trials.
4. Six separate significance tests were conducted under each of H_{01} and H_{03} without a formal correction for multiple comparisons; the Socioeconomic result under H_{03} ($p = .008$) lies closer to a conservative, Bonferroni-corrected threshold than the uncorrected p-value suggests and should be read with greater caution, although substantive conclusions elsewhere are unaffected.
5. The achieved sample's gender composition departed modestly from the proportionate sampling target, for reasons of fieldwork substitution discussed in Section 3.2; the shift is small relative to the total sample but is worth bearing in mind in any gender-disaggregated reading of the results.
6. The qualitative phase relied exclusively on 16 purposively sampled key informants occupying institutional or programmatic roles; the perspectives of parents and children themselves were not directly incorporated, and future research eliciting these perspectives directly would meaningfully complement the institutional viewpoint offered here.
7. The study was confined to the Quetta Division; while its four districts capture meaningful variation within the division, the findings should not be generalized to Balochistan without further research in the province's other divisions.

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7. Author Declaration

The authors declare that this manuscript is original work, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Ethical approval and informed consent procedures for this study are described in Section 2.4.

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