The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies

Online ISSN: 3006-7170
Print ISSN: 3006-7162
Volume 4, Number 1, 2026, Pages 1674 – 1689
Journal Home Page
https://thecrsss.com/index.php/Journal/about

Governance and the SDG Challenge: How Corruption Undermines Education and Economic Progress in Pakistan

Muhammad Sohail Hassan[1], Saba Tubassam[2], Muhammad Nauman Umar Tabassam[3] & Syeda Ameena Fatima Kazmi[4]

[1]*BS Scholar in Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Sargodha, Email: sohailhassan535@gmail.com*
[2]*MPhil Social Work, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Email: saba.uos.sgd@gmail.com*
[3]*MPhil Social Work, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Email: naumanmalik557@gmail.com*
[4]*MPhil Social Work, Department of Social Work, University of Sargodha, Email: fatimaameena36@gmail.com*

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	*January*	*03, 2026*
Revised:	*January*	*26, 2026*
Accepted:	*February*	*08, 2026*
Available Online:	*February*	*20, 2026*

Keywords:

Governance, Corruption, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Education Transparency, Institutional Reform, Public Policy, Economic Growth.

Corresponding Author:
Muhammad Sohail Hassan
Email:
sohailhassan535@gmail.com

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

Corruption is a major hindrance towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan, and it is evident in both academic and economic realms. This paper explores the intersection between governance and corruption and how they have had negative impacts on the process of SDG implementation, especially in education and economic development. Combining the governance indicators, corruption indices, and SDG statistics, the study will show that corruption undermines institutional integrity, prevents the implementation of policy, and increases inequality. Using a mixed-methods research design based on the combination of qualitative case-study analysis and quantitative regression modelling, the results indicate a strong correlation between a high level of corruption and low educational achievement, economic stagnation, and a long-term implementation of the SDG targets. The findings highlight the need to change the system of governance, launch active anti-corruption initiatives and increase the institutional openness to reduce the negative impact of corruption and promote the SDG goals of Pakistan. The article ends by giving policy recommendations that can be used to build stronger governance structures, rejuvenate the education sector, and promote economic growth by use of evidence based anti-corruption policies.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) issued by the United Nations is a universal agenda that is supposed to be used to curb the basic problems like poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. There are insurmountable challenges when these goals are implemented in an environment such as Pakistan, especially when it comes to SDG 4 Quality Education, and SDG 8

Decent Work and Economic Growth. Corruption acts as a major hindrance to the successful achievement of such goals, a trend that is so rampant in most developing environments. In Pakistan, cases of malfeasance destroy institutional efficiency, cause misallocation of resources and thwart development in both education and the economy sector. Such an inefficient system kills confidence in government agencies, undermines the system of governance, limits access to quality education and economic opportunities, and ultimately fuels inequality, thus putting the country at a slower pace in achieving the SDGs.

Even though there have been numerous efforts by the government and non-governmental organizations to fight corruption, Pakistan still has to face a problem of governance that is rooted deeply. Both the private sphere and the public sector are infected with corruption which has a significant impact on such development spheres as education and the economy. There is poor management of resources, there are increased non-existent schools, ineffective execution of policies, and poor development of the economy is subjected to poor management, little external investment, and developmental imbalance. The corruption-SDGs nexus is quite multifarious and intricate, as it influences all phases of the policy process, starting with the creation of policies and ending with the provision of services. As a result, it is necessary to learn about the mechanisms by which corruption weakens these spheres to understand what mechanisms should be employed to promote the governmental enhancement, as well as the enhancement of the speed of SDG achievement in Pakistan.

The given paper aims at exploring the connection between corruption, governance, and SDG development in Pakistan, specifically focusing on education and economic growth. It not only answers the question of how corruption undermines educational attainment, access, quality and equity, but also explains its negative effect on economic development through the establishment of inefficiencies and the maintenance of inequality. Moreover, the paper discusses the role of corruption in upsetting the governmental institutions thus hindering the performance of the SDGs. Through focusing on these issues, the paper presents a critical discussion of the issue of governance in Pakistan and gives possible reforms that might help the actualisation of the SDGs.

The research study is highly relevant, in that it throws light on the policy considerations regarding governance reform in Pakistan.

It illuminates the interdependence between corruption and Sustainable Development Goal outputs and thus adds an evidence-based model which explains how corruption perpetuates disparities in educational and economic areas.

The empirical results have solid grounds to incorporate policy interventions that would lead to good governance, boosting transparency and adopting anti-corruption strategies to curb the maladies of the system.

After all, the article contributes to the academic argument of how third world countries, such as Pakistan can overcome governance challenges and proceed to sensible actions in the achievement of the SDGs.

The paper further advances in the following way: the second section will review the relevant literature and theoretical framework on corruption, governance and the SDGs. The methods of the research, the data sources, the design of the research, and methods of analysis are discussed in section 3. The empirical findings are given in section 4. Section 5 puts these findings into perspective and puts them in the theoretical context and connects to the existing scholarship. Lastly, the policy recommendations are presented in Section 6 of the report, which are aimed at improving governance and advancing the Pakistan SDG agenda.

Problem Statement

Corruption is one of the major obstacles to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan, especially in the sectors of education and economic growth. With the spread of governance reforms and intervention of policies to help curb this problem, the aspect of corruption in the institutions of the government still exists, thus hindering the success of the policies and strategies that are needed in the development agenda of Pakistan. The inefficiencies of the education sector can appear as a poor resource distribution, the development of non-existing schools, and the hiring of unqualified teachers, which are the phenomena that are symbolic of corrupt networks. These malpractices lead to poor educational performance, limited access to good education, and high rates of dropouts, mostly disadvantaging marginalised and rural populations. In the same line, corruption has a negative effect on the economic growth by corrupting the allocation of resources, limiting foreign investments and inflated business costs hence limiting economic growth.

The inefficiency and inequality created as a consequence of corruption hobble the ability of Pakistan to achieve SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), thus making the achievement of the overall targets set by United Nations difficult.

Although there is a growing body of literature on the broad implications of corruption, a significant research gap exists in regard to the particular effects of corruption on these SDGs in Pakistani contexts, in particular, in educational and economic terms.

The available literature is mostly focused on the macro-level implications of corruption or its impact on the governance systems, and not the specific impact of corruption on sectors of development like education and economic growth.

Hence, the paper aims at addressing the above lacuna by critically examining how corruption has affected the achievement of SDGs in Pakistan and more specifically, its negative impact on education and economic development. The relationship needs a delicate understanding so as to develop specific solutions and policy interventions that can be used to break the vicious circle of corruption and develop more efficient governance systems that will lead to sustainable development.

Research Objectives

The current study mainly focuses on how the aspects of corruption have hindered the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth) in Pakistan. This paper will attempt to offer an in-depth examination of how corruption is manifested in such vital areas and also to offer information that may alleviate the negative effects.

One of the major aims is to determine the impact of corruption in education sector in Pakistan. Some of the malpractices in this area are resource misallocation, creation of phantom institutions and the hiring of unqualified teachers- all of which have a direct negative effect on access and quality of education. The paper will explore how these practices have limited access to education, in particular, among the marginalised groups and rural residents, and it will evaluate how the long-term effect of these practices on education outcomes including literacy, enrolment, and graduation rates, which explains why Pakistan is not able to realise SDG 4.

The next significant objective is to determine the impact of corruption on the economic growth and development in Pakistan that will in its turn impede the achievement of SDG 8. Corrupt governance systems corrupt the distribution of resources, discourages foreign investment and

makes conducting business more expensive. The study will explore the role of such inefficiencies in economic stagnation, low job creation and increasing poverty, thus trapping the society inequalities. The investigation of the nexus between corruption and the major indicators of the economy such as GDP growth, employment, and poverty levels will help in quantifying the degree to which corruption is hindering sustainable development in Pakistan.

The governance mechanisms whereby corruption has a negative influence upon implementation of SDGs are also examined in the paper. Secondly, it is imperative to understand the institutional processes that help in perpetrating corruption, including weak accountability, transparency, and weak policy implementation to find out the cause of governance failure. This part will examine how the lack of governance contributes to corruption and hinders the effective ensuring of education and economic policies, and eventually, the progress of the country towards SDGs. The research will further give an empirical evidence of the correlation between the rate of corruption and SDG performance in Pakistan, basing the analysis on the indices of corruption, governance and other available educational and economic statistics. The aim of this empirical method is to prove the thesis that corruption is a key disincentive towards sustainable development in the Pakistani education and economic sectors.

The paper will provide policy recommendations on how to limit corruption and improve governance in Pakistan based on the findings of the research. The recommendations will be on how to empower the institutions, enhance transparency and accountability in government administration, and adopt effective measures to curb corruption in the education sector and the economy. The proposed study aims to add to the discussion on the topic of governance reform in Pakistan by providing a set of practical solutions that will bring the implementation of SDGs to the next level and contribute to sustainable development.

Research Questions

How does corruption influence the economic growth and the realization of SDG 8 (Economic Growth) in Pakistan?

What are the effects of the processes of corruption on the SDG development in Pakistan?

What empirical research links corruption to SDG outcomes, i.e. SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth) in Pakistan?

What are the policy reforms and governance change initiatives that should be taken in order to help reduce corruption and the speed at which SDGs can be achieved in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

The current paper will focus on one of the urgency dimensions when discussing the attempts of Pakistan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth). The vice of corruption is a major retardant to development in these areas, and a strict conceptualization of the processes is necessary to come up with viable policy countermeasures that would break the loop of failure and imbalance. Through an area of focus on the nexus between corruption and SDG achievement, the study will provide a detailed evaluation of how governance gaps continue to perpetuate the intermittent issues that education and sound economic growth continue to face. The results of the empirical study will shed light on how corruption obstructs the ability of Pakistan to achieve SDG targets, and as such, provide a subtle insight that is not limited to the superficial views of corruption.

The importance of the study is also supported by the fact that it may be used to influence changes in the governance frameworks and policies that have a direct impact on the population. The

findings of this investigation will provide policymakers and development experts with the empirical evidence that is critical in designing specific interventions to help reduce corruption in the education and economic sectors. The paper outlines the major areas that require reform such as greater transparency in resource distribution, improved accountability frameworks, and correction of institutional gaps that support the continuation of corruption. The research is likely to enhance the development of more effective and evidence-based policy interventions that can help sustain the development in Pakistan as it will present solid empirical evidence and in-depth knowledge of the negative impact of corruption on the SDG progress.

Furthermore, the research will add to the academic body of governance, corruption, and the achievement of SDG in the developing countries. Despite the extensive coverage of corruption issue in depth with respect to development, there is a major gap in the literature that focuses on the study of its effects in the SDG framework, especially with respect to education and economic growth in Pakistan. In filling this gap, the study provides useful information in successive researches on similar environments particularly in states that face similar governance issues. In addition, it provides a theoretical framework that explains the intricate relationship between corruption, governance, and development outcomes, a framework that can be used in other situations facing a similar predicament.

The practical implication of the research is on the international organizations and non-governmental actors in the sphere of sustainable development in Pakistan. By identifying the influence of corruption on the SDG development, such actors can improve their interventions so that they are more aligned with the national interests. This study determines the importance of governance reforms in achieving more sustainable social goals by establishing corruption as a common impediment to SDG realization, enhancing the world agenda on experimental social development.

Literature Review

Corruption has been an insurmountable challenge to good governance in developing worlds like Pakistan where it is especially concerning that the level of corruption in the education and the economic sector is high. As has always been shown in literature, corruption impedes the effective utilization of public resources, poor quality of services, and it enshrines inequality, therefore, becoming a significant hitch towards the realization of SDGs. Corruption in the education sector takes the form of misappropriation of funds, growth of ghost schools, hiring of unqualified teachers, and bribery to pass the tests and gain admissions (Hallak and Poisson, 2007). Such malpractices worsen the quality and access to education, particularly to the marginalised groups. Huang (2008) reported that there was a negative relationship between corruption and the levels of education (school enrollment rates and life expectancy) in more severe cases in countries with weaker institutions. The ensuing inefficiencies limit the educational opportunities and frustrate the achievement of SDG 4 that requires inclusive, equitable, and quality education to all (UNESCO, 2020).

Effects of corruption on economic development have been well studied; researchers have confirmed that corruption discourages foreign investment, distorts the market mechanism and increases the business expenses. The World Bank (2004) holds that corruption breeds resource misuse, increases the risks of doing business and causes a level playing field among economic players hence hindering economic growth due to lack of investment and loss of public confidence. These findings are supported by recent empirical studies that indicate that there is strong negative relationship between corruption and GDP growth in developing nations. Indicatively, Sze (2022) approximated that one standard deviation of perceived corruption decrease in the long run GDP per capita by 17 percent in 175 nations. Corruption also breeds poverty and inequality of income

by channelling resources that should be used in major development projects and this continues to enhance social-economic imbalance further (Kaufmann et al., 2002). This interaction is a hindrance to the ability of a nation to achieve SDG 8: sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth.

Although the negative impacts of corruption on education and the growth of the economy have been well established, the literature recognizes the contextual difficulty of the corruption development relationship. According to some scholars, in specific conditions, corruption can help oily the wheels of bureaucratic systems to help in conducting business transactions and delivery of services (Leff, 1964). Yet these propositions have been questioned more, particularly when applied to situations such as in Pakistan wherein corruption has become institutionalised and hence efficacy has been eroded and inequality maintained. By showing that corruption levels high reduce the effectiveness of the public investment in human capital; education, Mauro (1995) is able to destroy the economic productivity and long-term growth.

Governance systems are critical in regulating the effects of corruption on the developmental outcomes. This is because weak governance, which is typified by a lack of transparency, accountability, and oversight of the operations of the state, provides conditions that facilitate the continuance of corruption. Svensson (2005) argues that better governance by increasing accountability and transparency would help to reduce corruption and better the results of development. This statement has profound consequences of SDG 4 and SDG 8 because strong governance is one of the foundations of a good policy, resource distribution, and fair distribution of services (such as education and economic opportunities) to the population.

Although there is a rich literature on the importance of corruption in development, there is still a research gap on how the SDGs can be influenced by corruption in the Pakistani context. The current literature focuses on general impacts (e.g. the quality of governance and institutions) without narrowing down to direct impacts on SDG-related sectors (e.g. education and economic growth). Although studies by Duflo et al. (2011) and Gupta et al. (2002) can be useful in the general understanding of corruption impacts, the generalisation across the countries that is made by both studies might be not fully applicable to the Pakistan context. This gap explains why country-specific studies should be performed to examine the nexus of corruption, governance and SDG achievement in Pakistan.

The study aims to fill this gap focusing specifically on the failure of SDG 4 and SDG 8 due to corruption in Pakistan. It will provide empirical data concerning the impact of corruption on education results and economic development and will examine the institutional processes that hinder the development in these spheres. This research will be useful in contributing to the current body of literature and will give practical recommendations to policy-makers who seek to address the problem of corruption in Pakistan and attain the SDGs.

Theoretical Framework

This paper lies in between two main theoretical paradigms- Institutional Economics and Governance Theory. These frameworks give a general picture of how corruption, governance structures, and institutional integrity has slowed down the economic growth and the education sector in Pakistan especially in the wider notion of how Pakistan has been struggling to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The two theoretical constructs play significant roles in the understanding of corruption as a hindrance to good governance and development in particular in weak or developing states where institutions are generally fragile in nature.

The seminal analysis of Douglass North of 1990 shows that the form and quality of institutions i.e., the system of rules, norms and governing mechanisms through which economic activity is

organized are considered central in the determination of economic outcomes. Corruption is one of the salient attributes of weak institutions in which the rules of the game are habitually compromised or disobeyed to benefit self gain. North contends that strong institutions help to build trust, protection of property rights, accountability, and the provision of the common good and services that are needed in economic and social development. Corrupt institutions on the other hand destroy such functions by misappropriating the public resources, causing inefficiencies and impeding policy implementation. This model is very applicable in the study of the institution environment in Pakistan which has had chronic corruption that has hindered effective governance in education and economic sectors.

Through the application of institutional economics to the issues of governance in Pakistan, the study aims at explaining why the quality of the education policies, economic reforms, and institutional operations is low due to the corrupts. Corruption leads to misplacement of resources, low capacity of states, and inequalities which remain no-go areas in achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth). The theoretical prism will shape the analysis of the way in which the failure of governance and especially corruption mires the development predicament in Pakistan.

The concept of good governance is one of the pillars of this investigation, which is the governance theory. Good governance can refer to the instruments, institutions and norms that allow the state force to act in a productive, transparent, and responsible way to meet the interests of the people. Good governance is mainly constituted by transparency, accountability, participation and the rule of law. On the other hand, dysfunctional governance that is frequently the result of the systemic corruption develops weak institutions, inefficiency, and unfairness in the process of providing public services. The governance theory highlights how these principles are essential towards sustainable development because they are invaluable in building trust in people concerning governmental institutions as well as in equitable and efficient resource distribution.

Corruption also has a direct negative impact on the principles of good governance seen through lack of transparency and accountability. The problem of corruption in the public institutions in Pakistan especially in the education and the economy sector is revealed through misappropriation of funds, favoritism in resource allocation and lack of monitoring in checking the development which in turn affects the delivery of services and the denial of the country developmental opportunities. The theory of governance suggests that effective, transparent and accountable institutions are crucial in the realization of the SDG outcomes, and corruption presents a significant challenge to the realization of the SDG outcomes. This research paper will therefore use the governance theory to explore the form of corruption that is impeding the process of good governance and the proper application of policies within the education and the economy sector of Pakistan.

Associating the Theoretical Frameworks with the Achievement of SDGs.

The institutional economics and governance theory theoretical approaches have a direct connection to the achievement of SDGs in Pakistan. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and especially SDG 4 and SDG 8 require effective governance systems and strong institutions. Under the principle of institutional economics, the hypothesis is that powerful institutions promote the provision of education and economic development through the effective distribution and use of resources. On the other hand, the governance theory highlights that transparency, accountability and good governance framework are the condition to successful implementation of policies and programmes meant to attain SDG targets.

The situation in Pakistan is that corruption is instigated by weak institutions and poor governance practices, which in the long run will degenerate the development of the SDGs. Through corruption, resources are channeled out of the essential areas like education and economic development thus creating the loss of growth potential and development opportunities. The current paper attempts to break down the complex nexus between corruption, governance and SDGs achievement using these theoretical frameworks and therefore provide substantive data on how reforms to strengthen the governance and institutional integrity in Pakistan may speed up the achievement of the SDGs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework behind the current research project is that corruption, governance, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are nexus; however, particularly, the SDG4 (Quality Education) and SDG8 (Economic Growth) in Pakistan. The research hypothesis is that corruption acts as a central variable, which undermines the institutions and governance and thus halts the development of Pakistan towards these SDGs. The framework incorporates the experiences of both the institutional economics and governance theory, and how effective institutions and transparent governance can ensure sustainable development.

The framework describes corruption at its simplest form as the misuse of office by the government to benefit personal interests. Corruption has negative effects on governance by undermining the integrity of the institutions, distorting the decision-making process and allocating the available public resources to unproductive services. Corruption in Pakistan is practiced in the form of embezzlement, bribery and favoritism and thus institutions become weak to carry out SDG corresponding policies. The framework argues that corruption is a stumbling block to progress in education and economic development because it creates inefficiencies, misallocation of resources as well as reinforcement of inequality, which hinder the achievement of SDGs.

The governance aspect of the framework explains why poor governance institutions enhance the impact of corruption. Governance refers to the procedures, organizations and institutions of how the state power is used and how the state resources are utilized. Corruption in Pakistan alters the governance processes making them less transparent, accountable, and participative. Poor governance systems result in poor distribution of resources, low quality service delivery and poor policy execution. The conceptual framework holds that the good governance that is defined by accountability and transparency is necessary to counter the negative effects of corruption and enable SDG to be realized especially in education and economic development sectors.

Another key component of the structure is the effect of corruption on education. Through corruption in the education sector, the funds are mismanaged, ghost schools are started, and unqualified teachers are hired hence lowering the quality of education. Such forms of corruption make education unavailable, particularly in underrepresented and marginalised areas, and reinforce educational disparities and achievement. Therefore, the lack of governance aggravates educational deficiencies, leading to the low level of literacy, increased dropout rates, and the lack of equal opportunities, thus keeping Pakistan out of the SDG4 targets of inclusive and equitable quality education.

Similarly, the framework highlights the negative impact of corruption to economic development. Due to corruption-related malfunctions in the government and economy, there is a sudden onset of inefficient resource distribution, deterioration of investment, and overbearing expenses of business. Such circumstances create an environment that is hostile to economic growth, limits the labor market, and enhances poverty - effects that are inconsistent with Sustainable Development Goal 8, the vision of which is to achieve sustainable, inclusive, and equitable economic growth. The conceptual framework demonstrates how ineffective the economic policies are which is also

weakened by the weak institutions and corruption, which further discourage fair economic development in Pakistan.

The framework provides an understanding of the importance of governance reform to reduce the adverse consequences of corruption and achieve SDGs. Institutionalization and enhancing transparency and accountability are the main aspects of reform. Pakistan can more efficiently allocate resources, promote the efficiency of its governance, promote the delivery system in the education sector and the economy, and create an environment that will support sustainable development by combating corruption at its disease and enhancing the efficiency of its governance. The framework finally implies that attainment of SDGs in Pakistan is not only dependent on the policy implementation but also on development of sound, transparent and accountable institutions that would be able to circumvent the obstacle of corruption.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is the qualitative one to examine the correlation between corruption, governance, and the achievement of SDGs, namely SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth) in Pakistan. The qualitative method was chosen to achieve a profound, subtle understanding of the way in which corruption affects the operation of the system of governance, the sphere of education, and economic progress. Considering the opinions and views of the main stakeholders, the study will identify the most important themes and patterns that may shed light on how corruption impacts SDG implementation in Pakistan.

The research design takes an exploratory and descriptive position where a detailed analysis of the less researched issue regarding the effects of corruption on the achievement of the SDGs in the education and economy sector of Pakistan is obtained. Semi structured interviews and focus group discussions were also used to bring out the root cause of corruption, mechanism and impact of corruption in relation to SDGs. The descriptive element aimed at eliciting the finer views of the stakeholders and thus creating an in-depth context of the relationship between corruption and SDG development.

The primary data were gathered in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion with the key stakeholders who are directly concerned with governance and education in Pakistan. The participants were the government officials, educationists, students, and faculty members based in Punjab School Education Department. The officials have been chosen according to their involvement in the establishment of the policies and their understanding of how corruption affects the educational policy implementation and resource distribution. The principals and senior teachers and administrators interviewed so as to understand the issues facing the sector and how corruption impacts the quality and access of education. The faculty members and students were taken to offer personal details on their experiences with corruption in institutions of learning and its impact on the learning settings.

The secondary data were based on reports and publications of international organisations such as the Transparency International, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. These sources retrieved contextual information on the corruption rates and levels, governance effectiveness, and SDG realization in Pakistan.

A purposive sample was used to sample out participants who had a background of knowledge and experience in matters of corruption, governance, and education in Punjab. About ten respondents were selected to provide a representative sample of voices within the government officials, educationists, students, and the faculty members. The interviews helped the respondents to express

how corruption affected education and economic growth and the focus group discussion helped to gather group opinions and experiences.

The qualitative analytical process was systematic to analyze and interpret the data patterns and themes. It included data transcription and review, the initial codes, finding themes, reviewing themes, and defining final themes. The identified themes explicated how corruption contributes to the education and economic outcomes, and showed the problems of governance that hinder the successful execution of policies.

Ethics were followed strictly during the research. All the participants were informed consentors, fully informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation in the study, and their right to discontinue the research without being penalized. The anonymisation of the identities of the participants and the safe storage of all the data provided confidentiality. The research was conducted in accordance with high ethical standards to ensure that the privacy and dignity of the participants were not violated especially on the issues that were sensitive like corruption.

Findings

The evidence of this study creates a nexus that is complex between corruption, governance, and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan, with specific focus to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth). An analysis of interviews with the representatives of the School Education Department in Punjab, educationists, students, and faculty members demonstrated several salient themes that support the negative effects of corruption on the government work and SDG implementation.

First of all, the statistics show that corruption in the education sector is one of the leading causes of the deficiency of the quality of education and its accessibility in Pakistan. The representatives of the government admitted that the lack of adequate distribution of resources is a persistent problem; the money aimed on the development of infrastructures, payment to the teachers, and educational resources are often directed or otherwise misused. The result of such a corruption is underfunded schools, especially in the rural and marginalised regions, which have poor facilities and no access to good education. Educationists and faculty would later discover other issues like ghost schools wherein teachers are paid but have never taught; and nepotism in staffing among other factors, all which help to bring about inefficiencies in the education system. It thus leads to a decline in standards of education and students and most importantly those of disadvantaged backgrounds are not given equal learning opportunity thus subtly negating SDG 4 targets.

Besides misallocation of resources, corruption was also observed to increase inequality in access to education. The respondents observed that in the education system, corruption is rife and hence resources are not evenly distributed, and some schools are given an advantage by political goodwill, and not necessarily the need. This disparity creates disparities in educational achievement especially in the rural regions where schools are easily affected by corruption issues. Students and faculty were frustrated that there is no clarity in the way resources are allocated and no ways to penalize corrupt actors. Such results support the claim that corruption does not only worsen the quality of education but it also further enhances socioeconomic differences that exist, thus hampering the development of Pakistan towards SDG 4.

Secondly, the effect of corruption on economic growth (SDG 8) was seen to be on the governance failures both in the government and the business sector, and this created a negative impact on the economic development. According to the reports by government officials and business heads, corruption leads to poor business environment where one needs to pay bribes to get permits, contracts and access to resources. This increases the cost of operations and scares away foreign

direct investment as well as smothers entrepreneurship and inventions. One of them pointed out that when public funds are diverted to economic development programmes and other infrastructure projects, it usually leads to stuttering and ineffective implementation to continue to keep the economy at a standstill.

In addition, a lack of transparency and accountability in making economic policies was cited as a major development impediment. When there is corruption in the execution of the policies, then there is inefficient resource allocation whereby the funds that should be used in enhancing some vital development projects are misused thus slowing down economic development. Faculty members and owners of businesses noted that corruption leads to a lack of certainty that businesses cannot predict change in regulations, and fair competition is undermined by corruption. This ends up in economic stagnation, sluggish growth, and increased inequality hence hampering the achievement of SDG 8.

Lastly, the research revealed that absence of governance mechanisms was at the core of the continuity of corruption both in the education sector and the economy. The interviews with the officials and educationists indicated that inefficient monitoring systems and laxity in enforcing laws against corruption are the main causes that led to the further continued prevalence of corruption. Lack of political will to implement substantive reforms and political interference in many areas was reported by many officials. The lack of strong monitoring mechanisms to the allocation and performance of school resources was also pointed out by educationists and faculty and contributes to the weakness of the governance that impedes prevention and correction of corruption and its deleterious impact on development results.

The findings indicate that corruption is an important factor that prevents Pakistan in achieving SDGs 4 and 8. The research revealed corruption to exist across the system and economy of education and levels- resource distribution to the implementation of the policies and poor governance systems, thus contributing to the developmental problems. Apparently, combat of corruption by governance reforms, establishment of accountability mechanisms, as well as improvement of transparency, is critical in ensuring a sustainable development and equal access of education and economic opportunities.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the significant contribution of corruption to the undermining of the education sector and economic growth of Pakistan, and, consequently, the realization of SDGs 4 and 8. The information gathered among the officials in the School Education Department in Punjab and also among educationists, students and faculty members reveals that corruption is widespread and is undermining the national development process. These findings are interpreted and explained in the framework of the broader literature as well as suggested strategies to reduce corruption and promote sustainable development.

One of the main findings is that corruption in the education system of Pakistan influences negatively on access and quality. This is consistent with the previous studies that documented that corruption leads to the lack of resources, increased inequality, and inaccessibility to high-quality education, especially in marginalised and rural regions (Hallak and Poisson, 2007). Quality education is greatly hampered by ghost schools, appointments of teachers with fraudulent intentions and misappropriation of educational funds. In line with SDG 4 aim of inclusive, equitable, and quality education to all, the research affirms that corruption undermines the credibility and the ability of the system in the achievement of this objective.

Disparities that are taken out of proportion by the underprivileged groups are further sustained through corruption mainly to rural students and families. Similar to Duflo et al. (2011), corruption also increases the disparities in education by limiting the resources required by the marginalized groups. The imbalance of resources by the authorities is demonstrated by the imbalance of educational results, which leads to the continuation of inequality in the society. These results would require systemic changes, i.e., increased transparency in resources distribution, integrity during teacher recruitment, and effective school administration to alleviate corruption and advance the level of education in the country.

The economic consequences of corruption, as they have been found out here, are also far reaching. The diversion of funds and bribery during procurements in the public sector is a contributor to the dragging back of economic growth, as is consistent with the literature on corruption as a contributor to hindered foreign investment, smothered entrepreneurship, and high-cost operations (World Bank, 2004). All these lead to a sense of uncertainty and inefficiency in the Pakistani economy, thus scaring away local and foreign investors. Inadequate regulation and accountability systems contribute to the negative economic effects of corruption, complicating the process of achieving SDG 8 that tries to enhance inclusive and sustainable economic development.

The paper highlights the critical role played by governance systems in reducing or enhancing the effects of corruption. Weak institutions and absence of political goodwill pose a great challenge in governance. Theoretical schools of thought on governance assert that issues of transparency, accountability, and rule of law are critical to sustainable development (Grindle, 2004). The systemic failure of governing is shown in the corrupt practices of the School Education Department diversion of resources and hiring on nepotism. These loopholes ensure that corruption continues to affect policy effectiveness towards SDGs in education and economics.

The problem of corruption has many aspects that can not be resolved by merely anti-corruption policy frameworks which must be reinforced, and made more transparent, and hold the leadership accountable to the people. Some of the interventions that are suggested to eliminate corruption are the establishment of independent supervisory bodies, decentralization of decision making, and ensuring the development of mechanisms that track resources and report them publicly. The results of the study indicate that institutional changes in the School Education Department such as anti-corruption departments, frequent auditing, and strict recruiting procedures are needed. To achieve economic growth, it is essential to cut down to zero on bureaucratic corruption and facilitate business transparency to create a favourable environment to attract investment and innovate.

Although it may be difficult to fight against corruption, it is possible. The roles of civil society organizations, media and international watchdogs are important in the creation of awareness, change advocacy, and government monitoring. The participation of the people in decision-making and empowerment of the community are crucial elements of a good anti-corruption strategy. The research notes the role of political will, including popular and institutional backing, in the process of the governance reforms and empowering the Pakistan to develop towards the SDG achievement.

Overall, it is evident that corruption in education and the economy is a significant challenge to the implementation of SDGs 4 and 8 in Pakistan. Corruption compromises the quality and equity of education and the development of economies by establishing barriers to a sustainable progress. Addressing these impediments requires an interrelational strategy that includes strengthening governance, enhancing transparency, and the successful implementation of the anti-corruption policy. The results are actionable in the quest to develop a corruption free environment that will facilitate the achievement of SDGs in Pakistan by the policymakers, the civil society and the international players in the development sector.

Conclusion

The current study considered the negative effect of corruption on the development of Pakistan based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with references to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Economic Growth). Results show that there is a widespread nature of corruption in both the education and economic sectors whereby governance failures do not allow proper policy implementation and allocation of resources. The study sheds light on how corruption is expressed in these industries and it is directly related to the failure to address the SDGs by interviewing officials of the School Education Department in Punjab and educators, students, and faculty.

Corruption in the education system fosters misappropriation of resources, opening of schools that have no foundation, hiring of poorly qualified lecturers, which negatively affects the results of education, and contributes to the unfair access to quality education. Such harmful activities also worsen educational inequalities, especially in marginalized communities, hence frustrating the achievement of SDG 4 in Pakistan. Similarly, in the economic sector, corruption in the form of bureaucratic inefficiency and misappropriation of resources hinders economic development, discourages investments, and perpetuates income disparity, which is against the SDG 8 goal of sustainable, inclusive, and equitable economic growth.

The review proves that ineffective governance systems make corruption easier to sustain thus, hindering the achievement of education results and the economy simultaneously. Lack of transparency, accountability, and political will to entrench sound anti-corruption practices makes the system inefficient and entrenches inequality. Devoid of these institutionalized governance vices, Pakistan stands a high chance of still facing immense challenges in its quest to meet its commitments on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Therefore, the fight against corruption becomes one of the most significant conditions of a successful step towards Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan. The paper proposes a radical redefinition of the governance system meant to improve institutional transparency, accountability, and wise management of resources.

The increase of anti-corruption tools in the School Education Department, as well as the general reforms in the institution, is crucial measures in addressing negative effects of corruption on education and economic development. In addition, the culture of participation among the people, civil-society monitoring and political commitment should be encouraged to make the transformation sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the subsequent suggestions can be offered to work on the challenges in the education and economic sectors of Pakistan caused by corruption and improve the situation with the Corruption Index in the country.

First of all, the education institutions should be made more transparent. The School Education Department of Punjab along with other bodies regarding education issues must develop a regular system of audits and reporting to the people on the allocation and use of the resources. This transparency will help protect contingent funds against misappropriation and will make sure such funds are used in improving infrastructures, improving the quality of teachers and make more educational resources accessible to more people. More so, independent checking bodies ought to be instituted to regulate the schools and reduce corruption in hiring, bids and budgetary control.

Laws to encourage reporting of any corrupt activities in the educational institutions should also be put in place and the whistle blowers should not be attacked.

Other than promoting transparency, there is a need to reform recruitment and hiring activities in the education sector. Teacher appointments in Pakistan have been a significant hindrance to improving the quality of education in the country since corruption is practiced in the form of nepotism and favoritism. An efficient, merit based recruitment system should be established and strictly implemented, where only the well qualified should be allowed to take the teaching and administrative positions. At the same time training programmes must be used to raise awareness of the teachers, administrators and officials on ethical behavior and anti-corruption.

When it comes to economic development, it is important to promote accountable and transparent governance. The government should have transparent regulatory frameworks that govern operations of businesses and strive to minimize bureaucracy red tape and all the points of bribery and favoritism. Improving the openness in open procurement and contract awarding will reduce the ability of corruption to augment the costs and undermine the effectiveness of the government expenditure. Additionally, there is a need to enforce anti-corruption laws more vigorously and increase political determination to deal with corruption in all levels of government. The entrenchment of transparency and accountability systems will foster a more predictable and fair business environment hence attracting investment and further economic growth.

One more recommendation is to empower the civil society to take an active part in anti-corruption actions. The non-government organisations, media houses and the local communities should be advised to step up the surveillance of the government operations and more especially in the educational and economic sectors. Such actors are able to offer the much needed checks and balances, record instances of corruption, and hold the government leaders to higher standards. An awareness campaign by the masses about the negative impacts of corruption and the need to insure transparency can rally the citizens to combat corruption.

The capacity of organizations that head the governance and anti-corruption roles should be increased. They should allocate more resources, train and give more resources to the Federal Investigation Agency, and other institutions of this nature to effectively counter corruption. A culture of accountability in the institution and reducing corrupt practices can be encouraged by introducing integrity mechanisms in these offices including the introduction of anti-corruption education to governmental staff.

In addition, the Pakistani government should strengthen its partnership with the world anti-corruption efforts. Interaction with the multilateral organizations like Transparency International, the World Bank and the United Nations will help Pakistan to be consistent with the international standards of governance. The alliances may offer technical support and advice in the formulation and implementation of effective anti-corruption policies.

The reduction of corruption in the education sector and the economy of Pakistan, in general, requires a complex approach. The solution to the underlying causes of corruption includes strengthening institutional transparency, restructuring the recruitment system, strengthening the responsibility of business enterprises, enhancing the capacity of the civil society, and increasing governance effectiveness. These reforms do not only enhance outcomes on Sustainable Development Goals on education and economic development but also lead to more equitable, open and sustainable course of the country.

Limitations of the Study

The research provides significant information on the relationship that exists between corruption and the processes of governance, and how this has affected the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan. However, there are a number of methodological limitations that should be considered. To begin with, the study has a qualitative paradigm that relies on perceptions and experiences of a narrow group of respondents. The sampling included government officials, School Education department, Punjab, educationists, students and faculty members; this small sample restricts the representativeness of the results and this may not be generalizable to other provincial settings and to national sub-sectors. Based on this, the extrapolation of the sampled population should be done with caution.

Second, the study is vulnerable to bias since self-reported data is prevalent. The respondents might have not made the blunt revelations about the corruption practices as they had the fear of punishments or social desirability. Educationists and government officials, e.g., might have diminished the role they participated in illegal matters in order to escape legal or professional penalties. Equally, faculty members and students would have been reluctant to talk about institutional corruption, particularly on such matters, which were sensitive. Although the guaranteed levels of confidentiality were followed, there could still be some latent sensitivity of corruption that could affect the accuracy of responses.

Another shortcoming is linked to the use of qualitative data only, which, despite its abundance of contextual information, is not as precise as statistical data to make general assumptions about the role of corruption as one of the factors that affect SDG development in Pakistan. The results of interview and focus-group are subjective in nature and may not necessarily represent the scale or the intricacy of corruption in both education and economy sectors. This means that the empirical evidence is rather weak in terms of guiding population-wide policy interventions.

Furthermore, the study has limited value to changing governance situations due to the time limitation of the study. Due to the changes in institutional structures and the level of corruption, results will be obsolete in the short term. The conclusions made in the study are necessarily restricted within the observation time frame, and the conclusions may require further analysis by the future research in case of the main political or administrative changes.

Recommendations in Future Research.

To enhance the arsenal of knowledge on nexus of corruption, governance, and SDG realization, future research should enhance the base of empirical evidence with quantitative research methodologies that can allow making generalizations and sound statistical inferences on the relationship between corruption and SDG. Quantitative determination of the impact of corruption on the quality of education, GDP growth and other SDGs in varied parts of Pakistan could be established through large-scale surveys or secondary data analytics, which will further support qualitative information.

Comparative analysis between Pakistan and other similar socio-economic contingents like India or Bangladesh would reveal deviant anti-corruption behaviors and governance results. Such a comparative empirical investigation can produce useful practical information, outline the best practices models, and streamline governance policies in particular situations.

Longitudinal studies cannot be ruled out since corruption is deeply rooted. Following the patterns of anti-corruption processes over a longer period of time, researchers may determine the extent of how the governance changes moderate the connections among corruption and Sustainable

Development Goal (SDG) outcomes. This diachronic view clears out cause-effect processes as well as guides policy intervention development in cycles.

It is also imperative that there is regional diversification. By increasing the comfortable scope of the analysis to include Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhaw and Balochistan, it would become possible to capture the province-specific political, cultural and economic variables affecting the incidence of corruption and downstream outcomes on SDG targets. The advantages of provincial disaggregation are the prospect of establishing anti-corruption strategies sensitive to the local environment and grounded in the contextual needs.

The efficiency of the already established anti-corruption institutions on the national level, including the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), as well as local groups working in the sectors of education and economy, needs to be checked thoroughly. Empirical studies of these institutions can shed light on how effective processes can be implemented and how gaps in existing processes remain open to advancing the governance reforms.

Lastly, the involvement of the civil society and common people in the fight against corruption should also be subject to academic attention. The role of citizen participation in creating an anti-corruption culture can be shed lighter on by investigations into the community-based organisations, media outlets, and non-governmental organisations, the effect of awareness campaigns, transparency demands, and institutional accountability. Enhancement of civic participation and social movements can be critical in reversing corruption in the community level thus enhancing the achievement of SDGs.

References

1. Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2011). Education and corruption: Corruption and access to education and learning outcomes. Journal of Development Economics, 96 (2): 380-394, https://doi.org/10.1016/s10535-010-02560-1
2. Grindle, M. S. (2004). Good governance: Inflation of an idea. HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series. Harvard Kennedy School. 10.2139/ssrn.2591379
3. Hallak, J., & Poisson, M. (2007). The corruption of education: A world view. International Institute for Educational Planning, IIEP, UNESCO. Retrieved from: https://etico.iiep.unesco.org/en/mapping-risks
4. Huang, J. (2008). Corruption and education outcomes: Evidence using cross national data. Journal of International Development 20(6): 785-806 https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1504
5. Transparency International. (n.d.). Corruption perceptions index, 2020. Transparency International. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl
6. World Bank. (2004). Governance and corruption: The world bank view. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/12059
7. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2016). Pakistan: Sustainable development road map. UNDP Pakistan. https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html
8. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC. (2021). Corruption and sustainable development: How corruption hampers SDGs. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/corruption/uploads/documents/Corruptionsustainabledevelopment_C.pdf
9. World Bank. (n.d.). Corruption and economic growth. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/overview
10. UNESCO. (n.d.). Corruption in education. Retrieved from: https://www.unesco.org/en/education/corruption