ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL (JALT)
Vol.9. No.1 2026

Bridging Schools and Communities: A Qualitative Exploration of Community Awareness, Outreach, and Participation in Punjab Education Foundation Schools

Ms. Sania Falak, MPhil, Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: saniafalak44@gmail.com
Dr. Misbah Malik, Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: misbah.ier@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

Community engagement is a key component to increase educational access, parental involvement and school effectiveness, especially for disadvantaged communities. This study took a qualitative descriptive research design that was informed by a paradigm of interpretation and sought to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents and community members in relation to school–community engagement. Focus Group Discussion was carried out amongst community members using purposive random sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data by coding, developing themes and interpreting the patterns that were identified. The results indicated that community members were in general, aware of the PEF-supported schools, primarily linking them with free education and textbooks. Awareness was raised mainly by informal means like relatives, friends, principals of schools and signboards as compared to structured awareness campaigns. The outreach work was restricted and mostly at school level and communication on educational benefits was largely informal. Parents reported that they were well informed about the school, and had good relationships with school leaders, however, their participation was primarily limited to Parent Teacher Meetings and annual events and there was limited awareness of formal participation structures including school councils. The study suggests that PEF and partner schools conduct structured community awareness campaigns, extend outreach efforts by engaging with families through community meetings and home visits, adopt formal channels for communication, and engage parents in school planning and decision making. Frequent opportunities for mothers, female guardians and community leaders to engage with schools should also be provided to support sustainable school–community partnerships.

Key Words: Punjab Education Foundation (PEF); Community Awareness; Community Outreach; Community Participation, Parental Engagement

Introduction

It is broadly accepted that education plays an important role in the social and economic development of an area, especially in low resource communities where access to quality education is difficult. In many developing countries, public–private partnerships (PPPs) are becoming important methods of providing educational services. The Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) in Punjab, Pakistan, sponsors free education in the state by forming ties with the private school sector, which has helped thousands of children from socially disadvantaged families to attend school. The mission of PEF is to foster quality education through the cooperation between the public and private sectors and community-based educational support (Punjab Education Foundation, 2026).

Engaging with communities is now an important element of good teaching. It has been suggested that good partnerships between schools, families and communities help to increase students' participation, educational outcomes, accountability of the school, and the longevity of educational initiatives. School/Community relationships are based on trust, communication, participation and

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

shared responsibility. Meaningful engagement is not just about participating in school activities, it is about discussions, collaboration and shared decision-making as well (Mu et al., 2023; Zuckerman, 2023).

Parent awareness and communication have an important role in educational participation. Research shows that well-informed parents who are provided with accurate and timely information regarding the school programs and student progress are more likely to support their children's learning and are more active in school activities. But, informal and inconsistent communications exist between schools and families. Structured communication practices are thus seen as vital to cultivating sustainable school–community partnerships (Pennington et al., 2024).

Another key element of community engagement is outreach activities. Trust is nurtured, and there is greater awareness of educational opportunities and participation by marginalised groups through direct interaction between schools and families. Community meetings, engaging with households, parent workshops, and joint activities have been identified in recent studies as successful outreach methods to support school–community relationships (Zuckerman, 2023; Mu et al., 2023).

Educational programmes and institutional relationships are important factors in influencing parental attitudes and involvement. Parents that are knowledgeable about the school programmes have a higher chance of supporting educational initiatives and participate in school activities. It is suggested that awareness is often created via social networks, personal relationships, and visible communication from the school, as opposed to formal awareness campaigns. Stakeholder engagement and understanding can be restricted, however, when relying on informal information sources (Pennington et al., 2024).

It is well known that awareness and parental involvement are vital aspects of successful educational programs. Parents are more likely to support their children's learning and attend school activities if they are informed about the learning opportunities. The findings from the PEF Partner Schools in rural Punjab indicate that raising awareness and parental involvement can help in enhancing the participation and enrollment in the education sector. The authors of Ramzan and Malik (2026) discovered that better cooperation between schools, families, and communities leads to better educational access and sustainability.

Outreach activities are ways in which schools can strengthen their relationships with families and communities. For Zuckerman (2023), continuous interaction, shared goals, and active collaboration are essential for successful school–community partnerships. Community meetings, home visits, and parent workshops are common activities that are cited as effective strategies to build trust and engagement. Many schools, however, still maintain a high level of school-based interactions, in contrast to wider community engagement.

Good communication is an essential part of parental involvement. The most successful schools have developed formal mechanisms for communication, which lead to better parent–school relationships and more parental involvement. It has been found that frequent meetings, orientation sessions, newsletters and digital communication enhance the understanding of educational opportunities and student progress among parents. Informal communication practices, on the other hand, can lead to information gaps and unequal access to information (Pennington et al., 2024).

Meaningful participation goes beyond attending school events, and means engagement in decision making, governance, planning, and accountability processes. There is a strong focus in the

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

literature working with school–community partnerships on establishing clear structures to allow parents and community members to participate in educational planning and monitoring. It is also important to have inclusive participation mechanisms, especially for women and marginalized groups. If such opportunities are not provided, the outcomes of community engagement can be dampened (Mu et al., 2023; Zuckerman, 2023).

The study is important as community and parental engagement is becoming a key element in enhancing educational quality, student participation and school effectiveness. Results from research have demonstrated that productive school-family-community partnerships can mean better student success, more positive student engagement, and better school accountability (Muhammad et al., 2024; Bond et al., 2025).

The study offers insights on the perception of awareness, outreach, communication and participation practices of parents and community members in the schools of Punjab Education Foundation. The results of the findings can inform the creation of more inclusive and effective engagement strategies for PEF authorities, school leaders and policymakers, by identifying strengths and gaps in current engagement strategies. In addition, the study adds to the scarce literature on school–community partnerships in public–private partnerships in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024).

In addition, the study provides implications for enhancing the communication systems, improving outreach activities, educating parents, and encouraging meaningful involvement in school governance and decision-making. School–community partnerships may be sustainable because of these improvements, and the educational programs for disadvantaged communities may be more effective.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To explore community awareness regarding the partnership between schools and the Punjab Education Foundation.
2. To examine the outreach practices used by PEF-supported schools to engage parents and community members.
3. To investigate how the benefits of PEF-supported education are communicated to the community.
4. To explore the nature and extent of community participation in school affairs within PEF-supported schools.

Research Questions

Following are the research questions of the study:

- What level of awareness do community members have regarding the partnership between schools and the Punjab Education Foundation?
- How do PEF-supported schools and PEF representatives engage with communities through outreach activities?
- How are the benefits of PEF-supported education communicated to parents and community members?
- How do parents and community members participate in school affairs and decision-making processes?

Research Design

In this study, an interpretivist paradigm was adopted and a qualitative descriptive design was

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL (JALT)
Vol.9. No.1 2026

employed to explore the community awareness and participation in the schools of Punjab Education Foundation (PEF). The design allowed for the development of a detailed understanding of community members experiences and perceptions of school–community engagement.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

The communities were purposefully sampled close to the PEF schools and the participants in the FGDs were randomly sampled within the communities.

Data Analysis:

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis which involved coding, building themes and interpreting patterns of data with regard to awareness of PEF partnership, PEF outreach, explaining benefits and community participation in school affairs.



ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

Theme: Community Engagement and PEF Involvement

This theme will explore the levels of community involvement and the nature of involvement in schools supported by the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), specifically the levels of awareness, participation and engagement between parents and school authorities. The participation of community members is an important part of improving educational results, particularly in low-resource areas where the involvement and awareness of parents can have a large impact on enrolment and retention. Responses from members of the community suggest different levels of awareness of PEF initiatives, limited outreach, and mainly informal modes of communication between school and parent. Overall, there is a positive school-home connection, but there are areas where structured approaches to engaging families are not yet in place.

Sub-theme 1: Awareness of PEF Partnership

This sub-theme focuses on the awareness in the community regarding the link between schools and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF). It is important to be aware of such partnerships to inform parents of their trust and expectations in the education system and the decisions made for school enrollment. The results indicate that while most of the community members understand they are supported by PEF, the knowledge is more about the visible benefits (free education, textbooks, school signboards etc.). All awareness is gained informally; some limited structured information about PEF's role and programs exists. As a result, the people in the community have a very superficial understanding of the nature and scope of PEF's involvement in supporting education.

These are the responses of community members

CM1-4 stated: Yes I know the school is PEF supported

CM5 stated: When we decided to move to this area, my husband looked for a free school and his friend recommended this PEF supported school that offers free education and books

CM8 Stated: Everyone know this school is suppoted by PEF as it is intigated on a sign board outside

CM9 Stated: Yes I know because it provide free education

There is a general knowledge among the community of the school's affiliation with PEF, primarily as a school for free education and textbooks. This awareness is largely gained through sign boards and informal means (friends, family, community members) than structured awareness initiatives. The majority of respondents were aware of PEF, but lacked a deeper understanding of its overall functions, suggesting a need for more systematic communication and awareness-raising.

Sub-theme 2: PEF Outreach

This sub-theme explores the outreach activities that PEF carry out and how much community members are actively involved in this. Building awareness, trust and collaboration between educational programs and local communities is important and effective outreach is a key component. The feedback from the community indicates there is a high degree of indirect involvement with PEF, and mostly it is school-based, with little evidence of proactive outreach efforts at the household or community level. The results of this review offer a number of opportunities to foster deeper direct engagement with the community and to improve school-to-community relationships and linkages for PEF-supported schools.

CM 1 Stated: No one ever from PEF visited our homes.

CM5 Stated: We heard PEF visited the school sometime, but didn’t come to our home.

CM6 Stated: I know PEF team visited the school because the principal usually calls us if our child is absent when they visit

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

PEF outreach activity seems to be restricted to school level interaction and there is little evident household/community outreach. The majority of the respondents said they had no direct contact with the PEF representatives, with most getting information mainly from the school administration. While there were a few cases where PEF teams visited the schools, the majority of participants stated that this was not a frequent occurrence and that little communication took place with parents. Limited outreach can limit stronger community relationships and effectiveness of PEF initiatives, the findings indicate.

Sub-theme 3: Explaining Benefits

This sub-theme will explore how the advantages of PEF supported education are conveyed to parents and whether there are any awareness activities in place that are structured. The results show that there is a lack of organization in raising awareness, most of the parents got information about free education and textbooks from informal sources. There are no specific sessions for mothers and female guardians, and there are not many meetings in the community to inform people; these are indications of a lack of systematic communication and awareness-building practices.

About explaination of PEF benefits these are the responses of community members

CM1, 2 stated: Yes Principal explaied us that there is no fee and books will be provided to your students

CM4 stated: Principal promised to provide free books but not all the students get free books.

CM5 stated: My husabnd's friend told us about PEF benififts. When we decided to move in this area my husband's friend told him that this school is good there is no fee in this school and the books are free of cost.

CM 3,6,10 stated: They know the education is free of cost in this schools and books are free.

About community meetings to inform parents these are the reponses of community members

CM1 stated: Principal calls parents to discuss students progress and vacations

CM5 stated: If there is an issue in student performance or he is absent principal call us

CM2-4, 6-10 Stated: Parents are only invited on PTMs (Prents Teachers Meetings) or on annual function

The results indicate that there are hardly any systematic activities related to communicating the benefits of PEF-supported education to the community. The majority of respondents said that the information about free education and available resources is disseminated informally, not via organized awareness sessions/community meetings, but rather through principals, peers, and personal networks. While parents knew about benefits like free tuition and textbooks, there were concerns about the inconsistent services being provided. The results indicate that information about the school and children is not being communicated effectively due to the absence of systematic communication which in turn restricts effective information dissemination and informed parental engagement.

Sub-theme 4: Community Participation in School Affairs

This sub-theme examines the level of involvement in school activities, opportunities for feedback, involvement in events, and knowledge about governance mechanisms (school councils). Overall, the results suggest that parents are comfortable communicating with school personnel and feel their concerns are being addressed. The level of formal participation, however, is low and awareness of formal participation mechanisms is limited, so there is a gap between the current governance system and the meaningful participation by the community.

All community members (CM1–CM10) affirmed that their opinions and feedback are considered

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

by the school.

CM1 Stated: All things are good in this school we don't have any opinion.

CM6 stated: Once I came with a complaint and they resolved my issue.

About involvement of community representatives or elders

All community respondents (C1–C10) stated they have "no idea"

CM1 stated: I don't know if any elder from our village is involved in school or not

Principle further included

P3 said: We made a scchool council, which includes parents and local elders, though parents themselves are unaware of its existence or role.

About participation in school events

All respondents (C1–C10) confirmed they are invited to school events, particularly Parent-Teacher Meeting and Annual functions

CM5 stated: If principal call us for short attendance then we came otherwise we just came on PTMs and on annual functions

About sessions organized for mothers and female guardians these are the responses of community members

CM1 stated: Principal call us to school whenever he wants to discuss something about our child.

CM2 Stated: Principal ask to inform other mothers about admissions and encourage them to send their kid to the school

CM5 stated: The principal calls me to school whenever my child don't perform well

CM6-10 stated: Principal arrange PTMs to discuss our child progress and issues

There is some community involvement in PEF-supported schools; it is informal and still quite limited. Overall, parents reported good relationships with school administration and that their concerns were heard and acted upon. However, awareness of formal participation mechanisms, such as school councils and community representation, was very low. There was relatively little participation at other meetings or events apart from Parent–Teacher Meetings, and there was little systematic organization of mothers and female guardians' participation, with much of it being related to need.

Findings

- Awareness among community members about the school's association with PEF is generally present, and is mostly linked to the free education and free textbooks.
- Awareness related to PEF-supported schools is mostly created by informal means like word of mouth from friends, relatives, neighbors, principals and the school's visible signage rather than through formal awareness building activities.
- Parents have a very limited understanding of what PEF is involved with, and of the wider role and goals of PEF.
- School principals and administration are the primary sources of information for parents on activities, enrollment, and student-related information about PEF.
- The idea of the advantages of PEF-supported education, in particular the provision of free tuition and free textbooks is communicated mainly in informal contacts and not in systematic education awareness raising events.
- Limited or no community meetings and structured awareness programs for parents.
- Some parents voiced concern about inconsistencies in provision of free textbooks, even though there were assurances from the school administration.

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

- There is a positive relationship between schools and parents, as seen in how responsive school administrators are to parents' worries and feedback.
- The community's involvement in school affairs is restricted to Parents-Teachers Meetings (PTMs), annual functions, and visits to the school based on issues.
- Many parents don't know about formal involvement, including community representatives or local elders on school boards, or school councils.
- Mothers/female guardians participate mostly on a need-to-do basis, e.g., when there are concerns regarding school performance or attendance, rather than through regular organised participation activities.

Discussion

The results suggest that the general public and parents know about the PEF supported schools and free education programs. However, this awareness is mostly gained informally, through relatives, friends, neighbours and principals of schools, with some organised awareness campaigns. In some communities with a lack of service provision, informal social networks are found to influence the awareness of parents, as mentioned by Jones and Palikara (2023) and Oduro et al. (2026). Informal communication can restrict the ability to foster long-term and collaborative school–community relationships.

The study also found that very little PEF outreach work is conducted at the household/community level and is still mostly targeted at schools. PEF representatives did not make proactive outreach to most respondents. This discovery aligns with the recent literature that calls for ongoing school–family communication and community involvement to foster trust and enhance educational support systems (Peng et al., 2026). Some minimal contact can decrease opportunities to participate together in educational planning.

The results also indicate that information about PEF benefits, such as free textbooks and tuition, is primarily spread by principals, teachers, and personal networks, rather than through formal awareness-raising initiatives. Similarly, Fang et al. (2026) reported that parent involvement and engagement in education improved with organized communication systems. Lack of structured awareness-building exercises, especially for mothers and female guardians, can hinder informed involvement in educational practices.

The other concern found in the study was that there was no consistency in the provision of free textbooks despite the school administrative assurance. Parents welcomed the learning support that is offered in PEF schools, but were somewhat displeased about access to the learning materials that have been promised. Research that has come before has emphasized the importance of a parent-school partnership (parental involvement/parental participation) that is grounded in trust (Kaplan Toren, 2025). Thus, educational resources provided on a regular basis can reinforce parents' confidence and school–community ties.

The results also indicate that parents are largely satisfied with the way schools are run, especially when it comes to the schools' responsiveness to concerns about attendance and academic performance. This is a positive indicator of the connection between school and community and aligns with evidence that suggests that in responsive leadership practices, parents' trust and involvement is fostered (Liu et al., 2026). However, parental involvement is still reactive, and does not happen much outside of Parent–Teacher Meetings, year end visits, and issue based visits.

The study also revealed a lack of parental awareness about school councils and community involvement in school governance. While a few respondents recognized such structures, most did

not know what they were and what they do. But meaningful community engagement is impossible without transparent, inclusive, and participatory governance mechanisms, as Brown et al. (2020) state. Based on the results, it can be inferred that collaborative decision-making practices are not being implemented well in PEF supported schools.

Lastly, mothers and female guardians were identified as participating mainly because of the need and based on the school's contact with them about attendance and/or academic issues. Very few respondents mentioned a program of activities specifically aimed at involving mothers. This finding suggests that parental involvement is still reactive, rather than proactive. The literature reveals that intentional participation relies on regular and inclusive participation opportunities (Guo & Zhao, 2025), and increased participation from mothers can increase the collaboration between home and school and enhance educational outcomes (Alter, 2025; Bond et al., 2025). Without formal opportunities for engagement, therefore, there might be a lack of ongoing community engagement.

Overall, the results indicate a level of community engagement in PEF schools that are informal, trustful and have low participation of parents. There are instances of positive interaction between schools and parents, however there is a lack of structured school–community outreach programs, awareness-building and governance participation mechanisms, which helps to limit the ability to build sustainable and meaningful school–community partnerships.

Recommendations

PEF and school administration are urged to plan and conduct frequent community awareness programs to make parents aware of more detail on the PEF programs, educational value, process of enrolling and services available to parents.

Structured outreach activities, such as home visits and community meetings, should be initiated to better connect PEF representatives to the community.

Women and mothers' awareness sessions should be held separately in schools to involve them in educational decision making and school activities.

Formal communication should be developed, using newsletters, notice boards in the community, and scheduled parent orientation sessions, to minimise the need for parents to rely on informal communication.

School councils and community participation mechanisms should be more visible and effective through informing parents of their existence, role and opportunities for participation.

Parents and community representatives should be involved in planning, monitoring and decision making in schools to hold schools accountable and create a culture of shared responsibility.

Schools should secure the regular delivery of promised PEF-supported educational resources, especially free textbooks, to keep parents' trust and confidence in PEF-supported programs.

To ensure effective long-term partnership between schools and communities, regular parent engagement activities beyond the PTM and annual functions should be planned.

PEF is to be responsible for creating community engagement guidelines for partner schools that will facilitate more systematic and inclusive communication practices.

School principals and staff should receive training in effective community engagement and communication strategies to enhance relationships with families and communities.

References

Ahmed, Q. W., Rönkä, A., Perälä-Littunen, S., & Eerola, P. (2024). Parents' involvement in their children's education: Narratives from rural Pakistan. Educational Research, 66(1), 34–50.

Alter, A. (2025). The multi-faceted effects of gender in parental involvement: The results of a systematic literature review. Review of Education.

Bond, A., Moore, G., & Hawkins, J. (2025). Understanding parental involvement with schools and parental engagement with learning across schools in areas of socioeconomic deprivation in Wales. Educational Review, 77(7), 2025–2045.

Brown, J. C., Graves, E. M., & Burke, M. A. (2020). Involvement, engagement, and community: Dimensions and correlates of parental participation in a majority–minority urban school district. Urban Education, 57(5), 747–777.

Fang, Z., Wei, X., Liu, J., & Fu, Z. (2026). Parental academic involvement and academic engagement in adolescence: Moderating effects of growth mindset across diverse educational contexts. BMC Psychology, 14, 4556.

Jones, C., & Palikara, O. (2023). How do parents and school staff conceptualize parental engagement? A primary school case study. Frontiers in Education, 8, 990204.

Kaplan Toren, N. (2025). Parents-teachers' trust relationship and student self-esteem and academic achievement: A three sources multiple-step analysis. Journal of Research in Childhood Education.

Liu, K., Zhao, Y., & Li, M. (2026). Parental educational anxiety and parental involvement: Effects of teacher emotional support, academic burden, and shadow education. BMC Psychology, 14, 647.

Mu, G. M., Gordon, D., Xu, J., Cayas, A., & Madesi, S. (2023). Benefits and limitations of partnerships amongst families, schools and universities: A systematic literature review. International Journal of Educational Research, 120, 102205.

Muhammad, Y., Waqar, Y., & Anis, F. (2024). Parental and community involvement in promoting inclusive education: A focus on Pakistan. Global Sociological Review, 9(1), 64–76.

Oduro, D., Agud-Morell, I., Bertran-Tarrés, M., & Dobber, M. (2026). A scoping review on community and parent involvement in quality education in rural primary schools. SN Social Sciences, 6, 181.

Peng, Y., Alias, B. S., Wan, X., & Mansor, A. N. (2026). The impact of parental involvement on sustainable school in improving educational quality: A systematic review. Discover Sustainability, 7, 608.

Pennington, S. E., Tang, J. H., Divoll, K., & Correll, P. (2024). A scoping literature review on parent interactions with teachers and school environments at the middle level. Education Sciences, 14(12), 1364.

Punjab Education Foundation. (2026). Vision and mission. https://www.pef.edu.pk

Ramzan, A., & Malik, M. (2026). Barriers to female education in rural areas: A case study of PEF partner schools. Social Science Review Archives, 4(1), 2687–2697.

Zuckerman, S. J. (2023). The ecology of rural cross-sector school-community partnerships: A literature review. Peabody Journal of Education, 98(4), 430–447.