



## UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: LEVEL 5 GENDER EQUALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Even though Pakistan has ratified the UN's 2030 Agenda, it is still impossible to apply Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) to higher education. The current study examined the structural, sociocultural, and pedagogical obstacles that higher education instructors must overcome in order to attain gender equality in educational settings. A sample of 160 faculty members (N=160) from both public and private universities in Lahore participated in the quantitative, cross-sectional survey. The results also revealed a negative correlation: teachers reported higher levels of professional self-efficacy and pedagogical competence in gender issues because families had high levels of knowledge and experience with these issues (M=4.10), but the biggest obstacles were the families' fear of retaliation (M=4.39). Although there was no rigorous guidance adhering to the gender protection policy, it was generally observed that institutional support was beneficial in terms of professional development. Although the outcome was not statistically significant enough (p=.023), the comparison analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between pedagogical problems. The findings demonstrated that private sector educators experienced fewer operational difficulties than public sector educators. The study suggests that the greatest obstacle to achieving SDG 5 is not a lack of teacher competency but rather a lack of strong institutional security structures to overcome sociocultural resistance. The recommendations include modernizing the pedagogical support mechanisms in public universities and developing apparent teacher protection processes by the Higher Education Commission (HEC).*

*Keywords: SDG-5, Gender Equality, Higher Education, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Socio-Cultural Barriers, Educational Policy, Pakistan.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the research topic and outlines the study's core components. It details the objectives, significance, scope, and limitations of the research. Furthermore, the methodological framework is presented, specifying the research design, population, and sample

#### **Background of the Study**

Systemic inequalities profoundly engrained in social, economic, political, and environmental spheres, however, began to be confronted in earnest along with the global adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable



Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets (United Nations, 2015). The agenda, which encompasses all member states, has an envisioned timeline of the year 2030 to be fully realized. Among the many targets, however, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (SDG-5) is perhaps the most pivotal—an independent development focus as well as a foundational cross-cutting accelerator for the rest of the goals (United Nations, 2015). Recent monitoring undertaken by the UN shows slow and, in some cases, regressing trend levels with respect to SDG-5, which the UN attributes to entrenched structural barriers and socio-cultural norms reproducing inequalities (United Nations, 2023). The setback in the trends for the SDG-5 indicators globally suggests a concerning gap between policy intention and the actual, on-the-ground change.

International data demonstrates that the world is far off track in attaining the 2030 targets on gender equality. The 2023 report on the Progress of the Sustainable Development Goals details setbacks to progress made in the areas of women's safety, women's labour participation, equality in access to higher education, and women's leadership (United Nations, 2023). This stagnation is the result of entrenched discriminatory attitudes and practices and institutional inertia. This suggests that the absence of social and educational equity is the result of the superficiality of legislative and policy reforms. For this reason, SDG-5 is increasingly seen as an urgent corrective agenda. The need for bold systemic change as opposed to mere symbolic change is self-evident.

Nonetheless, uneven application of SDG-5 in practice shows the need for a global response. Countries have varied in adoption, prioritization and implementation. Many areas have made progress in legislation but cultural norms, and structural and institutional frameworks continue to resist. The 2023 Global Gender Gap Index shows a slight improvement in global gender parity, 4% gained in a decade, which at the current rate will take 131 years to achieve full parity (World Economic Forum, 2023). This indicates that the 2030 goals will certainly not be met. There is a pressing need for contextualized and targeted initiatives, especially in the education sector which is expected to drive social change.

In this context, universities have shown to be one of the key institutions regarding the promotion of gender equity. Because of structural and intellectual capacities of higher education institutions (HEIs) as socio-cultural influencers in the generation of knowledge and the development of the workforce, they have the power to confront and change discriminatory mindsets and produce transformative change agents. Yet enough progress has not been made and there is no lack of uneven development in the sector, in addition to the implementation of SDG-5 being described as mostly symbolic in the education sector (UNESCO, 2022; United Nations, 2023). This provides the context for this study regarding the focus of universities and other educational systems in operationalizing SDG-5 in teaching and learning.

Pakistan is slowly and unevenly working towards completing SDG-5. As a result, there are still major gaps and constraints regarding gender issues. Socially, economically, and educationally, there are still major issues. Despite Pakistan integrating SDG targets into its national development plan and focusing on the 2030 Agenda, there is a clear gap between policy and practice. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023 states that Pakistan is still far away from completing the SDG-5 targets. Moreover, key areas such as gender-based violence, political participation, and the empowerment of women economically remain stagnant (United Nations, 2023). The Global Gender Gap Report 2023 scored Pakistan 142 out of 146, highlighting and confirming the gender inequities in education, health, economic participation, and political and civil rights (World Economic Forum, 2023). With these two



reports providing the necessary context, it is time to evaluate the higher education system, and how it has contributed, and is continuing to contribute, to gender equity in the country.

Education has for long been considered a fundamental tool for the empowerment of women. However, inequity in education continues to fuel gender disparity in the country. Although primary and secondary education has registered an improvement in the enrolment of girls, the higher education transition sees a gendered drop-out pattern triggered by socio-cultural, monetary, and safety issues. Evidence suggests that, even as women reach the highest levels of educational attainment, socio-cultural factors and hegemonic patriarchal structures still limit further educational pursuits, career goals, and personal autonomy (Naz & Ashraf, 2020). This suggests that tertiary education also reproduces the gendered disempowerment norms prevalent in Pakistani society, rather than acting as a realm of empowerment. Thus, the higher education landscape is enmeshed in the same structural inequities that shape the socio-cultural environment, rendering the education setting as inherently inequitable.

### **Problem Statement**

Even though Pakistan has signed onto the 2030 Agenda and has begun to recognize the role of higher education in advancing SDG-5, gender equality remains poorly integrated into university level instruction, curricula, and the practices of universities themselves. National and global evaluations of the 2030 Agenda flag Pakistan's progress on SDG-5 as insufficient, with the higher education sector offering little more than nominal compliance on the gender parity indicators. As a result, the gender-equity policies in higher education have little real force in practice at the level of the classroom (United Nations, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023; Higher Education Commission, 2023).

Most of the existing scholarship in the Pakistan context has been focused on the outcomes of women's educational access and the empowerment discourse, and not the classroom experiences of university educators who promote gender equality as a planned outcome of their education. Gendered bias in curricula, socio-cultural constraints, and lack of impetus from the institution result in teachers being educationally disempowered in their ability to teach gender-equity (Naz & Ashraf, 2020; Shaukat et al., 2014; UN Women Pakistan, 2023). The lack of empirical work that attends to the educational leadership required to implement and promote SDG-5 in universities in Pakistan is glaring and calls for research that will provide the basis for focused interventions and strategic policy change.

### **Objectives**

These are the objectives of the study:

- Understanding what is difficult for university lecturers when it comes to sustaining SDG-5 Gender Equality in teaching and in the higher education classroom.
- Examining the impact of institutional and socio-cultural elements on university lecturers' ability, intention, and readiness to enact SDG-5 Gender.
- Comparing the difficulties university tutors face in SDG-5 Gender Equality across the public and private university sectors.

### **Research Questions**

From the stated objectives, the study intends to address these research questions:

- What particular difficulties do university instructors encounter most in the teaching of SDG-5 Gender Equality in higher education classrooms and academia?



- What are the impacts of institutional and cultural contexts on a university teachers' ability and willingness to promote SDG-5 Gender Equality in terms of awareness, his/her attitude, and self-efficacy?
- What disparities exist concerning the challenges of promoting SDG-5 Gender Equality among university instructors in public and private institutions?

### **Research Design**

This research utilizes a descriptive and comparative survey design. This allows to systematically identify and analyze the difficulties university educators experience when advocating for SDG-5 Gender Equality and understanding how these challenges differ by type of institution. A descriptive view allows the study to quantify the rank order of the perceptions, experiences, and contextual realities of the teachers, while the comparative aspect allows balanced assessment of public and private universities to assess whether and how the type and level of challenges vary in these institutional contexts. Such a design available to the study ensures the stated study objectives are met by collecting data that is quantitative in nature for the purpose of evidence-based interpretation.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

SDG 5, which promotes the empowerment and advancement of women and girls, sits at the centre of the 2030 Agenda. Though there have been significant advancements, real and true gender parity continues to face systemic, cultural, and institutional challenges. While diverse forms of education, and especially higher education, are commonly perceived as critical tools in mitigating the factors of gender inequality within societies as well as in shaping the education and participation of people in civic life, the higher attainment of gender equity in society and the complete attainment of its civic participation are paradoxically and simultaneously dependent on universities.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to fulfil their multifunctional roles within the scope of the SDGs. They have the potential to educate, produce knowledge, innovate policies, and promote and institutionalise civic engagement. In the words of many global leaders, universities are "one of the most significant incubators of ideas... and solutions to global problems." This statement captures the essence of incorporating the SDGs into the academic purpose of universities. This partnership, along with the promotion of genuinely sustainable development, can effectively contribute to the promotion of gender equity.

The contemporary idea of sustainable development did not simply crystallise within the policy discourse at a particular moment. Rather, it took the form of decades of discourse surrounding the environment, the economy, and the social realms. From the early environment-related discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly writings from the Club of Rome, which warned of the dangers of unchecked resource consumption and subsequent degradation of the ecosystem, there were documented environmental concerns. This formed the basis of a conceptualisation of development which, as the text "Meadows et al. 1972" explains, is not simply economic growth, but a multi-dimensional discourse.

"The 2030 Agenda" as a Global Policy Framework "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" of 2015, which all Member States of the United Nations accepted unanimously, is the most global and most extensive of all development contracts yet. All previous contracts and frameworks, especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), do not include such a universal, integrated and transformative agenda. Most, if not all, previous frameworks do not apply to all high, middle, and low-income countries. The 2030



Agenda is universal and integrated as a development framework". United Nations 2015. The challenges for sustainability, especially in the world of the Global South, are not gender neutral - especially in relation to the Global South - and all countries in the world have gender inequalities. The development "partnership" is grounded in the "universal" principle of shared responsibility.

Integration is one of the 2030 Agendas defining contributions. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are interlinked and progress in one requires advancements in others. Academic studies emphasise that these interconnections are not merely interlinked in principle, but in practice. For example, gender equality (SDG 5) affects (positively) education (SDG 4, quality), (sustained) economic growth (SDG 8), (less) inequalities (SDG 10, reduced), health (SDG 3, good), and peace (SDG 16, & justice) (Nilsson et al. 2016). The agenda, therefore, advances the opposite of siloed policy thinking in terms of the needed progressive systemic coordination, in sharp contrast to the MDGs, which were criticised for regarding gender equality as a goal, rather than a core, multidimensional development framework (Fukuda-Parr, 2016).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a carefully designed attempt to build an all-encompassing, operationally definable, and normative global framework. Their structure is a result of decades of policy design, empirical evaluation, and political compromise, to culminate in a design that seeks to address the complexity of development in a comprehensive manner. The SDGs, unlike all other international development agendas, are not presented with stand-alone targets. Rather, they are contained within an integrated framework, built around five core values — People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership, referred to as the 5Ps. These values explain the philosophy and the operational rationale of the agenda, which is too inter-relate human development, protection of the environment, economic development, governance, and international cooperation (United Nations, 2015). One of the central structuring features of the SDGs is their interdependence. Development scholars note the SDGs have been purposefully designed to circumvent the methodological soiling that plagued the MDGs (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). Take, for instance, SDG 4 (quality education), which is fundamentally connected to SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). According to Nilsson et al. (2016), the SDGs should be viewed as a web of integrated systems as opposed to merely a list of heterogeneous goals. MacFeely (2018) argues that a system with this many indicators is likely to overwhelm national statistical offices, particularly in developing countries with poor data ecosystems. With that said, the indicator system is a pivotal component of the SDGs. Indicators systematised the previously abstract goals and with that, also provided a basis for countries and institutions to hold each other accountable.

Universities are particularly influential within Educating for Sustainable Development (ESD) considering their perennial managerial position in knowledge creation and professional education. Scholars observe that institutions of higher education are more than teaching establishments; they are policy and sustainability research-shaping and value-influencing social engines and leadership training (Cortese, 2003). This deliberate position is strengthened by the advocacy effort for educational establishments to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their organisational policies and practices. In numerous countries, educational establishments have incorporated sustainability within their teaching, research, governance, and administrative processes, proving their ability to become full actors of sustainability.



The sustenance of these frameworks is provided by various global texts and declarations, such as the Talloires Declaration (1990) and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). These frameworks and texts directly compel higher education institutions to integrate the challenges of sustainability into their teaching, research, and leadership functions. As Filho et al (2018) point out, there is significant variance in the ability of universities to meet these requirements, owing to differing levels of leadership engagement, institutional culture, resource distribution, and preparedness of faculty. Insufficient training, lack of resources for curricula, restricted institutional motivation, and ambiguity as to how sustainability can be incorporated into teaching particular to a discipline are the challenges that educators indicate (Warwick et al., 2023).

The 2030 Agenda recognises gender equality as the “one of the most unaddressed issues and a necessary condition to attain a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world” (United Nations, 2015). This is because gendered relations govern access to and control of resources, participation in governance and decision-making, and the distribution and control of opportunities. Other scholars argue that supporting development is not achievable if 50% of the population is disempowered because of overt discriminatory practices and institutional and cultural constraints (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). For the universities, this advocacy position means that achieving other educational and development outcomes is dependent on creating and sustaining gender equitable educational environments.

The meaning of gender equality within the context of global development is the same as the equal rights, equal responsibilities, and equal opportunities of the same regardless of gender. This is not to suggest that males and females should become clones of one another. It is to suggest that there is equality if one is treated with the same respect. This, of course, is not the case. In a world with inequity, the history of a person should determine how one is treated, and the inequitable treatment should be reversed. (UN Women, 2020). Conceptually, the most distinguishing differentiation should be between sex and gender. Sex constitutes a person’s biological makeup while gender refers to the socially ascribed roles, functions, and expectations of individuals that are not the same across space and time (Butler, 1990). This is the crux of the global goal number 5 of the SDGs. It is not the biological makeup that is responsible for the inequality, but the socially constructed expectations and roles.

From this view, one recognises that gender equality is also about other indirectly related concepts, such as gender equity and empowerment. Gender equity refers to fairness of treatment or equal justice as a principle of legal equality within a particular social context. This is particularly the case in a context where women are, as a population, disadvantaged. (UNESCO, 2022). Empowerment is a broad notion within the feminist approach for the development of women that refers to enhancing the capability of individuals, particularly women, to make choices concerning the course of their life in a strategic manner. Such a notion was popularised by Kabeer (1999), claiming that empowerment is at the intersection of resources, agency, and achievements, which emphasises the multiple and diverse aspects of gender inequality, including social, economic, political, and institutional.

Considering the functions of university teachers as educators of knowledge and as shapers of social norms and professional ideologies, the role of gender-responsive pedagogy (GRP), especially in a university context, becomes central in debates related to the realisation of SDG 5. While the university context, like any other context in higher education, contains built-in gendered structures, available evidence shows that university teachers, in the main, do not have the necessary formal training on the inclusion of gender in their teaching (Morley, 2014; O'Connor and Irvine 2020). GRP, unlike other sectors of education, rests on



narrowing frameworks, such as inclusive pedagogy and feminist education, where advocacy on pedagogy and teaching ignores the consequences of classroom practices, curriculum, and educational structures in promoting gender inequity (hooks, 1994; Bhopal, 2020). While in the education of primary and secondary students, gender-responsive teaching has been and continues to receive significant policy attention, in higher education, the reverse is the case, hence the inequitable results concerning the engagement of teachers.

One of the most enduring issues with existing frameworks is the weakness of the frameworks relating to gender and the lack of mechanisms for putting them into practice. A number of universities in the world adopt statements of gender equality, anti-harassment policies, and diversity policies, but such documents are often ceremonial and lack the implementation required to make a difference in everyday academic life (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Stromquist (2015) claims that institutions of higher education practice what she calls "policy 'borrowing'" by merely adopting "equality" "policies" for the sake of satisfying statutory or international commitments, without any real "structural" change. In Pakistan, policies framed at the university level regarding gender equality are often limited to the provisions of harassment reporting as prescribed by national law, while the more important issues of gender-responsive curriculum design, training of faculty, equitable recruitment, and so on, are ignored (Shah "&" Shah, 2012). Such a narrow approach to policies leaves university teachers with no formal guidance, institutional expectations, or administrative backing for the incorporation of SDG 5 into their teaching.

Educators' sensitivities to family expectations impact their willingness to speak on particular issues. One example is suggested by Stromquist (2015), in which family or community elders may criticise women educators for discussing gender violence, women's rights, or gender identity issues, for any reason, even in a classroom. Such criticism could foster psychological and emotional barriers, preventing educators from addressing such sensitive classroom issues. Conversely, male educators who advocate for classroom equality may face social ostracism or professional alienation for perceived violations of hegemonic masculinity or for being 'too' feminist. Such interactions serve to illustrate the extent to which the socio-cultural context of the wider community influences the teachers' teaching practices, in

A recurring theme in the international and regional research is that university instructors report significant gaps in their professional development in regard to gender, and the implementation of the SDG 5. According to UNESCO (2022), many college and university instructors lack even the most basic training in gender pedagogy. Professional development gaps are attributed to lack of understanding of the global gender policy framework, inadequate knowledge and skills in teaching and promoting inclusive classrooms, and insufficient familiarity with gender-disaggregated data in academic planning. Instructors report that they do not know how to provide gendered examples in their discipline, which suggests that they need training materials that are not generic diversity materials

In Pakistan, the situation is exacerbated. Research indicates that educators go long periods without having any specialised, sustained, and longitudinal professional development that is organised around the instruction of teaching and learning with a focus on the intersection of gender, inclusive classroom practices, and SDG-responsive teaching (Naz et al., 2017). There are additional barriers to participation for the female academics, who are often overburdened with teaching responsibilities, experience a lack of vertical mobility, and loss of potential mentorship, all of which diminish the scope of training (Rana et al., 2024). There are also teachers that solely focus on STEM and have voiced that the only gender



workshops that are offered are almost exclusively for the social sciences, creating a dearth of examples on how to teach SDG 5 to STEM learners. There are also several barriers to the participants of the training, such as the absence of adequate administrative support, a lack of recognition for participation in such training, and an absence of training and administrative policies on the necessity of gender training.

It is the pedagogical competencies of teachers that determine whether or not gender awareness is actualised in classroom practices. Gender-responsive pedagogy is the practice of pedagogy that counters biases, facilitates equitable participation, and incorporates gender issues in the pedagogy of the subject matter. However, there is a universal tendency for the majority of universities to not develop these competencies in their faculty, as international studies continue to find (UNESCO, 2023). It is taken for granted by institutions of higher education that pedagogical skill comes automatically with academic expertise, a presumption that is challenged by evidence. Within several Asian and African HEIs, studies show that faculty continue to employ traditional teaching practices characterised by passive learning and a top-down power dynamic, conditions that more often than not exacerbate the already existing gendered disadvantages (Morley, 2021). For example, in STEM classrooms, there is a tendency for male students to be called upon more frequently, while female students, due to cultural implicit biases of teachers, tend to participate less.

Further research in Pakistan shows that university instructors are not provided structured gender-pedagogy training, despite being asked to support the institution's goals related to gender equity. Naz et al. (2017) noted that there are many faculty members who are unable to effectively manage gender-sensitive discussions, counter gendered insults in classroom settings, or address the relevance of gender in their teaching content. This lack of skills is more common in the so-called "neutral" fields, like engineering, economics, or computer science, where instructors do not see the relevance of gender to the field. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge has continually shown that gender-responsive teaching is relevant in all fields because there are gendered experiences that affect participation, confidence, and learning in all fields (UNESCO, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the methodology; the design of the study, sampling and its technique, Instrumentation etc will be described.

### **Research Design**

The current study utilized a quantitative, employing a cross-sectional survey to understand the difficulties university educators experience in attempting to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) in higher education in Pakistan. It is acknowledged that the utilization of a quantitative survey framework is most appropriate for research that seeks to capture the distribution, structure, and comparative differences across a range of constructs i.e., barriers at the level of the educator, institutional, and socio-cultural dimensions. Since the objectives for the study are descriptive and explanatory (as opposed to being predictive) a non-experimental design best allows for the assessment of a situation, as is, without interventions. The cross-sectional design framework allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time. This approach is common in research within and across higher education and gender studies fields as it allows for the practical and rapid assessment of constituents (stakeholders) perceptions in instances where the target population is university educators and is time-strapped due to competing academic activities. The chosen survey design corresponds precisely with the research objectives to ascertain obstacles, examine institution and culture, and contrast the type of universities in implementing SDG 5. The



survey method allows the researcher to obtain uniform answers from a relatively large and diversified sample of the faculty, allowing the study to gain the breadth needed to identify and analyse different patterns on institutional levels and with the required accuracy to distinguish differences in contextual variables. Furthermore, survey-based designs are fundamental in quantitative analysis despite the educational level as it pertains to the study of internationally researched systems in gender equality affirming the study's legitimacy to other studies (UNESCO, 2022).

This study investigated university level educators in post-secondary educational facilities situated in Lahore, Pakistan. Since this study focuses on the challenges educators face in advocating for Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality), it was necessary to choose educational institutions that have SDG-related activities, specific gender policy frameworks, and a heterogeneous faculty that could reasonably affect educators' viewpoints. Due to the high concentration of universities and various types of institutions, and its significance as a leading educational centre in Pakistan, Lahore was selected.

The following universities were selected based on a purposive sampling technique:

1. A Public University – University of Education, Lahore
2. A Private University – University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore

The sampling method emphasizes practical issues. As discussed in previous studies regarding Pakistan's higher education, university teachers have a constantly growing workload, and their unavailability and non-participation in research surveys are becoming increasingly problematic (Naz & Ashraf, 2020; Rehman et al., 2024). Consequently, in purposive sampling, the researcher concentrated on the faculty who are likely to be most available and willing to participate, while still keeping the necessary representation from the departments where teaching and gender issue discourse is most relevant, including the social sciences, education, management sciences, and humanities.

Moreover, in studies regarding gender and the SDGs, purposive sampling is the norm (UNESCO, 2022). This is because it guarantees that participants have lived experience with the particular institutional and socio-cultural realities regarding the gender gap. The selected institutions are diverse in their governance, administrative arrangements, and gender climates, which allows for richer analysis as compared to random sampling for a larger set of universities.

In essence, the sampling method made it possible to include participants who were highly informative and placed in the relevant environments for the purpose of the study, thereby increasing the credibility and configurative significance of the results.

### **Sample Size**

The study consisted of 160 university teachers sampled from the two selected institutions; one public (University of Education, Lahore) and one private (University of Management and Technology, Lahore). This range takes into consideration both the practical limitations of data collection in higher education settings as well as the methodological appropriateness of small-to-moderate samples in survey studies involving faculty populations.

Participation issues persist in quantitative research involving university teachers as a result of busy teaching loads, administrative tasks, and general unavailability (Bryman, 2016). In a Pakistani context, response rates are typically low in survey research involving faculties as seen in several studies that examine gender and higher education (Naz & Ashraf, 2020; Shaukat et al., 2014). For these reasons, a sample size of 160 respondents is seen as



realistic and is more than adequate for carrying out descriptive statistics and comparisons of means of different categories.

Also, the comparative analysis between the faculty of public and private universities is not confined to a large sample as the purpose is exploratory, not confirmatory. As long as both sectors of institutions are represented (i.e., 80 teachers from each), the sample is able to provide meaningful descriptive differences and hence sectoral challenges. This has a rich history in higher education research, especially in studies linked to the SDGs and gender equality, where differences within institutions, qualitatively, outweigh large differences statistically (UNESCO, 2022).

### **Instrument Development**

The construction of the research tool was the outcome of systematic yet academically-rooted reasoning for the purpose of achieving conceptual clarity, alignment with the purpose of the study, and methodological consistency. Based on the reviewed literature, the first step was to isolate the core components pertaining to the finalized objectives of the study, which focused on the teacher's knowledge and skills related to gender, the institutional and socio-cultural barriers to gender equality, and the attitudes the teacher holds toward SDG 5 in the context of the university. These areas formed the conceptual blueprint for the articulation of items and the integration of both adapted and newly created items. Only those areas which had empirical literature backing them were kept in order to enhance the instrument's theoretical relevance and internal consistency.

Incorporating existing grounded scales to integrate useful measurement practices, as recommended by literature, was exercised to improve potential reliability and reduce measurement ambiguity. Self-efficacy items were taken from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Even though TSES was designed for school teachers, its use has been justified and documented in several studies in post-secondary education, as long as the items are modified to reflect university teaching. For this reason, only those items that reasonably aligned with the teaching of higher education were modified, and the terms were changed so as to reflect higher education teaching as opposed to K-12. Each changed item kept the primary theoretical focus, but was adjusted in wording to reflect the language and practices of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Additional items were developed for aspects of the context specific to Pakistani higher education that have yet to have validated measures that fully capture the nuance of the context, particularly relating to academic institutional gender mainstreaming, socio-cultural barriers, and personal discomfort with gender issues in the classroom. Such items were developed based on a comprehensive literature review on gender equity in higher education, particularly those studies addressing the socio-cultural barriers (e.g., Shah & Shah, 2024) and gaps in institutional governance and the extent to which teachers were prepared for gender responsive teaching. This was to ensure context specificity, in that international measurement tools often ignore the socio cultural and institutional context, especially related to gender, and the cultural dimensions of South Asian universities. Drafts of the new survey items were evaluated in terms of conceptual overlap, simplicity, and directness of measurement.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The researcher employed the Statistical Packages for Social Science version 25 to conduct data analysis for the study in accordance with a set of procedures aimed at fulfilling the study's descriptive and comparative objectives. Considering the study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey, the analytical strategy aimed at ascertaining the extent



and the degree of the challenges faced by university educators in the advancement of SDG 5; and if these challenges were the same or varied in public and private university institutions.

The first stage in the analysis was performing data preparation. Questionnaires were evaluated for data completeness, data consistency, and data coding accuracy. Respondents on the Likert scales were coded in a range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), and the questionnaires with higher rates of missing data were dropped from the data set. Occasionally, there were cases where responses were missing to a few items, and in these cases, mean substitution for that construct was used in keeping with good practice for data that are missing randomly, and in small amounts. After that, the dataset underwent empirical scrutiny to determine the presence and impact of skewness and rudimentary measures of kurtosis, in order to ascertain whether the aggregate scores for composite variables came to approximate a normal distribution. It is possible for composite scores to behave like interval data for Likert-type responses, and theoretically Likert-type data are best treated with nonparametric tests.

To accomplish the first objective of the research, understanding the problems that educators encounter while trying to support SDG 5, descriptive statistics were used. For the three main elements: teacher level, institution level, and socio-cultural predicament, means, standard deviations, and frequency counts were calculated. These statistics allowed us to understand the barriers to the problems and the intensity greatly. The overall descriptive analysis was important for the understanding of barriers that educators may encounter, considering the varied manifestations of gender equity problems across different institutions and cultural systems around the world. (UNESCO, 2022).

To reinforce the construct validation for the analysis component of the study, composite scores were calculated for each primary dimension by averaging the responses to the grouped items. The use of each construct as a continuous composite score improved the statistical strength of the subsequent inferential analysis and ensured that a construct was treated as a holistic entity rather than a collection of disjointed items.

In order to meet the comparative objective of determining the extent to which the challenges perceived by teachers in public and private universities were distinct, independent samples t-tests were conducted. The independent samples t test was the most appropriate given the independence of the two samples and the presence of composite variables which, in view of the reliability evidence and approximate normality, could be appropriately treated as interval variables. The t test permitted comparison of the means of the scores of the two groups for each of the constructs, thus identifying possible distinctions in terms of teachers' institutional or socio-cultural level barriers, and/or the other variables of interest. In addition to t test, effect sizes (Cohen's d) were computed in order to provide an indication of the extent of the differences, as it was recognized that statistically significant results do not, in themselves, provide an adequate basis for the exercise of practical judgment.

Given the sample size, the t test assumptions, and in particular normality and homogeneity of variance, were examined with particular care. In the event of non-normally distributed data, the Mann-Whitney U test was used as an alternative non parametric test. This was done to ensure that the results were not compromised due to lack of adherence to the underlying assumptions.



### Ethical Considerations

What defines the research ethics for protecting the dignity and rights of the participants? Of the sensitivity of the issues that the study attempts to explore - gender inequity, institutional practices, and socio-cultural discrimination – the ethics of research becomes extremely crucial.

- Informed Consent
- Voluntary Participation
- Anonymity and Confidentiality
- Avoidance of Harm
- Transparency and Honesty in Reporting
- Institutional Permission
- Data Storage and Protection
- Ethical Use of Results

### DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter features the discussion of the data gathered to explore the issues faced by university educators to showcase Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) implementation in Pakistani higher education institutions. It utilized cross sectional survey design. One hundred and ninety questionnaires were sent to the faculty members in the universities in Lahore. After data cleaning and fulfilment checks, 30 questionnaires were dismissed because of a high amount of missing data, which now connects to the final analytical sample of  $N = 160$  and a valid response rate of 84.2%.

IBM SPSS statistics were used to analyse quantitative data. The procedure of the analysis will be divided into three parts, namely, the demographic description of respondents, the assessment of the reliability of the instrument, and the use of the descriptive and inferential statistics including the Mann-Whitney Test to answer the research questions regarding challenges, self -efficacy, and institutional barriers in relation to SDG-5.

### Demographic Information

Below in the table 1, given the demographic information of the respondents:

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	55
	Female	72	45
Institution Type	Public Sector	80	50
	Private Sector	80	50
Qualification	MPhil / MS	35	21.9
	PhD	125	78.1
Total		160	100

Gender sample size implies that the sample of academic workers in the chosen universities is quite balanced. As it was mentioned in Table 1, the sample was predominantly male (55.0%,  $n=88$ ) and female faculty members (45.0%,  $n=72$ ). This almost-parity means a



lot to the purpose of the study, which is to discuss gender-responsive pedagogy, as it will guarantee that both the male and female teachers can be sufficiently represented in the discussion of obstacles related to SDG-5.

On the institutional affiliation, there was a perfect stratification of the sample between the two sectors. Precisely 50.0% (n=80) and 50.0% (n=80) of the respondents were recruited in the public and the private sector university respectively. The fact that this distribution is equal is also methodologically beneficial to this study since it offers a proper statistical foundation of the comparative analysis needed to answer Research Question 3 so that no sector takes up too large a portion of the dataset.

The sample is a very qualified group of educators in terms of academic qualification. The data shows that the large majority of the respondents, 78.1% (n=125) have a PhD degree and 21.9% (n=35) has an MPhil or MS. The prevalence of PhD in the sample gives the results a credibility in terms of self-efficacy and pedagogical competence since the majority of the respondents are a representation of the highest and older cadre of the university faculty.

### Reliability Analysis

To determine the internal consistency of the instrument, the Alpha of Cronbach was determined on the four principal sub-scales. DeVellis (2012) reports that a Cronbach alpha value of more than 0.70 can be said to be acceptable in a social science study.

The reliability figures of all constructs as shown in Table 2 were higher than the 0.70 threshold. The sub-scale that showed the best reliability was the Teacher Self-Efficacy (alpha =.905), which showed great internal consistency in assessing the perceived capabilities of the teachers. Another great scale was the Pedagogical Challenges sub-scale (alpha =.870). The context-specific scales on the measures of "Institutional Support" and "Socio-Cultural Barriers" produced significance coefficients of .721 and .724 respectively, which attests to the fact that the tool was valid to be used in the local context.

**Table 2**

*Reliability for the constructs*

Scale / Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Interpretation
Pedagogical Challenges	6	0.87	Good
Teacher Self-Efficacy	9	0.905	Excellent
Institutional Support	9	0.721	Acceptable
Socio-Cultural Barriers	5	0.724	Acceptable

### Descriptive Analysis

This part shows descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of key constructs of the study. The analysis will be structured in such a way that it will answer the first two research questions, which are the pedagogical challenges that teachers encounter (RQ1) and how institutional and cultural contextual factors have an impact (RQ2).

Criterion to Interpretation of Means To interpret the descriptive data well, the mean scores were divided into five levels depending on the interval of 0.80 (Pimentel, 2010).

- > 1.80: Very Low (Strongly disagree with positive items / Strongly agree with negative items)
- 1.81 – 2.60: Low
- 2.61 – 3.40: Moderate (Neutral)



- 3.41 – 4.20: High
- 4.21-5.00: Very High (Strongly Agree with positive items /Strongly Disagree with negative items)

### ***Pedagogical Practices and Challenges***

Table 3 demonstrates the answers of teachers concerning the classroom practices. An important point of this analysis is that the negative statements (marked with a star) needed to be reverse-coded. In the case of these items, a large mean score means that the respondents did not agree with the negative statement, which is a positive result (i.e. low difficulty).

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for Pedagogical Challenges and Practices*

Item / Statement	Std.		Interpretation
	Mean	Deviation	
I struggle to balance the complexity of questions I ask*	4.32	0.755	Strongly Disagree
I struggle to employ the same level of discipline consistently*	4.32	0.772	Strongly Disagree
I deliberately keep track of my class to make sure I give attention	4.24	0.748	Strongly Agree
I deliberately employ terms that do not specify a gender	4.11	0.774	Agree
I strenuously promote mixed gender seating arrangements or groups	4.07	0.939	Agree
The examples I often use in my lecture present both genders	3.89	0.873	Agree

*\*Note: These questions were stated negatively. The average score was 4.32, which means that the respondents strongly disagree that they struggle and have high perceived competence.*

Table 3 results makes the picture of the faculty look very confident. Teachers were of the opinion that they intentionally monitor their attention to promote equity (M=4.24) with a Strong Agree. More importantly, as far as challenges are concerned, the statistics indicate that teachers do not feel like struggling. The average of the struggles to balance question complexity (M=4.32) and the struggles with discipline (M=4.32) scores are in the Strongly Disagree spectrum of the scale. It means that the respondents think that they are perfectly able to cope with the gender dynamics and do not consider the pedagogical mechanics of equity as the important barrier.

### ***Teacher Self-Efficacy***

Table 4 shows the perceived self-efficacy of the teachers on SDG-5 implementation. The findings are consistent with the findings of the above section with high confidence levels.



**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Self-Efficacy*

Item / Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I know where to find area and country-specific data and evidence	4.33	0.765	Completely Confident
I can positively modify the attitudes of the students regarding gender	4.26	0.756	Completely Confident
I can facilitate discussions around the issues of gender	4.23	0.848	Completely Confident
I can assess and locate appropriate evidence to address the topic	4.18	0.843	Very Confident
I am knowledgeable about instructional approaches that facilitate	4.17	0.659	Very Confident
I can manage challenges regarding the topic of gender equality	4.16	0.838	Very Confident
I can adjust my teaching to be more gender responsive	4.16	0.749	Very Confident
I can design learning activities that promote critical understanding	4.12	0.788	Very Confident
I have sufficient understanding of SDG 5 and its relevance	4.11	0.925	Very Confident

Very high level of self-efficacy was demonstrated by the respondents. They both "Completely Confident" that they had the abilities to locate data that is specific to gender (M=4.33) and change the attitudes of students in a positive way (M=4.26). The least rated item in this construct, which was to understand the specific relevancy of SDG 5, still had a high mean score of 4.11 (Very Confident). This proves that the teachers in this sample do not interpret incompetence or lack of knowledge as a hindrance; they believe that they are competent change agents.

***Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers***

Table 5 shows the external pressure that informs the practice of teachers. In this section we have a revelation of the real difficulties.

**Table 5**

*Descriptive Statistics for Institutional and Socio-Cultural Contexts*

Item / Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
<b>Socio-Cultural Barriers</b>			
Fears of backlash from students' families arise if I cover the topic	4.39	0.584	Strongly Agree
Worries pertaining to the impact on my professional standing	4.36	0.667	Strongly Agree
Given my context some gender topics are complicated to	4.35	0.563	Strongly



address			Agree
There are some gender issues that I modify or avoid due to my personal safety	4.31	0.549	Strongly Agree
Teaching gender sensitive topics openly is affected by the attitude of students	4.29	0.686	Strongly Agree
<b>Institutional Factors</b>			
My university provides me the opportunity of professional growth	4.4	0.737	Strongly Agree
Departmental leadership shows enthusiasm in supporting faculty	4.29	0.678	Strongly Agree
The integration of gender issues in curriculum review is a component	4.29	0.688	Strongly Agree
The teaching of gender equality in my department is regarded positively	4.17	0.702	Agree
Equitable behaviours and mentoring with respect to gender are discussed	4.04	0.738	Agree
My university has clearly stated policies and guidelines on gender	3.91	0.652	Agree

The barriers analysis is an interpretation in vivid contrast to the self-reported competence of the teachers. Teachers do not believe that they are incompetent (pedagogically), but greatly agree that they are under harsh socio-cultural dangers. The maximum average in the whole survey was on "Fears of backlash of families of students" (M=4.39), it was then followed by Fears of professional standing (M=4.36). This implies that hostile external environment is the biggest impediment to SDG-5 implementation, rather than lack of teacher skill.

Concerning institutional ones, although the general support of professional development is rated as very high (M=4.40), the presence of the clearly stated policies and guidelines on gender received the lowest rating (M=3.91). This is, though again, a positive sign, but it is still less than other indicators and this could be evidence that although the universities might be generally welcoming, it might not have the specific, codified protections to be able to counter the high cultural fears that teachers were reporting.

**Normality of Data Distribution Testing.**

It was also necessary to ascertain the data distribution before going ahead to the inferential analysis to answer the third research question. Normality is a crucial assumption to be used when choosing a suitable statistical test (parametric vs. non-parametric). To confirm this assumption, Shapiro-Wilk test was run on the four composite variables which include Pedagogical Challenges, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Institutional Support and Socio-Cultural Barriers.

The null hypothesis of this test ( $H_0$ ) will assume that the data is normally distributed. When the p-value (Sig.) exceeds 0.05, the data is said to be normal. Nonetheless, when the p-value becomes less than 0.05, it is an indication that the assumption of normality is not satisfied.



**Table 6**

*Normality check for the questionnaire sections*

Composite Variable	Statistic	df	Sig. (p)
Mean_Challenges	0.795	160	0
Mean_Efficacy	0.704	160	0
Mean_Institutional	0.895	160	0
Mean_Sociocultural	0.898	160	0

Table 6 shows that based on ShapiroWilk test, the p-values of all four constructs are found to be significant ( $p=.001$ ). This is adequate to dismiss the null hypothesis of normality and the data on Pedagogical Challenges, Self-efficacy, Institutional Support, and Socio-Cultural barrier do not follow a normal distribution. Under this condition of breaking the normality assumption, the application of the parametric tests like the Independent Samples t - test would be wrong and may cause statistical errors. As a result, a powerful non-parametric alternative, namely, Mann -Whitney U test, was identified in order to test the difference between public and private sector universities in terms of average rank of universities.

**Comparative Analysis: Public/Private Universities.**

The third research question aimed to find out whether there are major differences between teachers in the public and private universities concerning the issue of SDG-5 promotion. A MannWhitneyU test was conducted to explore this. The grouping variable was the type of the institutions (Public vs. Private), the test variables were comprised of the composite scores of the four study constructs.

The null hypothesis of this analysis is ( $H_0$ ) that the scores have the same distribution in both categories of institutions. A significance level of less than 0.05 was used as the criterion for rejecting the null hypothesis.

**Table 7**

*Mann-Whitney U Test Results Comparing Public and Private Universities*

Variable	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Pedagogical Challenges	2540.5	5780.5	-2.281	.023*	Significant
Teacher Self-Efficacy	3156	6396	0.152	0.879	Not Significant
Institutional Support	3123	6363	0.264	0.791	Not Significant
Socio-Cultural Barriers	2658	5898	-1.88	0.06	Significant

***Pedagogical Challenges***

The comparison showed that there is one statistically significant difference in the perception of pedagogical challenges among teachers in the governmental and private sectors ( $U = 2540.50, Z = -2.281, p = .023$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected because the p -value is not more than 0.05.

Mean rank of teachers in the private-sector displayed higher (88.74) when compared to the teachers in the public-sector (72.26), which means that the faculty in private



universities do not experience that many pedagogical challenges as those in the public sector. This conclusion means that the institutional type has a determinative effect on the everyday classroom challenges faced by the teachers. Potential differences on the structure or operations of the state and privated universities are seen to create different pedagogical milieu and thus influence the manner in which the teachers handle the issues of discipline, as well as being biased when it comes to tackling complex issues with regard to gender.

### ***Teacher Self-Efficacy***

Conversely, the self-efficacy of teachers did not differ significantly ( $U = 3156.00, p = .879$ ). The high  $p$ -value shows that in both sectors teachers have almost the same degree of confidence in their skill of teaching gender -responding topics. Educators view themselves as competent and skilled whether in a social or in a personal environment.

### ***Institutional Support***

On the same note, there was no significant difference in the analysis of institutional support ( $U = 3123.00, p = .791$ ). This finding is interesting because it undermines the popular belief that the resources or support systems provided by private universities could be significantly better than those provided in the case of public institutions. Teachers in these two sectors have a similar perception of administration support and policy clarity in terms of SDG-5.

### ***Socio-Cultural Barriers***

Lastly, when it comes to socio-cultural obstacles, the test was not statistically significant but the outcome was close to the level of significance ( $U = 2658.00, p = .060$ ). This marginal significance indicates a tendency, but, strictly speaking, the null hypothesis cannot be discarded. This confirms that the presence of external pressures, such as fear of backlash by the families and resistance of the society has been ubiquitous throughout the higher-education environment in Pakistan. The fear related to dealing with gender issues is a common professional risk of both working in the public and the private sector of faculty.

In the chapter, the author reflected the interpretation of the results of the study of 160 teachers of universities. The reliability test established the instrument and the sub-scales to be reliable (Butcher, 1989; 2001, p. 97). It was identified that the descriptive analysis has shown that the teachers have a high degree of self-efficacy and pedagogical competence, yet their socio-cultural barriers, especially the fear of the families are immense. The tests of normality showed non-normality distribution of data and thus the non-parametric statistics were to be used. The results of the MannWhitney U test revealed that, despite the similarity in the views of the teachers in the public and the private-sector in terms of institutional support and socio-cultural barriers, major difference between these two groups is achieved in terms of the pedagogical challenges they are faced with in the classroom. Chapter 5 discussion and recommendations are empirically supported by these findings.

## **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The conceptualization of gender equality in the 2030 Agenda of sustainable development appears as a basic human right, however, it is rather a prerequisite of a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainably designed global order. In this global agenda, the fifth Severe Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) clearly requests that discrimination against women and girls should be ended at all costs. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are always credited playing a central role in this change, having the role of destroying the powers of patriarchy and developing inclusive societies by creating knowledge and developing future leaders. The realization of these international commitments in the classroom, as they relate to Pakistan, is, however, hindered by a complicated combination of systemic and socio-cultural challenges.



Although there is an increase in the gender-equity policies internationally, reports have recently shown that Pakistan is still one of the last-ranked countries in the globe in regard to gender parity. As much focus has been given to enhancing feminine enrolment and access to education, a grave vacuum in comprehending the experiences lived by the educators that will bring these values into practice still exists. In this requirement, university instructors play an pivotal role but they often cannot do their job because of combination of pedagogical difficulties, institutional resistance and deep-rooted socio- cultural structures.

To fill this gap in the existing knowledge, this research was developed, and it would conduct a study, which empirically addresses the issues that university teachers encounter when trying to encourage SDG-5 in the higher education sector in Lahore, Pakistan. Going beyond a biological concept of persistence such as a number of stimuli enrolment statistics, this research concentrated on a micro-level of academic environment dynamics. In particular, it was intended to measure the pedagogical challenges faced by the teachers, gauge their self-efficacy in presenting gender-sensitive material and determine the institutional and socio-cultural constraints that hinder their professional agency. Besides this, through a comparative design, this study attempted to establish whether these challenges vary significantly between the institutions of the public and private sector, which is a dimension that has hitherto been underestimated in the local literature.

The research study used quantitative survey design, in which data on 160 faculty members in two different institutional settings were gathered. This research produced a subtle dataset, through a stringent statistical procedure of reliability test, descriptive profiling, and non-parametric comparative analysis, which sheds light on the conflict between teacher competence and environmental limitation. This chapter has brought together all these findings, explaining them in the importance of Teacher Efficacy and Social Role Theory. It goes on to give implications of these findings, and finally gives evidence-based suggestions that the policy makers, administrators and future researchers can take to improve the agenda of gender equality to Pakistani higher education.

### **Summary of Findings**

The empirical research about the data obtained on the sample of 160 university educators provided some significant knowledge about the state of gender equality implementation in the sphere of higher education. The sample was defined by an equal number of non-profit sector institution between public (50.0') and private (50.0') and a well-established academic profile with the majority of the respondents being a doctorate (78.1'). The reliability analysis established the internal consistency within the research instrument, and all the sub-scales were greater than the acceptable threshold (0.70 and above). According to the descriptive and inferential statistical tests, the following major findings were found:

#### ***High Self-efficacy and Perceived Competence of Teachers.***

On the contrary to the hypothesis that the teachers may not be able to address the issue of gender, the results showed a very high level of self-efficacy among the respondents. The teachers in the study always had the strongly agree or agree on their capabilities. They were very optimistic about their capacity to find country-specific gender information, have sensitive conversations and alter the attitude of students. Also, the item analysis of the perceived pedagogical difficulties showed that teachers do not feel having difficulty with the mechanics of equitable instruction; the mean scores of the items that relate to classroom discipline and questioning strategies were at very strong disagreement levels with the idea that these activities were challenging. This is indicative that the faculty feels professionally competent and pedagogically ready to promote SDG -5.



### ***Predominance of Socio-Cultural Barriers***

The most notable barrier was cited as the external environment although internal competence was also very high. One of the points of the descriptive analysis was that the highest rating means were obtained from the socio-cultural barriers in the whole study ( $M > 4.30$ ). In particular, the most acute stressors were found to be Fears of backlash by the families of students and Worries related to the professional standing. This result can be used to define that the main barrier to gender-responsive teaching does not lie in the incompetence of teachers, but rather in unpleasant external environment, marked by cultural opposition to it and the possibility of social or even professional punishment.

### ***Institutional Ambivalence***

The results on the institutional support were a back-and-forth picture. Although teachers admitted that they had the opportunity to develop professionally in their universities ( $M = 4.40$ ), the level of the presence of the thoroughly outlined policies and guidelines on gender was rated much lower ( $M = 3.91$ ). This is an indication of a structural gap where institutions provide generalized professional support, but do not supply the specific codified safety nets to safeguard faculty that participate in gender-transformative work.

### ***Sectoral Inequalities in Pedagogical Dilemmas.***

The cross-comparison of the two types of universities: the public and the private was made through the Mann-Whitney U test which identified a subtle terrain. The findings did not provide a statistically significant difference between the two sectors in terms of teacher self-effectiveness ( $p = 0.879$ ), institutional support ( $p = 0.791$ ) or socio-cultural barriers ( $p = 0.060$ ). It means that this level of confidence and the fear of getting some cultural backlash is omnipresent among the faculty in both industries. Unfortunately, there was a tremendous disparity in the area of Pedagogical Challenges ( $p = 0.023$ ). The analysis of the mean ranks showed that educators in private sector experience much less pedagogical challenges than those in the public sector do. This indicates that, as much as the cultural pressures discussed are common, the realities of the operating conditions of the public sector classrooms have its special obstacles towards introducing gender-equitable teaching.

### **Discussion of Results**

This research study gives a subtle and even opposite picture of gender equity in Pakistani higher education. Although the dominant international narrative explains the unsatisfactory rate of SDG-5 implementation by the lack of capacities or knowledge of teachers, the empirical findings provided below indicate the existence of a more complicated situation. The information reveals that university educators in Lahore have high levels of professional confidence and pedagogical will; however, their action is significantly curtailed by a socio-cultural and institutional framework. The current section poses cross-examination of these findings through the Teacher Efficacy Theory and Social Role Theory and efforts to place them in the greater academic discourse on gender in higher education.

### ***High Efficacy in Hostile Environment.***

The first implication of this research is a high degree of self-efficacy expressed by teachers of a university. The descriptive statistics indicate that teachers have always estimated their capability to stimulate discussions, change student attitudes, and find gender-specific data as falling within the scope of either Strongly Agree or Agree. Furthermore, they directly differed with the assertions that tend to suggest that they do not have issues with the pedagogical mechanics of discipline or inquiry. This result questions the mainstream explanation of the situation highlighted in international reports, including those of UNESCO



(2022), which, as a rule, explain the slow pace of achieving SDG-5 by the absence of training teachers and the lack of pedagogical readiness.

Most teachers are generally motivated by the Teacher Efficacy Theory, which is expressed by Teschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), to persist with the problem and take on the difficult issues of the classroom. Theoretically, the gender biases should be broken by the teachers who share the belief that they can make a difference. However, a combination of high efficacy and reported socio-cultural anxiety is juxtaposed implying what is denoted as the phenomenon of the blocked agent. Teachers experience the sense of being competent internally (they have the necessary skills) but restricted externally (they are not safe).

This goes in line with Shaukat and Pell (2020), who discovered that Pakistani university teachers can profess a progressive professional ideology but often lack opportunities to manifest it since the institution is often characterized by a conservative culture. It also makes more complicated the point that Naz et al. (2017) make that faculty are not specially trained in gender. The competence of gender among the respondents in this study seems to have been achieved at the functional level, either by self-directed learning or a general learning in academics, but this competence is still latent. They are willing to teach SDG5, but the situational environment does not allow the complete operationalization of this will. As a result, the policy should be changed to focus on the protection of the teachers instead of on training them (who already consider themselves to be competent).

***The Spectre of Backlash: The Socio-Cultural Barriers as the Major obstacle.***

The most prominent result of this study is that there is a tremendous dominance of socio-cultural impediments. The peaks of the mean scores were observed in the variables of Fears of backlash of the families of students and Worries relating to the professional standing. Those findings can affirm that the opposition to SDG-5 in Pakistan is not merely a local educational issue but a socio-cultural war.

The apprehension of the teachers to the issue of backlash is intensely so that the classroom is not an isolated scholastic environment, but rather one open to the wider societal forces. This is consistent with Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) who say that unfriendly environments in tertiary institutions are usually a reflection of the violence and discriminatory nature of the society towards gender change. The teachers in the study seem to carry out the ongoing risk evaluation on how to strike a balance between the obligation to support SDG-5 in the professional role and the likelihood of social disapproval or professional damages. The ensuing culture of fear in effect, undermines the high self-efficacy illustrated above: despite teachers having knowledge on how they can champion gender equity, the perceived dangers might force them to speak as mute as possible. This fact is in agreement with the claim of Naz and Ashraf (2020) that even the most educational sphere does not allow autonomy because of the socio-cultural reasons.

***The Public, Private Split: Deconstructing the pedagogical Divide.***

In spite of the fact that socio-cultural anxieties and self-efficacy beliefs were always similar in the whole sample, a comparative analysis gave some disparities in sectoral differences in pedagogical challenges. The statistical findings show that pedagogical challenges in the private sector are much lower in the reports of teachers than in the public-sector teachers ( $p = .023$ ). This observation is central, in that it highlights the fact that, though cultural pressure is eminent throughout Pakistan, the structural surrounding of the institution is decisive in determining the ability of teachers to navigate such pressures in the classroom.

The reported increase in the pedagogical load of the public-sector teachers can be attributed to the systemic factors which are typical of Pakistani public higher education.



Qureshi and Rarieya (2017) emphasize the fact that public universities frequently have to work with a higher number of students in a classroom, governance that tends to be bureaucratic, and inflexible frameworks of the curriculum, which, combined, makes pedagogical innovation restrictive. The mental burden inherent in maintaining discipline and getting involved in dynamic, gender-sensitive arguments as identified to be particular issues in Table 3 is multiplied in such situations by the sheer magnitude of dealing with students and administrative fortitude.

On the contrary, competitive market forces, and international accreditation norms motivate institutional members of the private sector in Pakistan to have more lenient instructional systems and more commendable resource distribution. This was also observed by Naz et al. (2017), who indicate that the climate in private institutions could be easier to accommodate modern pedagogy, despite the culture around the institutions being conservative. The resultant resource-efficacy rift is that teachers in the private sector, with improved infrastructure and possibly with lower student to teacher ratios, find it less taxing to implement gender equity, even though they also have the same fears of being targeted by backlash just because they are teaching in the same environment as their colleagues in the public sector.

### **Policy Practice Gap**

The last significant theme that was drawn out of the data is the inconsistency of institutional backing in general and the explicit gender policy, in particular. Descriptive The analysis shows that, although the teachers ranked Opportunities to professional growth highly, their lowest rankings were given to the presence of clearly stated policies and guidelines on gender ( $M = 3.91$ ). This empirical argument confirms the Policy Practice Gap widely written in literature.

Lahore universities seem to have very effectively implemented a version of neoliberalism where they entice their faculty to publish, attend workshops, and further their careers but they never did anything substantial like Gender Mainstreaming, as Moser (2005) puts it. The lack of clearly specified, written gender policy creates a sense of ambiguity. Although the teachers are encouraged to approach the abstract idea of progressive approach, they are still professionally vulnerable because, unless there are specific policies to protect them, they are vulnerable to the accusations by students or families against them about the so-called controversial subjects.

It is such ambiguity that runs as an engine of what Stromquist (2015) calls policy borrowing, which means adapting the rhetoric of equality to please international donors or ranking agencies (e.g., the HEC requirements), instead of aligning the structure with the principles of social reforms to challenge the status quo of patriarchy. In the case of the teachers participating in the study, this policy borrowing can introduce an excellent uneasy situation: they will need to market SDG 5 to reflect on modern image of the university but they will have no clear policy buffer to shield their pedagogical thumbs in opposition to social-cultural backlash.

### **Conclusion**

The success of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) in higher education seems to be more a phenomenon evoked by the socio-cultural environment that educators will be operating in than an attribute of their pedagogical ability. The results of this study were that university faculty in Lahore were found to have a strong degree of professional self-efficacy, with the necessary level of knowledge, confidence, and preparation to promote gender-responsive learning. In such a way, the dominant belief that faculty needs



considerable training to be able to learn about gender equity is somewhat false. The main problem lies not as lack of expertise but lack of safety.

Such an overwhelming prevalence of socio category impediments like the fear of familial repercussion and the possible risk of jeopardizing career status points to the notion that the classroom is not a safe environment concerning gender discourse at the moment. The rationality of a teacher is a self-preservation strategy when he or she prefers silence and choosing a neutral position when exposed to a hostile environment. The situation is rampant in the world of higher education involving both the state-of-art institutions and the privates.

However, there is also a strong sectoral gap in the field of operation. There are significant differences in the way in which pedagogical obstacles are faced by the teachers working in the area of the public sector as compared to the work of those operating in the private sector. Such imbalance is indicative of structural inefficiencies in the public sector the likely cause of which has to do with the size of classes or the allocation of resources or the very inflexibility of an administrative system which makes equitable teaching a more cognitively and logistically challenging endeavour. Finally, without the institution being suitably replicated to eliminate the culture of fear and the pedagogical landscape of the public sector being updated, the adherence to SDG5 will remain a policy aspiration, but not an actual classroom implementation.

### **Recommendations**

In accordance with the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are promoted in matters of the stakeholders in the higher education sector. These recommendations aim at the structural, institutional, and pedagogical contexts of intervention needed to generate SDG-5 operationalisation effectively.

#### ***HEC and Government Policy Recommendations***

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has to increase the current gender policy frameworks to encompass specific protections to the faculty members. Although the existing policies can be considered as regulating the harassment of learners, the significant necessity is associated with the practices that can ensure that educators who teach approved, gender-related issues do not face external pressure. Policy documents must clearly mention that the teaching staff in universities has legal and professional protection when performing the content based on the national curriculum and SDG obligations, which will consequently offer a certain amount of immunity to the faculty currently experiencing a fear of both social and career repercussions.

To further reduce the risk of potential victimization of individual teachers regarding controversial opinions, the HEC ought to establish a homogenous and officially approved SDG-5- Module of curriculum. Involving gender equality issues in a state-certified curriculum, the selection of the content is no longer the duty of an individual instructor but rather that of a control organ. This empowering ability enables the educator to push the authority back to the formal curriculum in case of confrontation by the students or parents effectively giving the educator a professional cloak and authorising the dialogue in the classroom.

#### ***University Institutional Recommendations***

Universities should go beyond undertaking token steps and instead institute active Gender Equity Cells that will offer real legal and administrative resources. These cells in contrast to the traditional harassment committees should be set up in a certain way so that it can provide mediation and law services to faculty members who will face complaints about course content raised by students or families. An official conflict-resolution system would in



itself ease the identified barrier of the fear of professional standing that researchers found to be crucial in this research, as teachers will no longer be compelled to face these issues on their own.

There is also an acute need of specific assistance of the public sector. Since the major pedagogical challenges were found to be prevalent among the teachers of the public university, the administrators ought to invest in the mechanisms of support in the classroom. The student-teacher ratio should be reduced where practicable and Teaching Assistants (TA) should be allocated to handle the discipline and intricacy of gender sensitive conversations which will ease the cognitive burden of classroom management to allow public sector teachers to conduct their pedagogy more resourcefully.

### **Teacher Recommendations**

Without bringing any structural changes, university educators are advised to use the so-called indirect pedagogical approaches to survive in the present socio-cultural environment. Anonymous case studies, third-party scenarios as well as structured debates are some of the techniques that help explore the gender roles without forcing students to reveal their beliefs instantaneously. These approaches introduce a psychological divide, which will minimize the chances of instant backlash and hence attain the critical learning outcomes related to SDG-5.

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