

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND UNHCR IN PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

Khizer Hayat¹, Benafsha Ahmadi², R. Alpha Amirrachman³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia, Indonesia

Email Correspondence: khizer.hayat@uiii.ac.id

ABSTRACT:

Despite efforts by the government of Pakistan and the UNHCR to establish formal regulations and educational programs for Afghan refugee children, the results are mixed and unclear. On the one hand, these actions resulted in the enrollment of about 56,000 Afghan students and the placement of some refugee children in public schools. Meanwhile, overall enrollment fell from 55% in 2019-2020 to 18% in 2022-2023, demonstrating that, while legal and strategic frameworks exist, operational gaps, resource constraints, and cultural barriers continue to inhibit their effectiveness. This study aims to find out what the Pakistan's government and UNHCR do within their legal frameworks and techniques to help Afghan refugees continue their education, and why the program is problematic. This research consider the Pakistan government's and UNHCR's legislative frameworks for expanding educational access for Afghan refugees and the implementation of these initiatives. The investigation examines UNHCR and government records to understand their service delivery goals. Economic concerns, school overcrowding, unequal opportunities for genders, and a lack of resources prevent children from achieving optimal growth. This study demonstrates that high-quality interventions, coordinated planning at all levels, and ongoing support enable Afghan refugees to receive a good education in their host nation. The study proposes improving education and making refugees feel more welcome in the Pakistani educational society.

Keywords: *Afghan Refugees, Educational Equity, Human Rights-Based Approach, Policy Implementation, UNHCR and Pakistan*

Article Info

Received	:	23 January 2025
Accepted	:	06 May 2025
Published	:	11 July 2025
DOI	:	https://doi.org/10.30872/psd.v6i2.147

Copyright and License

Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgment of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.



1. INTRODUCTION

Civil disputes, violent confrontations, persecution, natural disasters, and insufficient financial resources for survival exacerbate the global refugee crisis. The UNHCR (2023) states that a refugee must leave their nation of origin due to conflict, persecution, or danger. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports 49.4 million refugees globally, with individuals under 18 constituting over half of this population. Afghanistan produces a greater number of refugees than all other countries combined.

Prolonged conflict in Afghanistan has led to the displacement of millions of Afghans, who are now seeking asylum in neighbouring nations such as Iran, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. UNHCR (2024) anticipates that the global population of Afghan refugees would reach 6.4 million by the conclusion of 2023. Millions of Afghan refugees reside in Pakistan, which shares a 2,430 km (1,640 miles) border along Afghanistan's southern and eastern peripheries (Al Jazeera, 2021). This nation is classified as a lower-middle-income country, with an approximate population of 247 million (World Bank, 2023), and hosts 3.7 million Afghan refugees. Fifty per cent of them are under the age of 18. This estimate includes registered refugees, Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, unregistered members of registered families, undocumented Afghans, and new immigrants not accounted for in the official tally (UNHCR, 2023; UNHCR, 2022).

Research indicates that Afghan migration commenced in the 1970s, prompted by civil unrest that compelled numerous Afghans to relocate to Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and FATA regions. Afghan refugees are presently distributed among 54 villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, and Punjab, in addition to the capitals Peshawar and Quetta of KP and Balochistan, respectively (UNESCO, 2023).

The influx of refugees in Pakistan escalated significantly after the 9/11 attacks, when the United States and its allies initiated military action against the Taliban administration in Afghanistan. By the conclusion of 2001, five million Afghans had relocated to Pakistan (Khan, 2016). Following the ascendance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to power, numerous Afghans repatriated. After the collapse of the Islamic Republic in 2021 and the resurgence of the Taliban, the influx of migrants escalated significantly, totalling millions across several countries, predominantly in neighbouring Pakistan. Kumar (2023) reports that around 3.6 million Afghans departed the country between 2021 and 2022 as a result of the persistent humanitarian crisis. Afghan refugees face significant social and economic challenges following their evacuation from their homeland. They have mostly curtailed access to essential human rights, such as education for their children.

Education is essential for all individuals, including refugees and other displaced persons. It is crucial in shaping the future of refugee children and can enhance the lives of those who can access it (Thomas, 2016). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) asserts that "everyone possesses the right to education." Numerous other international human rights instruments also emphasise this. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination is the inaugural legally binding global agreement specifically addressing the right to education, guaranteeing compulsory education without discrimination and promoting equal educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2024). Moreover, Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda emphasises education, aiming to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." (United Nations, 2015). This Sustainable Development Goal emphasises that all individuals, irrespective of gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability, migratory status, Indigenous heritage, vulnerability, refugee status, childhood, or youth, must have access to lifelong learning opportunities. Moreover, international agreements establish minimum standards for the care of refugees. For instance, examine the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees emphasises the significance of minimum standards for refugee treatment. Article 22 underscores the importance of refugee education, stipulating that Contracting States must afford refugees the same educational treatment as nationals for elementary education. No less favourable treatment than that accorded to other foreign nationals for education beyond the elementary level, encompassing access to studies, recognition of qualifications, fee waivers, and scholarships (UNHCR 1951).

Notwithstanding these regulations, refugee education continues to be a significant global issue. A poll indicates that 48% of refugee children are out of school (UNHCR, 2024). Refugee children face restricted access to all tiers of education, encompassing elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. UNHCR (2024) reports that data from 40 countries indicate that 42% of refugees are enrolled in preschool, 68% in primary education, 37% in secondary education, and 6% in further education.

Regarding Pakistan, Afghan refugee children face challenges in accessing education. The data, collected from Turkey, Pakistan, Uganda, Sudan, Iraq, and Ethiopia, shows that Pakistan had the lowest gross enrollment rate of refugees in 2022-23 among these countries. There was a sharp decrease in gross enrolment in Pakistan from 55 per cent in 2019-2020 to 18 per cent in 2022-23 (UNHCR, 2024). It is indicated that 70 per cent of Afghan refugees have no education (UNHCR, 2022). However, the Pakistan government and the UNHCR have made several attempts to implement initiatives and strategies aiming to provide educational opportunities for Afghan refugee children. This paper aims to find what initiatives the Pakistan government and UNHCR implemented to provide educational opportunities for Afghan refugees and identify the challenges of providing educational opportunities for refugee children.

The study will contain the following research questions:

1. What legal framework and strategies have the government of Pakistan and UNHCR implemented to promote educational access for Afghan refugees?
2. What are the challenges of the government of Pakistan and UNHCR's framework in providing educational access to Afghan refugees?

The study aims to explore the legal framework and strategies the government of Pakistan and UNHCR implemented to promote educational access for Afghan refugees and to identify the key challenges faced by the Pakistan government and UNHCR in providing educational access to Afghan refugees. Furthermore, this study will improve our understanding of educational accessibility for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. This article explores the government of Pakistan legal frameworks and the UNHCR's strategies for solving this critical issue. According to research, implementation challenges are caused by financial restrictions, cultural opposition, and poor administrative procedures. The detailed research findings help the Government of Pakistan (Ministry of Education), international organisations (UNICEF, UNHCR), donors, and national and international NGOs better understand Afghan refugees' educational challenges, improving awareness of this critical issue. The findings lay the groundwork for improving and ensuring the long-term viability of educational systems. Human rights norms must be implemented alongside policy initiatives and capacity-

building instruments to ensure that refugee children may fully participate in education and contribute to their social groups. This study adds to worldwide refugee education knowledge by addressing Pakistan's educational challenges and opportunities. Improving refugee education requires increased coordination between institutions and governments, committed funding, and cultural understanding. The research aims to guarantee fair access to education for all persons, promoting inclusivity throughout society, which aligns with Global Development Goal 4.

The right to education for refugees is established in various international documents, most notably the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Edwards, 2005). However, refugee education faces numerous challenges (Morrice, 2021). According to Shebl et al. (2024), as stated by UNHCR in 2024, fifty per cent of refugee children are not enrolled in schools, one-third are in secondary education, and only one-sixth are studying in universities. Similarly, Tazin et al (2023) stated that the ACLU claims that the average school enrollment rate of refugee children in low-income countries is lower than that of the host country. These figures suggest that policy measures and educational reforms can be more effective in increasing refugee education, especially in addressing the limited resources of the affected regional education systems. In a 2024 report, UNHCR shows that refugees entering local schools benefit everyone by strengthening community bonds and producing new career paths. Nations must work together to fix global education deficiencies in refugee-hosting areas while addressing teacher and facility problems.

Currently, 85% of all refugees are hosted in low-income countries (UNHCR, 2023), further worsening the challenges facing their already strained education systems. In Pakistan, refugee classrooms can have more than 70 students per teacher, significantly higher than the optimal ratio of 40:1 (Van Esveld et al., 2023). Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2018), three-quarters of low-income refugee children are transitioning to secondary education. A UNHCR study from 2024 shows that less than 1 in 20 refugees worldwide attend university-level programs. All countries hosting refugees must join forces with global assistance groups and UN organisations to make education available to everyone at every school level. These findings call for sustained foreign investment to strengthen host countries.

The world recognises education as a basic human right through the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and SDG Goal 4, which makes education available and fair to every person. Refugee children in Pakistan and those from Afghanistan encounter major obstacles when trying to get an education despite international agreements. Afghan refugee children now make up only 18% of Pakistan school enrollment in 2022-2023, according to UNHCR, despite global education promises. Refugee education faces obstacles from poverty and traditional social barriers, as well as serious problems of crowded schools and inadequate facilities. Studies show that including refugee students in national schools helps refugee populations and local communities build stronger connections while creating more job opportunities. However, practical adoption faces barriers from a lack of funds and missing policies (UNESCO, 2023; UNHCR, 2023b).

As of 2018, Turkey had recorded millions of Syrian refugees and had made significant progress in enrolling refugee children in Turkish schools through the Temporary Protection System program (Dolapcioglu & Bolat, 2021). (Ozlem, 2023) stated that by 2022, 730,000 Syrian students are expected to enrol in schools in Turkey to address the shortages, of which only 63% are currently enrolled. Nevertheless, life transitions remain a concern due to linguistic disparities and insufficient resources for modern education. In contrast, Lebanon's shift system has successfully enrolled 40% of school-age Syrian refugees (Metni, 2022). However, it has been criticised for overburdening public schools and undermining educational standards. These two examples prove that global partnerships with focused financial support help improve refugee students' educational access equally. The narratives below highlight the importance of using context-sensitive strategies in managing refugee education.

1. Mahmood (2022) indicated that most Afghan refugee families in Pakistan live below the poverty line of \$2 per person per day, making it difficult for them to afford transportation, books, and uniforms. According to Shah et al. (2020), refugee children in Pakistan face a 40 per cent dropout rate as financial constraints affect men and women differently. Government programs for refugee education show unequal benefits for female students because of their limited availability, as Malick et al. (2024) reported. Butt found that family budget constraints push households to pick male education over female education thus keeping gender inequality alive in schools. This evidence indicates the need for specific financial support strategies to enhance educational sustainability.
2. Cultural norms, particularly gender inequality, exacerbate educational disparities (Abbas & Smith, 2023). Butt, (2024). found that 48% of Afghan refugee girls in Pakistan drop out of school due to early marriage or domestic labour—the Global Report of the World Health Organisation (2022), similarly indicated that cultural barriers hinder female school attendance, resulting in a 27 per cent gender gap in enrollment. Culturally relevant approaches are needed to address these disparities, including community engagement and gender mainstreaming initiatives (Malick et al., 2024). Malick et al. (2024) explain that active community participation and gender equity projects are essential to solving problems in

educational access between boys and girls. Cultural traditions also block girls from getting an education by making parents oppose mixed-gender schools, according to Radhouane in 2023. Evidence from low-income refugee-affected countries demonstrates that modifying school programs to be fair for boys and girls increases participation rates, especially for girls (Van Esvel, 2023).

3. The government of Pakistan and UNHCR teams have launched educational measures for Afghan refugees, including strict primary schooling requirements and the implementation of BESP's Education Sector Plan. The system of Pakistan faces several persistent problems because domestic laws do not fully protect refugees while the country rarely follows its global treaty responsibilities to support children's rights (Malick et al., 2024; Butt, 2024). Academic studies show that better education results require solid policies plus more money, combined with respectful strategies that solve long-term and quick obstacles for Afghan refugees in Pakistan to learn. This follows global requests for nations to collaborate on specific education plans for displaced people (Piper et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2023b).

The complexity of the issues discussed in this article are well documented in the literature, particularly regarding the education of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Despite the adoption of international legislation regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities, evidence indicates that economic, cultural, and systemic barriers to education remain. The practical impact of education varies even when examined through the lens of human rights or entitlement theories. Research on refugee education systems in Turkey and Lebanon directs us toward policy developments that are effective and locally relevant. Research findings highlight the importance of developing specific programs that address education accessibility and quality issues in order to promote social inclusion for all students. A refugee is a person who is compelled to leave their own country due to persecution, conflict, or violence. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 49.4 million refugees worldwide, with more than half under 18 (UNHCR, 2024). Afghans form one of the world's largest refugee populations.

A theoretical framework guides our research design, allowing us to operate and understand data sets effectively. This foundation is necessary for research because it provides a standard structure for investigating and comprehending the primary research subject. A theoretical framework is created by selecting relevant concepts that describe a study issue, allowing scholars to understand all elements of it. A comprehensive framework assists researchers as they select study locations, define research techniques, and interpret research findings (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Theories describe the steps the government of Pakistan took in collaboration with UNHCR to improve education for Afghan refugees and the challenges encountered during the implementation process (Nateghi, 2024). Three complementary theoretical frameworks are used to attain the study's goals: policy implementation theory, the human rights-based approach (HRBA), and the capacity approach.

1. Anis et al. (2023) determined that both the theory of policy implementation and the linear model can aid in comprehending the process of policy execution. The theory elucidates the mechanisms via which the Pakistan government and UNHCR officials execute their policies, highlighting the available policy measures and the constraints that regulate them. Our methodology must assess the effectiveness of educational objectives and their framework while considering the contributions of diverse stakeholders in school administration. It should also examine how governance issues and insufficient resources hinder the establishment of new schools. Our framework enables the evaluation of policy implementation and provides recommendations for enhancing its efficacy. The theory asserts that low funding and weak systems hinder the implementation of educational initiatives for Afghan refugees. Agencies should partner with supplementary training programs to eradicate learning obstacles, ensuring uniform learning opportunities for all individuals.
2. Pantzerhielm (2023) states that the HRBA issue centres on the right to education, as established in international human rights treaties, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. Government policies and operational actions must adhere to fair standards, without discrimination, and with transparent accountability. The framework promotes human rights education access by acknowledging education's essential relevance, refugees' decision-making power, and the responsibilities of organisations and governments to provide education. The HRBA analysis examines how the UNHCR and the government engage on IHRL despite significant variances from international best practices. The government's education policies do not adequately promote the Human Rights-Based Approach because refugee girls are treated differently from their peers. According to HRBA standards, businesses should create tracking systems to bridge the gap between policy objectives and reality. We require this view to examine methods that support Sustainable Development Goal 4 through fair education opportunities for every member of society.

3. Amartya Sen's capability viewpoint emphasises the significance of freedom in enhancing individuals' functioning via education. It includes all aspects of an individual's resources and inputs, as well as their output and potential. This viewpoint enhances individuals' capacity to attain their preferred lifestyles, accomplish practical goals like literacy and social inclusion, make significant decisions, and engage meaningfully in society. This study employs a capability framework to assess whether educational programs enhance the skills of Afghan refugees, elucidate their function in social and economic integration, and examine the inequalities in educational access and their effects on refugees' capacities (Givheart, 2024). This view shows how giving people essential abilities helps them find solutions beyond their power so that they can become independent. It explains how people's choices connect with organisational settings to create results. We can better understand education challenges through the capability approach and develop specific steps to make learning available and balanced across all groups.

Theoretical frameworks direct research endeavours by amalgamating theories from diverse disciplines to enhance the exploration of a particular subject. Applying these three frameworks provides a unique viewpoint on educational initiatives for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. As a comprehensive approach, policy implementation theory analyses effects and acknowledges practical limitations. A human rights-based approach guarantees that refugees' right to education complies with legal and ethical standards. A competency approach is more client-focused, highlighting the transforming effect of education in enabling choice and engagement. These frameworks offer a robust theoretical basis for tackling research inquiries and formulating practical suggestions for policymakers, stakeholders, and international organisations educating Afghan refugees. The study's theoretical approach studies how education promotes social justice by focusing on marginalised groups, especially Afghan refugees in Pakistan. By blending various theories, we gain deeper insight into how policy measures, rights protections, and empowerment work. This framework connects academic knowledge to practical solutions that promote educational equality and inclusivity.

2. METHOD

In this research study, a qualitative research methodology was used because it is appropriate for conducting research on the legalities of providing education to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as well as the strategies and areas of implementation for facilitating access to education for such individuals. The qualitative approach will allow for a thorough understanding of the policy documents and practices at that specific institution, which aligns with the research goal of studying what the government and UNHCR are doing to provide access to education and the challenges that both organisations face (Creswell, 2011). Document analysis served as the primary information source for this investigation. This approach was selected because it makes it possible to conduct a methodical examination of legislative and policy papers, which are crucial for assessing how institutions have responded to refugee education. The best choice was the qualitative analysis component, which included documents, because the nature of the concerns generated by the research questions demanded a thorough study of legal and strategic information, not just a numerical value.

The sources analysed were official reports, national educational policies, international legislation, UNHCR strategy and planning documents, and planning tools. According to UNHCR Global Trends Reports (2022, 2023), the number of refugees is predicted to be up to 24 million, while the number of displaced people is estimated to be up to 57 million, indicating one of its uncertainties. Balochistan Education Sector Plan (2020–2025). Pakistan's constitution, legislation, UN agreements, and protocols on refugee rights and education. The documents were selected based on relevance, credibility, and recent publication to capture data validity.

The information was obtained by accessing internet resources, such as the official websites of UNHCR, UNESCO, the Government of Pakistan, and academic databases. Thematic analysis was programmed in the collected texts by the step-by-step model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Data acquaintance
2. Production of the first codes
3. The seeking of themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Naming and characterising themes
6. Generation of report

The data-driven analysis produced deductive and inductive themes that were informed by research questions and theoretical frameworks. This hybrid methodology is based on both the theory and the substance of the texts. To increase credibility, triangulation was used, which involved cross-referencing themes across sources (including government policy texts, UNHCR reports, and international human rights treaties).

Production and authorship were verified. The researchers tried to ensure dependability by employing the same analytical process throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Initiatives and strategies implemented by Pakistan and UNHCR*

This section outlines the legal frameworks and strategies implemented by the government of Pakistan and UNHCR. Firstly, all legal frameworks and policies of the Pakistan Government regarding education for refugees, identified through the documentary analysis, are explained to highlight the government's efforts to ensure access to education for Afghan refugee children and young people. Secondly, the strategies and policies implemented by UNHCR are thoroughly discussed. This section addresses the first research question, which focuses on the legal frameworks, strategies, and policies put in place by both the government and UNHCR to ensure that Afghan refugees have access to education.

3.1.1 *Pakistan government's legal framework and policies*

Pakistan, the world's fourth-largest refugee host country after Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Colombia (UNHCR, 2022a), has been hosting millions of Afghan residents since the 1970s. The education of refugee children was a serious challenge, requiring tremendous attention and concentration to address their requirements. Pakistan is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. Furthermore, the government has not built a domestic legal framework to safeguard refugees and asylum seekers (UNESCO, 2018). However, the government of Pakistan has implemented many legal frameworks and regulations to ensure that refugees can access the country's primary, secondary, and higher education.

One important legal framework driving the government's integration of Afghan refugee children into Pakistan's national education system is the country's commitment to international legal responsibilities. The government has adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires nations to gradually make primary education free and compulsory for all, while also ensuring that secondary education is available and accessible to all children (article 28). Pakistan's international obligations require the country to give education not only to its residents but also to Afghan refugee children. On the other hand, Pakistan ratified the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Covenant, which requires the state to provide free and obligatory primary education and accessible secondary education to all students (Article 13). However, Pakistan has not ratified any Convention or Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee Education (UNESCO, 2018). However, the government created a new National Policy for Afghan Refugees in 2013. The draft refugee law, which outlines refugees' legal status, rights, and obligations under Pakistan's current domestic legal framework, has yet to be released in detail (Zetter & Ruadel, 2016). The absence of national legal frameworks and policies addressing refugee rights has limited Afghan refugees' access to education.

Their constitutions provide another important legal basis for the government's integration of Afghan refugee children into Pakistan's national education system. Pakistan's Constitution (1973) highlights the right to free education for all children aged 5 to 16 (Article 25). According to Nicolle (2019), this constitutional provision ensures that all Pakistani children, regardless of background, have access to an education. This constitution also outlines the rights to Secondary and Higher Secondary School Certificates (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, in 2012, the constitution of Pakistan was revised to make education compulsory for all girls and boys aged five to sixteen, regardless of gender, nationality, or race. This regulation assures that foreigners and refugees do not face barriers to education. This legal framework allows Afghan refugees to attend government schools with a legitimate birth certificate (Zetter & Ruadel, 2016). Similarly, according to Pakistan, the National Assembly of Islamabad states, "every child, regardless of sex, nationality, or race, shall have a fundamental right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school" (National Assembly Secretariat 2012). This means that Afghan refugees have the right to an education. Furthermore, the BESP plans (2020-2025) outlined strategies for Afghan refugee children, such as using Dari and Pashto textbooks, improving school conditions, increasing enrollment (particularly for girls), and providing quotas in secondary and higher education (Balochistan Education Sector Plan, 2020).

3.1.2 *UNHCR initiatives and strategies*

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), established in 1950, is an agency of the United Nations with the authority to lead international efforts in protecting refugees and addressing refugee issues worldwide (UNHCR, n.g). One of the key priorities of UNHCR is ensuring that refugee children and youth have access to quality education (UNHCR, n.g). It has actively advocated and supported the implementation of the right to education for refugee children globally. Afghan refugees have been a central

focus of their efforts for many decades. The UNHCR has developed several educational strategies to support and give access to Afghan refugee education in Pakistan.

One of the objectives of the education strategies of UNHCR was the enactment of refugee laws by the government of Pakistan. Refugee laws can considerably impact refugees' access to education and opportunities for further development. Refugees face significant challenges accessing the country's education system without clear legal frameworks. Pakistan has no domestic legal framework for protecting refugees (UNHCR, 2018). To establish such frameworks, UNHCR has advocated for refugee rights with federal and provincial government officials across various ministries in Pakistan in 2021. However, progress on its adoption has been delayed due to the country's political instability and security concerns (UNHCR, 2022).

Another key educational strategy objective of UNHCR is to integrate Afghan refugees into Pakistan's national education system. The organisation is dedicated to creating an environment that enables Afghan refugees to access inclusive, equitable, and quality education throughout their educational journey, including lifelong learning opportunities in national and public schools and Refugee Villages whenever feasible (UN Partner Portal, 2025). UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Federal Education, and provincial education departments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Punjab to enhance refugee educational access. With support from UNHCR, by the end of the year, 56,594 primary and secondary students were enrolled in school, with focused efforts to improve access to secondary education, particularly for girls (UNHCR, 2022). However, the number of student refugee children is considerably low, and including refugees in national education systems remains a significant issue, as the lack of incentives for the state often limits efforts to ensure their inclusion (UN Partner Portal, 2025). This study sheds light on the legal frameworks and strategies implemented by the Pakistan Government and UNHCR, as well as the challenges these two institutions face in improving educational opportunities for Afghan refugees and guaranteeing appropriate education. The discourse places these findings within the theoretical frameworks used in the study: policy implementation theory, human rights-based approach (HRBA), and competency approach. Theories and frameworks will be analysed.

3.2 A review of programs initiated by the government of Pakistan and UNHCR

Government of Pakistan has several national and international legal frameworks, and UNHCR has strategies to reduce educational disparities among Afghan refugees. These provision includes refugee educational institutions and integration measures that help former students integrate into the local education system. Nevertheless, their efforts have faced challenges. Despite the specified goals and objectives, even the most basic activities are hampered by a variety of hurdles, including a lack of funding, bureaucratic processes, and inadequate inter-agency collaboration, such as the enrollment of Afghan refugee children in Pakistan. The fall in rate, from 55% in 2019-2020 to 18% in 2022-2023 (UNHCR, 2024), demonstrates the flaws and hurdles in implementing policies at the national level and a lack of resources. Moreover, the Human Rights Bar Association underscores the ethical and legal dimensions of these endeavours. Pakistan's political and humanitarian accommodation of millions of Afghan refugees over the decades is unmatched by most nations; however, as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it lacks substantial legal frameworks to safeguard refugees and their rights, especially concerning education. This disparity sustains systemic imbalances, particularly affecting female students, due to cultural and gender prejudice (Yanan et al., 2019). These results align with global data indicating that merely 37% of refugee children worldwide access secondary school (UNHCR, 2024).

3.3 Challenges and barriers

The study has defined many economic, cultural, and systemic impediments that influence the efficacy of educational initiatives for Afghan refugees (Muhammad et al., 2024). Nonetheless, economic limitations persist as a significant obstacle, with the majority of refugee families in Pakistan enduring extreme poverty, rendering them incapable of securing the financial resources required for their children's education, including transportation, tuition fees, uniforms, and other essentials. As previously stated in the capabilities perspective, reducing these barriers is critical to improving the capabilities and functioning of refugee children. The lack of specific financial incentives and capacity-building programs prevents these youngsters from obtaining literacy, social acceptance, and economic well-being.

Cultural and gender differences exacerbate these barriers. In many refugee settlements, parents urge their daughters to marry or work in domestic service while their male counterparts pursue education (Abdulghani & Guoyuan, 2023). As Muhammad et al. (2024) highlight, this results in overcrowded schools and a 27% gender discrepancy in enrolment rates among Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Overcoming these difficulties requires deploying culturally relevant methods for involving communities in the importance of education and concerns concerning women's empowerment. Additional challenges include insufficient classroom availability,

inadequate teacher training programs, subpar infrastructure, and overcrowded classrooms, all of which reduce children's learning capacity. In certain refugee schools, student-teacher ratios approach 70:1, well above the minimum ratio of 40:1 required for elementary schools (Radhouane, 2023). These findings highlight the critical need for investment in educational infrastructure and teacher capacity across several schools.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the government of Pakistan and UNHCR have shown generosity by offering educational services to Afghan refugee children. However, a large number of Afghan refugee children are still out of school. The provision of educational access was primarily due to the efforts of the government and UNHCR. However, the lack of a national legal framework for refugee status determination in Pakistan addressing refugee rights has resulted in limited educational rights for Afghan refugee children. Economic, cultural, and systemic barriers were also identified as educational obstacles.

4.1 *Policy and practical implications*

Identifying major impediments allows us to employ policy implementation theory, HRBA, and competency methodologies to provide better management support. Educational programs will function more effectively with stronger agency relationships and more available resources. Our plan calls for improved collaboration across government agencies, UNHCR, and local community members to make the most excellent use of available funds and resources. Integrating human rights norms into national policy ensures equitable educational opportunities for all. Our system must grant refugees official rights while providing education that meets the global standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and SDG 4. Refugee integration works better when the system helps people overcome obstacles rather than addressing problems for them. Our educational support should now include academic and vocational classes and educational opportunities for refugees through community activities. According to research, Pakistan confronts numerous challenges when it comes to providing educational opportunities for Afghan refugees. The government and UNHCR continue to work on this issue, but ongoing problems require targeted cooperative effort. Refugees' right to education improves when stakeholders adopt human rights norms, improve refugee education qualifications, and defend refugee rights through policy actions.

4.2 *Ways to evaluate and track programs*

Research shows that educational initiatives do not produce optimal results because there are no strong systems to track and assess their progress. Due to inadequate monitoring of their educational initiatives, the government of Pakistan and UNHCR struggle to maintain sustainable success over time. Public policies work best when officials monitor progress and make changes to handle developing problems—the poor information collection about Afghan refugees limited policy updates, which delayed their educational progress. The lack of regular evaluation makes it harder to measure how refugee students are doing in school and confirms whether teaching programs suit their unique requirements. Refugee feedback systems and quick data analysis enhance educational programs to support refugee students.

The government and UNHCR have demonstrated a strong commitment to educating Afghan refugee children. A large proportion of Afghan refugee children are unable to attend school because Pakistan lacks legal frameworks for identifying refugees and protecting their rights. Various economic, social, cultural, and educational system barriers impede proper education for students. According to research, boosting interagency coordination, incorporating human rights concepts into legislation, and upgrading instructional approaches for Afghan refugee students are all beneficial strategies for increasing their access to education. By collaborating through focused programs, we can ensure educational access for all refugee children while meeting key educational equity standards.

4.3 *Recommendations*

All entities must enhance collaboration and optimise the utilisation of existing resources by consolidating the activities of the government of Pakistan, UNHCR, and local non-governmental organisations. The system must incorporate components that promote inter-organisational collaboration and the effective execution of educational initiatives. The government must comply with international human rights norms in education when legislating to safeguard the educational rights of refugee students.

A competency-based plan must incorporate training programs that provide refugees with essential life skills for social integration. Scholarship programs and community educational support networks must be customised to the daily conditions of refugee children. Refugee families necessitate support for transportation expenses and prices for textbooks and uniforms; hence, educational institutions and governmental entities ought to furnish these resources to enhance educational accessibility. We must improve children's access options while ensuring equal educational funds to benefit all students, including girls.

Special programs must be customised to align with each community's perspectives to engage citizens while underscoring the importance of girls' education. Implementing gender initiatives provides children of all genders in refugee schools with equitable opportunities to thrive. We must establish new educational institutions and equip educators with novel methodologies to enhance education. Educational institutions improve students' learning experiences by increasing school capacity, modernising facilities, and decreasing class sizes. The study efforts require thorough quality evaluations to ascertain if programs meet their objectives while ensuring accountability for their effectiveness. Regular assessment outcomes should guide methodological modifications, enhance support for refugee students, and augment program efficacy. These extensive requirements help Afghan refugee children obtain an adequate education while promoting sustainable, equitable advancement.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, A., & Smith, J. (2023). Gender inequality in education: A comprehensive examination of social science studies. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 1(1), 11–22.
- Abdulghani, M., & Guoyuan, S. (2023). A conceptual model of the factors affecting education policy implementation. *Education Sciences*, 13(3), 260. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030260>
- Anis, F., & Ahmad, Q. (2023). Analysis of educational institutions' public policy formulation process (Formulation, agenda arrangement, and ratification). *Journal of Educational Development and Administration*, 2(2), 183–190. <https://doi.org/10.55927/jeda.v2i2.4166>
- Balochistan Education Plan (2020–2025). (2020). Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan. https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_balochistan_besp2020-25.pdf
- Basit, A. (2021, February 25). The Pakistan-Afghanistan border fence is a step in the right direction. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/25/the-pak-afghan-border-fence-is-a-step-in-the-right-direction>
- Borthakur, A. (2017). Afghan refugees: The impact on Pakistan. *Asian Affairs*, 48(3), 488–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2017.1362871>
- Butt, A. K. (2024). Educational pursuits of resilient Afghan women students in Qatar post-2021 Taliban takeover: Challenges, migration motives, and future aspirations (Master's thesis, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar).
- Creswell, J. W. (2011). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Dolapcioglu, S., & Bolat, Y. (2021). The education issues of Syrian students under temporary protection status. *Research in Education*, 109(1), 3–19.
- Edwards, A. (2005). Human rights, refugees, and the right to enjoy asylum. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 17(2), 293–330.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2012). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. Pearson.
- Givheart, D. (2024). Strengthening outcome-based education: Capability approach perspective. *Edukasiana: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan*, 3(2), 143–155. <https://doi.org/10.56916/ejip.v3i2.550>
- Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your “house.” *Administrative Issues Journal*, 4(2), 4–13.
- Hamed, S., Seddighi, M., Rafieifar, M., & Ilea, P. (2022). Education of Afghan refugee children in Iran: A structured review of policies. *Children & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12620>
- Hervé, N. (2018). Inclusion of Afghan refugees in the national education systems of Iran and Pakistan.

- Kumar, R. (2023). Afghans fled for a better future, but 2 years later, it is a dream for most. *Al Jazeera*.
- Laura, P. (2023). On multiple objects and ontic fixes: Human rights and the 'forgotten' politics of the United Nations' human rights-based approach. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 51(2), 519–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298221146303>
- Lobos, J. (2023). Understanding trajectories of refugee inclusion in national education systems: Policy and data perspectives from Peru; background paper.
- Malick, N. U. H., Nawaz, M., Khan, M. A., & Tayyab, M. (2024). Minister for women's welfare committee on gender inclusion and cultural engagement for climate mitigation.
- Metni, E. (2022). Exploring Lebanese teachers' engagement in a low-cost, technology-enhanced, problem-solving-oriented learning intervention with refugee children (Doctoral dissertation, University College London).
- Morrice, L. (2021). The promise of refugee lifelong education: A critical review of the field. *International Review of Education*, 67(6), 851–869.
- M., Radhouane. (2023). Pedagogical challenges in integrating refugee students into the Global North: A literature review. *Prospects*, 53(1–2), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-022-09632-7>
- Nateghi, M. (2024). The right to education for Afghan refugee children in Iran: Barriers and progress (Master's thesis, UiT Norges arktiske universitet).
- National Assembly Secretariat. (2012). An Act to provide free and compulsory education to all children from five to sixteen years. *The Gazette of Pakistan*.
- Ozlem, E.-B. (2023). The role of temporary education centres on Syrian refugee students' socio-cultural adaptation. *Adıyaman Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 13(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.17984/adyuebd.1113518>
- Palik, J., & Østby, G. (2023). Interventions to improve refugee children's access to education and quality learning: A scoping review of existing impact evaluations. *International Review of Education*, 69(1–2), 227–247. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-023-10004-2>
- Shah, S. H., Bashir, B., & Zareen, H. (n.d.). The role of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is to provide basic education to Afghan refugees in the Hazara Division, Pakistan.
- Shebl, E. M., Shaker, R. H., El-Desouky, R. S., & Othman, M. F. (2024). Assessment of general health status among refugee women in Greater Cairo. *Benha Medical Journal*.
- Sofie, C. (2009). Societies in conflict: The education of young female Hazara Afghan refugees in Quetta, Pakistan: Factors influencing access to basic education.
- Tazin, M. H. (2023). Right to education of refugee children: An analysis of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' education programs (Doctoral dissertation, East West University).
- Thomas, R. L. (2016). The right to quality education for refugee children through social inclusion. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1, 193–201.
- United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. United Nations Sustainable Development. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainabledevelopment-goals>
- UNESCO. (2018). Global education monitoring report 2019: Migration, displacement, and education—Building bridges, not walls. UNESCO.
- UNHCR. (1951). Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-statusrefugees>
- UNHCR. (2022). Refugee statistics. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/#:~:text=Global%20Trends%20At%2Da%2DGlance,63.3%20million%20internally%20displaced%20people>
- UNHCR. (2023). Data and statistics: Global trends. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends>
- Van Esveld, B. (2023). A will and a way: Making displaced children's right to education enforceable. *Laws*, 12(1), 16.

World Health Organisation. (2022). World report on the health of refugees and migrants: Summary. World Health Organisation.

Yanan, F., Laura, J. S., Eve, S., Waters, M., Stone, R., Abel, E. L., & Johnston, E. (2019). Gender and cultural bias in student evaluations: Why representation matters. *PLOS ONE*, 14(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0209749>

Zetter, R., & Ruaudel, H. (2016). Refugees' right to work and access to labour markets—An assessment. Part II: Country cases (Preliminary). KNOMAD.