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Resilience Under Dual Pressures: Assessing Teachers' Perspectives on Socio-Cultural Constraints, Organizational Constraints, School Vitality, and School Sustainability Across the Macro–Micro Divide in Punjab's Public-Sector Schools

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ABSTRACT

Public-sector schools in Punjab face compounding systemic and community pressures that threaten institutional functioning. This study examined the socio-cultural and organizational constraints government school teachers experience, along with their perceptions of school vitality and institutional sustainability in District Sargodha, Pakistan. Employing a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected via multistage disproportionate stratified random sampling from 330 male and female teachers across government primary, elementary, and high schools in four tehsils—Kot Momin, Sargodha, Bhalwal, and Bhera—predominantly in rural localities. A validated questionnaire was used to measure four constructs, including Socio-Cultural Constraints, Organizational Constraints, School Vitality, and School Sustainability. It was found that there were many socio-cultural constraints because of the pressures of economic problems at home, which led to student absence and a lack of basic educational resources, a preferential male education system, the early marriage tradition, and poor supervision of student assignments by parents, while school council management was not a significant barrier. There was a marked dichotomy in organizational constraints, which were mainly the result of macro-level workload constraints like non-teaching jobs, classroom overcrowding, and shortage of teaching faculty on the one hand and good school administration on the other hand, such as provision of basic facilities, communication, and leadership qualities of the principal. Securing long-term school sustainability requires filling teacher vacancies, capping class sizes, restricting non-instructional duties, expanding school-based professional learning, and instituting accessible outreach for economically strained, low-literacy families.

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1. Introduction

Relevance, vitality, and sustainability are ever-increasing demands placed on schools around the world. School vitality is about keeping teachers motivated, fostering collaboration and innovation, and adjusting to change within and outside the school, and yet school sustainability is about the ability of a school to keep teaching well, school culture positive and student achievement high in the long run (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Tappel et al., 2022; Wang & Degol, 2016). The two constructs have been major issues in discussions on the improvement of education, especially in low-resource areas where systemic pressures are likely to pose a threat to school success. While there are indications that schools that can manage constraints effectively have higher levels of teacher engagement, collegial collaboration, and positive educational outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020), many schools in Pakistan continue to fail to effectively manage such constraints, and studies on the socio-cultural and organizational factors have been almost rare, especially in the context of the public school system in the province of Punjab, where the province's vast size means that Pakistan's public school system is particularly vulnerable to socio-cultural and organizational constraints (Ahmed et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024). These pressures are highlighted by administrative and survey data. According to the Pakistan Education Statistics (2023-24), there are 25.1 million out-of-school children in Pakistan, which represents 35% of the school-age population, with the province of Punjab having the highest number of 9.7 million children (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2025). The Annual School Census 2024-25 also highlighted that 320,713 is the total number of currently serving teachers in Punjab (~75% of sanctioned posts), leaving ~100,000+ vacancies in 42,873 government schools with an enrolment of 10.5 million, representing 75% of the sanctioned teachers' strength province-wide, and independent estimates also showed that the shortfall was exceeding 100,000 teachers across the province, with at least 10,000 schools having only one teacher and several hundred schools having none, (Express Tribune, 2024). The Annual Status of Education Report Pakistan 2023 revealed that only approximately one-third of the scrutinized children could perform basic subtraction skills, and only 65% of government schools were equipped with clean drinking water, whereas 82% of private schools had clean drinking water (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, 2024). These conditions combine to put the socio-cultural and organizational barriers explored in this study into an already stressed system, giving them the sense of being a lived reality for teachers in districts like Sargodha, instead of being a policy issue in the future. There are unique socio-cultural and organizational issues in government schools in Pakistan. The socio-cultural factors, community expectations, gender norms, household poverty, and different perceptions about the value of education have a significant impact on teachers' professional life and motivation (Ahmed, 2021; Ali & Syed, 2017). Concurrently, the factors of the organization cause dissatisfaction among the teachers and negatively affect the performance of the institutions, including excessive bureaucracy, shortage of resources, administrative burden, weak instructional leadership, and workload imbalance (Liu et al., 2010; Wang, 2024). These constraints combine to present a difficult challenge for schools to be vigorous and viable institutions. Although a significant percentage of government schools in Pakistan are facing challenges of vitality and sustainability, most of the literature that exists has focused on one or another of the socio-cultural or organizational factors individually, leaving an inconclusive picture for policymakers and school leaders that is not helpful in the context of the school (Siddiqui & Gorard, 2024). This study explores these constraints: Identifying and evaluating the main socio-cultural and organizational constraints of teachers in government schools of Punjab. Knowing which constraints teachers find most and least salient gives a vital, practically actionable basis for school leaders and authorities in District Sargodha to start from.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify and evaluate the nature and severity of socio-cultural barriers—including household economic pressures, gendered educational norms, early marriage traditions, and deficits in everyday parental involvement—perceived by government school teachers in District Sargodha.
- To examine the workplace and systemic organizational constraints faced by teachers, distinguishing between macro-level staffing and workload pressures and micro-level school leadership, communication, basic utilities, and participatory decision-making.
- To assess the level of school vitality perceived by teachers in terms of academic expectations, varied instructional practices, staff teamwork, constructive problem-solving, and student social well-being.
- To examine teachers' perceptions of school sustainability with respect to policy continuity, operational consistency, in-school professional development, regular performance evaluation, and instructional innovation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Socio-Cultural Constraints

Socio-cultural constraints are challenges related to community norms, family situations and cultural expectations that influence the involvement of parents/community in schools. Research on parental involvement in Pakistan's rural schools has proved that parents, especially in resource-poor areas, are less involved in their children's learning, and this is attributed to poverty, low literacy, and the norms in society in addition to their lack of involvement (Ahmed, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2024). Across the Global South, gender norms and economic burdens within the home limit student attendance in school and the overall home-school dynamic (Jayachandran, 2019; Ali & Syed, 2017). Similarly, Muhammad et al. (2024) noted that parental and community participation are among the weaker links of the school ecosystem in Pakistan as it is acknowledged as essential for inclusive and well-functioning schools.

2.2. Organizational Constraints

Organizational constraints are those that occur within the school as a workplace, such as staffing shortage, class size, resource adequacy, clarity of leadership, and teachers' participation in decision-making. Building on this, Liu et al. (2010) concluded that organizational constraints are invariably one of the most salient sources of occupational strain in all cultural contexts and therefore is relevant to teacher wellbeing and functioning. In Punjab in particular, the provincial government has stated that the issue of a lack of teachers in tens of thousands of schools is recurring, which means that the remaining teachers must cover the entire burden of workload and large class sizes (Express Tribune, 2024). International evidence reinforces this pattern: teacher workload and organizational support are closely tied to occupational wellbeing (Wang, 2024), and school organizational climate, encompassing leadership, resource provision, and fairness, meaningfully shapes teachers' day-to-day experience (Kandemir, 2024).

Together, the literature indicates that socio-cultural and organizational constraints are conceptually distinct yet jointly consequential for teachers, and that their relative salience in each context is best established through direct empirical measurement, the aim pursued in this article.

2.3. School Vitality

School vitality is tacitly an energized, enthusiastic, and pleasant ambience in a school, which is the main signature of a school that is full of life. A symptom of this phenomenon is the concept of proactive vitality management (PVM), which involves students making the most out of their energetic, effective, and cognitive resources in gaining maximum subjective well-being and meaning in life, particularly when they are in a positive school climate (Zhang et al., 2024). Besides this, the students' vitality, a second-order construct comprising gratitude, optimism, zest, and persistence, turns out to be a very powerful predictor of students' flourishing, not only directly but also through resilience and prosocial behavior (Lau et al., 2024). The idea of vitality develops into the emotional and leadership attributes of teachers, where the stress on emotional capital and empowering leaders can generate a supportive school environment that is advantageous for the well-being of students (Gendron, 2023).

Academic vitality, which is the combination of one's intrinsic motivation and enjoyment of learning, and academic self-regulation, is a significant factor affecting students' career aspirations, thus marking the importance of nurturing these qualities for long-term educational and career success (Mostajeran et al., 2025). Faculty vitality, as researched in the context of a medical school, is a matter of individual, institutional, and leadership vitality assessment and improvement to increase academic productivity and pinpoint the areas that need improvement (Bland et al., 2002). Moreover, vitality is one of the characteristics of equity-based leadership, where principals' enhancement of professional vitality comes from empowering others and sorting out inequitable practices, thus reducing stress and burnout (Coviello & Terosky, 2024). The WAVE project in New Zealand serves as a case in point that school-centered health promotion programs can be the source of a vitality culture by merging the health and education sectors, which in turn results in practice changes and student leadership development (Calder et al., 2019). In the end, schools adopting purpose-driven leadership continue to highlight the necessity of defining and taking care of a school's purpose as one of the main strategies for the retention of vitality and fighting against burnout (Holloman et al., 2007). In summary, the comprehensive approach to vitality in schools is necessary since it integrates psychological strengths, leadership, and health promotion to create flourishing educational environments.

2.4. School Sustainability

In the study of educational administration and school improvement, school sustainability is defined as the long-term ability of a school to ensure high-quality teaching, organizational culture, system consistency, and student success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Tappel et al., 2022; Wang & Degol, 2016). While the notion of sustainability does not mean temporary compliance and isolated reforms within programs, it is important to embed efficient practices into everyday activities and organizational

governance processes of the school to preserve educational quality through various changes (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Tappel et al., 2022). Public school systems that operate under constant resource and staffing restrictions need to demonstrate the ability of such a school to cope with the impact of external and internal challenges without harming its effectiveness.

An important principle for the sustainability of schools is policy and systemic consistency. Hargreaves & Fink (2006) assert that sustainable educational development requires coherence and continuity of policies, as opposed to policies that abruptly impose top-down change and interfere with classroom activities. Where educational policies have continuity in school activities and administrative processes have consistency, teachers can build upon the educational progress made and not have to begin afresh each time there are changes in policies. Leadership literature also supports the assertion by demonstrating how principals maintain organizational resilience by protecting their members from external shocks, providing organizational direction, and facilitating collective problem-solving (Leithwood et al., 2020).

No less essential to sustainability than stability and adaptability is the development and reflective improvement of teachers' skills. International studies indicate that schools maintain their effectiveness when the school management places emphasis on teachers' skills development and offers easy access to school-based professional development opportunities (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2024). In addition to that, sustainable schools build accountability and renewal through regular assessment of the school's performance, constructive criticism aimed at improving the work of the school, and promotion of innovation among teachers. All these elements form a unified conceptual framework for the analysis of sustainability of government schools in District Sargodha.

2.5. Significance of Study

This study will give meaningful theoretical and practical implications. It extends the literature on education, as empirical studies around the themes of school vitality and school sustainability in the Global South are still limited (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024), with the concept of school vitality and sustainability being unpacked through a theoretical lens.

The study's results are expected to benefit all stakeholders. The study provides empirical evidence for policymakers and officials of the Punjab School Education Department on the socio-cultural and organizational challenges that government schools face, which can help in designing more targeted and evidence-based changes to address these issues and allocate resources. School heads and principals will have a clearer picture of the constraints in their school and how this will help them become more effective leaders, have better teacher support systems and build a more vibrant and resilient school.

In this research, the teachers and the school principals are the main actors and stakeholders, and through it they can receive improved support from institutions and policies, which may be based on the problems they have experienced. Institutions responsible for teachers' training can also use it for the development of improved teacher training programs and preparation of teachers and principals to face problems in their institutions. The students do not complete the form, but they can derive benefits indirectly from improved teaching quality and a good learning environment.

The study also serves as a stepping stone for future research by scholars and academia on the topic of school vitality and sustainability in a similar socio-economic backdrop, with a validated frame of reference which can be used for comparative studies both in Pakistan and beyond. Finally, the results are available for use by the NGOs and development partners working on education-sector programming, to design interventions that are more contextually relevant, thereby improving school resilience and teacher well-being in Punjab.

2.6. Delimitations of the Study

To maintain a focused and feasible empirical scope, four intentional boundaries were established before data collection:

- The study focused on the public sector GPS, GES, and GHS in four tehsils of Sargodha district including Sargodha, Bhalwal, Kot Momin, and Bhera. No private schools and higher secondary institutions and other districts of Punjab were included in the sample frame.
- The data collection was confined to male and female teachers (N=330) teaching in the sampled government schools since the study aimed at acquiring the perspective of the teachers regarding the constraints.
- The study was confined to four main constructs, which include Socio-Cultural Constraints, Organizational Constraints, School Vitality, and School Sustainability without any other mediator, moderator, or external policy variable.
- The research design was specifically designed for a quantitative, non-experimental and descriptive survey research using 36-items validated Likert questionnaire.

2.7. Limitations of the Study

While the preceding delimitations enabled systematic data collection across a large, stratified sample, several methodological and contextual limitations should be considered when interpreting the results:

As data were collected in one snapshot of time by using cross-sectional survey method, therefore, the results are merely the depiction of a static picture of teacher perceptions. Hence, it is impossible for the research design to make any causation and measure the fluctuations of socio-cultural and organizational pressures in various stages of the school year.

The use of all four constructs based on teachers' self-administered questionnaire lacks triangulation in terms of the input from school principals, parents, School Council members, and students. Furthermore, the sole use of teachers' responses may lead to social desirability bias for the constructs related to internal school care, teacher collaboration, and performance appraisal.

In terms of statistical analyses, only the descriptive indices (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were considered. Therefore, the research cannot estimate the extent of the predictive strength and the direct and indirect links between socio-cultural and organizational barriers and the school vitality and sustainability.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues have been followed: participation is voluntary, informed consent is obtained, confidentiality is respected, anonymity is respected, the right to withdraw from the study, academic honesty.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for generating numerical data on variable measures and describing variable distributions across a large sample without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nunnally, 1978).

3.2. Population of the Study

The population consisted of all Government Primary Schools (GPS), Government Elementary Schools (GES) and Government High Schools (GHS) teachers of Punjab, Pakistan. Since the geographical area of the province is vast, the study was delimited to government schools of District Sargodha, including four tehsils of the district, namely Sargodha, Bhalwal, Kot Momin and Bhera. The targeted population comprised male and female teachers from all three levels at the government schools of these tehsils, which are home to thousands of Government school teachers.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

A multistage disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was used. Tehsils and school levels (primary, elementary, high) served as the first strata and teachers in selected schools were selected through simple random sampling, with representation of all the teacher types with limited sampling error. This method enabled the proper representation of locality (urban/rural) and gender in all four tehsils. The final sample comprised 330 teachers, distributed as follows: 170 male (51.5%) and 160 female (48.5%); 230 from rural schools (69.7%) and 100 from urban schools (30.3%); and by tehsil, Kot Momin (n = 164, 49.7%), Sargodha (n = 64, 19.4%), Bhalwal (n = 62, 18.8%), and Bhera (n = 40, 12.1%).

3.4. Research Tool

Data collection in the study was done using a modified version of a structured self-administered questionnaire, which was developed based on a literature review, existing questionnaires, and conceptual constructs to be studied, such as socio-cultural constraints, organizational constraints, school vitality and school sustainability. These constructs were broken down into individual questions and expressed as statements of the teacher's perceptions and experiences in the context of their school. All answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree - 1; Disagree - 2; Neutral - 3; Agree - 4; Strongly Agree - 5). The type of scoring facilitated analysis of the responses as interval-level data appropriate to descriptive statistical tests used in this study.

3.5. Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

To ensure that the modified 36-item structured questionnaire accurately captured the theoretical dimensions of the study—Socio-Cultural Constraints (SCC1–SCC9), Organizational Constraints (OC10–OC18), School Vitality (SV19–SV27), and School Sustainability (SS28–SS36)—the instrument underwent a rigorous content and face validation process before field administration. The draft questionnaire was critically reviewed by six independent experts who were specialists in the fields of

educational administration and teacher education. The feedback provided by each of these six reviewers has been systematically analyzed and incorporated into the questionnaire. More specifically, redundancy in items has been avoided to ensure that the participants do not get bored, double-barreled and self-referencing items have been broken down into single construct items and double negatives have been eliminated without eliminating balanced positive and negative items to reduce response-set bias. Furthermore, some of the items that were too broad have been made more specific to fit the operational and socio-cultural context of government primary, elementary, and high schools of District Sargodha.

Following expert validation, the refined questionnaire was pilot-tested to evaluate its psychometric reliability before main data collection ($N = 330$). Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), which is widely recognized as a standard reliability index for multi-item Likert scales in survey-based educational research. The instrument is equally divided into four theoretical constructs of nine items each: Socio-Cultural Constraints (SCC1–SCC9), Organizational Constraints (OC10–OC18), School Vitality (SV19–SV27), and School Sustainability (SS28–SS36). To establish a uniform scoring direction before analysis, 10 positively worded items across the two constraint subscales were reverse-scored ($1 \leftrightarrow 5, 2 \leftrightarrow 4, 3 = 3$) so that higher scores uniformly reflected greater perceived constraints—specifically four items in Socio-Cultural Constraints (SCC1, SCC2, SCC3, and SCC9) and six items in Organizational Constraints (OC13 through OC18)—whereas all items in School Vitality (SV19–SV27) and School Sustainability (SS28–SS36) were positively worded and required no reverse-scoring.

The pilot-test analysis confirmed that all four subscales achieved Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the widely accepted minimum threshold of 0.70 established by Nunnally (1978). These results demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across each conceptual domain, verifying that the instrument was reliable and psychometrically sound for full-scale administration across the four sampled tehsils of District Sargodha.

Table 1. Subscale Structure, Scoring Direction, and Pilot Reliability Summary

Construct / Subscale	Item Codes	Number of Items	Reverse-Scored Items	Pilot Cronbach's alphaα	Reliability Benchmark Status
Socio-Cultural Constraints	SCC1–SCC9	9	SCC1, SCC2, SCC3, SCC9	0.872	Acceptable ($\alpha >$ 0.70 ; Nunnally, 1978)
Organizational Constraints	OC10–OC18	9	OC13, OC14, OC15, OC16, OC17, OC18	0.853	Acceptable ($\alpha >$ 0.70 ; Nunnally, 1978)
School Vitality	SV19–SV27	9	None (all positively worded)	0.867	Acceptable ($\alpha >$ 0.70 ; Nunnally, 1978)
School Sustainability	SS28–SS36	9	None (all positively worded)	0.884	Acceptable ($\alpha >$ 0.70 ; Nunnally, 1978)
Total Instrument	Items 1–36	36	10 items reverse-scored	0.891	Acceptable ($\alpha >$ 0.70 ; Nunnally, 1978)

Table 1 outlines the subscale architecture, item codes, scoring polarity, and pilot internal consistency coefficients for the 36-item structured questionnaire. Psychometric evaluation from the pilot study demonstrated strong internal consistency across all conceptual domains. Each subscale—Socio-Cultural Constraints ($\alpha = 0.872$), Organizational Constraints ($\alpha = 0.853$), School Vitality ($\alpha = 0.867$), and School Sustainability ($\alpha = 0.884$)—as well as the composite 36-item instrument ($\alpha = 0.891$) substantially exceeded the minimum acceptability benchmark of $\alpha > 0.70$ established by Nunnally (1978), verifying that the scales were psychometrically reliable for full-scale administration.

3.6. Data Collection Methods

The following procedure was followed to collect data: permission was obtained from the Institute of Education, University of Sargodha; approval was taken from District Education Authorities; heads of selected schools were contacted; teachers were

briefed regarding the purpose of the study; questionnaires were distributed personally and through Google Forms; confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and questionnaires were collected and coded accordingly.

3.7. Data Analysis Methods

The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to summarize the data. The results of the data obtained from the questionnaire were encoded and then analyzed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the level of sociocultural constraints, organizational constraints, school vitality, and school sustainability as perceived by teachers.

Because the validated questionnaire contained both negatively worded constraint items and positively worded enabler items to prevent response-set bias, positively worded items in the Socio-Cultural Constraints (SCC1, SCC2, SCC3, SCC9) and Organizational Constraints (OC13, OC14, OC15, OC16, OC17, OC18) scales were reverse-scored before computing descriptive indices ($1 \leftrightarrow 5$, $2 \leftrightarrow 4$, $3 = 3$). Consequently, higher recoded means ($M > 3.00$) consistently indicate greater perceived constraints across all items.

3.8. Demographic Profile of the Study (N = 330)

The following is the Demographic Profile of the study (N = 330):

Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Study (N = 330)

Profile Dimension	Stratum / Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
School Level (Primary Strata)	Government Primary Schools (GPS)	149	45.2%
	Government Elementary Schools (GES)	72	21.8%
	Government High Schools (GHS)	109	33.0%
Tehsil (Geographic Clusters)	Kot Momin	164	49.7%
	Sargodha	64	19.4%
	Bhalwal	62	18.8%
	Bhera	40	12.1%
School Residence (Locality)	Rural (118 Male, 112 Female)	230	69.7%
	Urban (52 Male, 48 Female)	100	30.3%
Gender	Male	170	51.5%
	Female	160	48.5%
Age Group	21–30 Years	45	13.6%
	31–40 Years	187	56.7%
	41–50 Years	98	29.7%
Teaching Experience	1–5 Years	24	7.3%
	6–10 Years	121	36.7%
	11–15 Years	95	28.8%

Profile Dimension	Stratum / Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	16–20 Years	39	11.8%
	More than 20 Years	51	15.5%
	Bachelor	19	5.8%
Academic Qualification	Master	228	69.1%
	M.Phil.	83	25.2%
	B.Ed.	159	48.2%
Professional Qualification	M.Ed.	151	45.8%
	Other	20	6.0%

The demographic profile of the study (N=330) reveals that the empirical results of the study mostly represent the opinions of an equal proportion of male and female, middle-aged, well-educated, and mostly rural public school teachers of the District Sargodha.

As far as the distribution of schools is concerned, the largest respondents are those working in GPS (n=149, 45.2%), followed by GHS (n=109, 33.0%), and GES (n=72, 21.8%).

More than half of the respondents were recruited from Tehsil Kot Momin (n=164, 49.7%), whereas the remaining half were from Sargodha (n=64, 19.4%), Bhalwal (n=62, 18.8%), and Bhera (n=40, 12.1%). Regarding their residential location, rural school teachers (n=230, 69.7%) were twice as many as the urban school teachers (n=100, 30.3%).

There was an almost equal distribution of male and female participants, with 170 males (51.5%) and 160 females (48.5%). The proportion of male to female teachers was almost equal in both rural (118 males, 112 females) and urban (52 males, 48 females) strata.

There were a greater number of respondents in middle adulthood and mid-career service periods. Respondents aged 31-40 years constituted the largest percentage (n=187, 56.7%), followed by those aged 41-50 years (n=98, 29.7%) and young respondents aged 21-30 years (n=45, 13.6%). In relation to the same, teachers with 6-10 years (n=121, 36.7%) and 11-15 years (n=95, 28.8%) of classroom service constituted 65.5%, while veteran teachers with 16-20 years (n=39, 11.8%) and more than 20 years (n=51, 15.5%) of teaching experience and novice teachers with 1-5 years of service (n=24, 7.3%) formed the remaining percentage of respondents.

These sampled teachers were highly qualified formally. Individuals having a master's degree comprised more than two-thirds of the workforce (n=228, 69.1%), while individuals with an M.Phil. comprised another quarter (n=83, 25.2%), whereas individuals with a bachelor's degree were the least (n=19, 5.8%). In terms of professional qualification, individuals were equally divided between B.Ed. (n=159, 48.2%) and M.Ed. (n=151, 45.8%), while 20 individuals (6.0%) had some other pedagogical qualification.

In summary, the demographic distribution adds to the internal credibility of the survey because majority of the respondents have sufficient classroom experience and graduate/postgraduate level of education. On the other hand, a high clustering of respondents at rural schools (69.7%) and Tehsil Kot Momin (49.7%), along with small group size of Bachelor-qualified (n=19) and novice teachers (n=24), implies that the average value of entire sample will be biased towards mid-career rural teachers.

3.9. Socio-Cultural Constraints: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

The following are the Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Socio-Cultural Constraints (N = 330):

Table 3. Socio-Cultural Constraints: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

No.	Item Statement	1 (Very Low) f (%)	2 (Low) f (%)	3 (Neutral) f (%)	4 (High) f (%)	5 (Very High) f (%)	Low Constraint (1+2) f (%)	High Constraint (4+5) f (%)	M	SD	Result
1	[SCC1-R] Lack of parental interest in school activities (rev. from positive)	16 (4.8 %)	108 (32.7 %)	46 (13.9 %)	116 (35.2 %)	44 (13.3 %)	124 (37.6 %)	160 (48.5 %)	3.19	1.17	Moderate-High Constraint
2	[SCC2-R] Lack of parental monitoring of homework (rev. from positive)	13 (3.9 %)	75 (22.7 %)	64 (19.4 %)	132 (40.0 %)	46 (13.9 %)	88 (26.7 %)	178 (53.9 %)	3.37	1.10	High Constraint
3	[SCC3-R] Infrequent parent–teacher communication (rev. from positive)	17 (5.2 %)	98 (29.7 %)	67 (20.3 %)	117 (35.5 %)	31 (9.4 %)	115 (34.8 %)	148 (44.8 %)	3.14	1.10	Moderate-High Constraint
4	[SCC4] Families prioritize work or household duties over school attendance	61 (18.5 %)	49 (14.8 %)	50 (15.2 %)	160 (48.5 %)	10 (3.0 %)	110 (33.3 %)	170 (51.5 %)	3.03	1.22	Moderate Constraint
5	[SCC5] Concept of education for boys affects educational aspirations for some students	4 (1.2%)	13 (3.9%)	97 (29.4 %)	191 (57.9 %)	25 (7.6%)	17 (5.2%)	216 (65.5 %)	3.67	0.73	High Constraint

No.	Item Statement	1 (Very Low) f (%)	2 (Low) f (%)	3 (Neutral) f (%)	4 (High) f (%)	5 (Very High) f (%)	Low Constraint (1+2) f (%)	High Constraint (4+5) f (%)	M	SD	Result
6	[SCC6] Early marriage traditions interfere with continued education for some students	14 (4.2 %)	44 (13.3 %)	49 (14.8 %)	172 (52.1 %)	51 (15.5 %)	58 (17.6 %)	223 (67.6 %)	3.61	1.03	High Constraint
7	[SCC7] Family economic pressures cause frequent student absenteeism	15 (4.5 %)	24 (7.3%)	27 (8.2%)	174 (52.7 %)	90 (27.3 %)	39 (11.8 %)	264 (80.0 %)	3.91	1.02	High Constraint
8	[SCC8] Many students lack basic learning materials due to financial constraints	12 (3.6 %)	27 (8.2%)	24 (7.3%)	196 (59.4 %)	71 (21.5 %)	39 (11.8 %)	267 (80.9 %)	3.87	0.96	High Constraint
9	[SCC9-R] Limited school council involvement in school governance (rev. from positive)	25 (7.6 %)	143 (43.3 %)	65 (19.7 %)	84 (25.5 %)	13 (3.9%)	168 (50.9 %)	97 (29.4 %)	2.75	1.04	Low Constraint
	Composite Socio-Cultural Constraints								3.39		High Overall Constraint

(Note: Items marked [R] are reverse-scored from their original positive wording so that 4 and 5 represent high constraint endorsement. Item SCC4 also reflects the corrected mean of 3.03 and standard deviation of 1.22.)

Table 3 presents the item-level distribution for the Socio-Cultural Constraints construct ($N = 330$) after reverse-scoring positively worded items (SCC1–SCC3 and SCC9) so that higher scores consistently reflect greater perceived barriers. Overall,

the construct yielded a composite mean of 3.39, indicating substantial socio-cultural pressure across District Sargodha's government schools. Structural economic hardships emerged as the most severe constraints: family economic pressures causing frequent student absenteeism (SCC7) recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.02$), with 264 teachers (80.0%) endorsing it as a high constraint, closely followed by students lacking basic learning materials due to financial constraints (SCC8; $M = 3.87, SD = 0.96$; 267 teachers, 80.9%). Gendered norms and traditional practices also ranked prominently, including male-biased educational aspirations (SCC5; $M = 3.67, SD = 0.73$; 216 teachers, 65.5%) and early marriage traditions (SCC6; $M = 3.61, SD = 1.03$; 223 teachers, 67.6%). Crucially, reverse-scoring revealed that everyday parental disengagement is a major barrier rather than a minor one: over half of the respondents reported a lack of parental monitoring of homework (SCC2-R; $M = 3.37, SD = 1.10$; 178 teachers, 53.9%), nearly half reported weak parental interest in school activities (SCC1-R; $M = 3.19, SD = 1.17$; 160 teachers, 48.5%), and 44.8% reported infrequent parent–teacher communication (SCC3-R; $M = 3.14, SD = 1.10$; 148 teachers). Families prioritizing work or household duties over attendance (SCC4) showed a moderate constraint mean ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.22$; 170 teachers, 51.5%), whereas limited school council involvement (SCC9-R) recorded the lowest constraint score ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.04$; 97 teachers, 29.4%), indicating that formal school council participation is relatively active compared to household-level parental engagement.

3.10. Organizational Constraints: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

The following are the Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Organizational Constraints (N = 330):

Table 4. Organizational Constraints: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

No.	Item Statement (Constraint Direction)	1 (Very Low) f (%)	2 (Low) f (%)	3 (Neutral) f (%)	4 (High) f (%)	5 (Very High) f (%)	Low Constraint (1+2) f (%)	High Constraint (4+5) f (%)	M	SD	Result
10	[OC10] Teachers are burdened with extra duties in school	14 (4.2 %)	31 (9.4%)	27 (8.2 %)	125 (37.9 %)	133 (40.3 %)	45 (13.6 %)	258 (78.2 %)	4.01	1.12	Very High Constraint
11	[OC11] Large class sizes reduce teaching effectiveness	14 (4.2 %)	30 (9.1%)	27 (8.2 %)	126 (38.2 %)	133 (40.3 %)	44 (13.3 %)	259 (78.5 %)	4.01	1.11	Very High Constraint
12	[OC12] Shortage of teaching staff creates excessive work pressure	12 (3.6 %)	31 (9.4%)	24 (7.3%)	151 (45.8 %)	112 (33.9 %)	43 (13.0 %)	263 (79.7 %)	3.97	1.06	High Constraint
13	[OC13-R] Inadequacy of available instructional resources	27 (8.2 %)	159 (48.2 %)	50 (15.2 %)	70 (21.2 %)	24 (7.3%)	186 (56.4 %)	94 (28.5 %)	2.71	1.11	Low-Moderate Constraint

No.	Item Statement (Constraint Direction)	1 (Very Low) f (%)	2 (Low) f (%)	3 (Neutral) f (%)	4 (High) f (%)	5 (Very High) f (%)	Low Constraint (1+2) f (%)	High Constraint (4+5) f (%)	M	SD	Result
	(rev. from positive)										
14	[OC14-R] Inadequacy of technological resources (computers, internet) (rev. from positive)	30 (9.1%)	150 (45.5%)	43 (13.0%)	85 (25.8%)	22 (6.7%)	180 (54.5%)	107 (32.4%)	2.75	1.13	Low-Moderate Constraint
15	[OC15-R] Unreliability of basic utilities (water, electricity, sanitation) (rev. from positive)	43 (13.0%)	214 (64.8%)	35 (10.6%)	33 (10.0%)	5 (1.5%)	257 (77.9%)	38 (11.5%)	2.22	0.85	Low Constraint
16	[OC16-R] Lack of clear leadership direction from school heads (rev. from positive)	56 (17.0%)	181 (54.8%)	37 (11.2%)	41 (12.4%)	15 (4.5%)	237 (71.8%)	56 (17.0%)	2.33	1.04	Low Constraint
17	[OC17-R] Lack of timely communication of important information (rev. from positive)	58 (17.6%)	180 (54.5%)	33 (10.0%)	48 (14.5%)	11 (3.3%)	238 (72.1%)	59 (17.9%)	2.32	1.03	Low Constraint
18	[OC18-R] Limited teacher involvement in decision-	34 (10.3%)	149 (45.2%)	54 (16.4%)	70 (21.2%)	23 (7.0%)	183 (55.5%)	93 (28.2%)	2.69	1.12	Low-Moderate Constraint

No.	Item Statement (Constraint Direction)	1 (Very Low) f (%)	2 (Low) f (%)	3 (Neutral) f (%)	4 (High) f (%)	5 (Very High) f (%)	Low Constraint (1+2) f (%)	High Constraint (4+5) f (%)	M	SD	Result
	making (rev. from positive)										
	Composite Organizational Constraints								3.00		Bifurcated Constraint

(Note: Items OC13–OC18 are reverse-scored from their original positive wording so that higher scores represent greater organizational deficits.)

Table 4 reports the item-level distribution for the Organizational Constraints construct (N = 330) after reverse-scoring the positively worded workplace items (OC13–OC18). While the overall construct yielded a moderate composite mean of 3.00, the item-level data reveals a sharp bifurcation between severe system-level staffing/workload bottlenecks and relatively functional school-level administration. Specifically, three workload and human-resource items recorded the highest constraint scores across the entire survey: non-teaching extra duties (OC10; $M = 4.01, SD = 1.12$; 258 teachers, 78.2%), large class sizes reducing teaching effectiveness (OC11; $M = 4.01, SD = 1.11$; 259 teachers, 78.5%), and teaching staff shortages creating excessive work pressure (OC12; $M = 3.97, SD = 1.06$; 263 teachers, 79.7%). In contrast, reverse-scored items measuring resource availability and participatory governance indicated low-to-moderate constraint levels affecting roughly one-third of respondents, including inadequate technological resources (OC14-R; $M = 2.75, SD = 1.13$; 32.4%), inadequate instructional resources (OC13-R; $M = 2.71, SD = 1.11$; 28.5%), and limited teacher involvement in decision-making (OC18-R; $M = 2.69, SD = 1.12$; 28.2%). Finally, internal school leadership clarity (OC16-R; $M = 2.33, SD = 1.04$), timely information sharing (OC17-R; $M = 2.32, SD = 1.03$), and basic utility reliability (OC15-R; $M = 2.22, SD = 0.85$) registered the lowest constraint scores, reflecting positive day-to-day administrative management and basic infrastructure within most sampled schools.

3.11. School Vitality: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

The following are the Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for School Vitality (N = 330):

Table 5. School Vitality: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree f (SD+D) (%)	Agree f (A+SA) (%)	M	SD	Result
19	[SV19] My school promotes high academic expectations for all students.	6 (1.8%)	20 (6.1%)	53 (16.1%)	200 (60.6%)	51 (15.5%)	26 (7.9%)	251 (76.1%)	3.82	0.83	Agreed
20	[SV20] Teachers use varied instructional	5 (1.5%)	29 (8.8%)	45 (13.6%)	204 (61.8%)	47 (14.2%)	34 (10.3%)	251 (76.1%)	3.78	0.85	Agreed

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree f (SD+D) (%)	Agree f (A+SA) (%)	M	SD	Result
	strategies to engage students in learning.										
21	[SV21] The curriculum is regularly updated to meet students' evolving needs.	22 (6.7 %)	66 (20.0 %)	47 (14.2 %)	174 (52.7 %)	21 (6.4%)	88 (26.7 %)	195 (59.1 %)	3.3 2	1.0 7	Agreed
22	[SV22] Teachers feel energetic at work.	6 (1.8 %)	37 (11.2%)	52 (15.8 %)	188 (57.0 %)	47 (14.2 %)	43 (13.0 %)	235 (71.2 %)	3.7 1	0.9 1	Agreed
23	[SV23] There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff in my school.	10 (3.0 %)	23 (7.0%)	28 (8.5%)	197 (59.7 %)	72 (21.8 %)	33 (10.0 %)	269 (81.5 %)	3.9 0	0.9 2	Agreed
24	[SV24] Challenges are addressed constructiv ely within the school.	6 (1.8 %)	18 (5.5%)	43 (13.0 %)	212 (64.2 %)	51 (15.5 %)	24 (7.3%)	263 (79.7 %)	3.8 6	0.8 1	Agreed
25	[SV25] Positive relationshi ps between students are evident.	4 (1.2 %)	11 (3.3%)	41 (12.4 %)	220 (66.7 %)	54 (16.4 %)	15 (4.5%)	274 (83.0 %)	3.9 4	0.7 3	Agreed
26	[SV26] My school fosters a caring environme	5 (1.5 %)	16 (4.8%)	32 (9.7%)	217 (65.8 %)	60 (18.2 %)	21 (6.4%)	277 (83.9 %)	3.9 4	0.7 8	Agreed

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree f (SD+D) (%)	Agree f (A+SA) (%)	M	SD	Result
	nt for students.										
27	[SV27] My school actively supports students' social wellbeing.	6 (1.8 %)	13 (3.9%)	43 (13.0 %)	201 (60.9 %)	67 (20.3 %)	19 (5.8%)	268 (81.2 %)	3.9 4	0.8 1	Agree d
	Composite School Vitality								3.8 0		High Vitali ty

The total item-level response frequency distribution for the School Vitality construct (N=330) is presented in Table 5 on the five-point Likert Scale. On average, teachers expressed high levels of institutional vitality, resulting in a composite mean score of 3.80. The highest means among the constructs were observed for the indicators measuring relational and student-centered climate; three items were tied in terms of the highest mean scores (M=3.94); creation of caring environment for students (SV26; SD=0.78; 277 agreed, 83.9%), positive relationships between students (SV25; SD=0.73; 274 agreed, 83.0%), and support for social wellbeing of students (SV27; SD=0.81; 268 agreed, 81.2%). Other widely endorsed items included strong cooperation among the staff (SV23; M=3.90, SD=0.92; 269 agreed, 81.5%), problem-solving (SV24; M=3.86, SD=0.81; 263 agreed, 79.7%), high expectations of students regarding their academic achievements (SV19; M=3.82, SD=0.83; 251 agreed, 76.1%), diversity in teaching strategies (SV20; M=3.78, SD=0.85; 251 agreed, 76.1%), and high level of teacher's energy (SV22; M=3.71, SD=0.91; 235 agreed, 71.2%). Meanwhile, regular updates of curriculum in order to accommodate the changing needs of the students (SV21) received the lowest mean score within the construct (M=3.32, SD=1.07; 195 agreed, 59.1%; 88 disagreed, 26.7%).

3.12. School Sustainability: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

The following are the Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation for School Sustainability (N = 330):

Table 6. School Sustainability: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (N = 330)

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree f (SD+D) (%)	Agree f (A+SA) (%)	M	SD	Result
28	[SS28] Educational policies ensure continuity in my school practices.	14 (4. 2%)	44 (13.3 %)	57 (17.3 %)	189 (57.3 %)	26 (7.9%)	58 (17.6 %)	215 (65.2 %)	3.5 1	0.9 7	Agreed

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree (SD+D) f (%)	Agree (A+SA) f (%)	M	SD	Result
29	[SS29] School systems operate consistently over time.	6 (1.8 %)	32 (9.7 %)	84 (25.5 %)	185 (56.1 %)	23 (7.0%)	38 (11.5 %)	208 (63.0 %)	3.57	0.83	Agreed
30	[SS30] My school manages challenges without losing effectiveness.	5 (1.5 %)	24 (7.3 %)	56 (17.0 %)	203 (61.5 %)	42 (12.7 %)	29 (8.8 %)	245 (74.2 %)	3.77	0.82	Agreed
31	[SS31] Teachers receive opportunities for professional development in school.	14 (4.2%)	62 (18.8 %)	58 (17.6 %)	155 (47.0 %)	41 (12.4 %)	76 (23.0 %)	196 (59.4 %)	3.45	1.06	Agreed
32	[SS32] Skill development is prioritized by school leadership.	9 (2.7 %)	49 (14.8 %)	45 (13.6 %)	184 (55.8 %)	43 (13.0 %)	58 (17.6 %)	227 (68.8 %)	3.62	0.98	Agreed
33	[SS33] Training programs enhance teaching effectiveness.	7 (2.1 %)	11 (3.3 %)	31 (9.4%)	199 (60.3 %)	82 (24.8 %)	18 (5.5%)	281 (85.2 %)	4.02	0.82	Agreed
34	[SS34] My school regularly evaluates its performance.	6 (1.8 %)	17 (5.2 %)	37 (11.2 %)	213 (64.5 %)	57 (17.3 %)	23 (7.0%)	270 (81.8 %)	3.90	0.80	Agreed
35	[SS35] Feedback is used to improve	8 (2.4%)	11 (3.3 %)	33 (10.0 %)	206 (62.4 %)	72 (21.8 %)	19 (5.8%)	278 (84.2 %)	3.98	0.82	Agreed

No.	Item Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	Disagree (SD+D) f (%)	Agree (A+SA) f (%)	M	SD	Result
	school practices.										
36	[SS36] Teaching innovation is encouraged in my school.	10 (3.0%)	15 (4.5%)	44 (13.3%)	197 (59.7%)	64 (19.4%)	25 (7.6%)	261 (79.1%)	3.88	0.88	Agreed
	Composite School Sustainability								3.74		High Sustainability

Table 6 reports the item-level response distribution for the School Sustainability construct (N = 330), which achieved a high overall composite mean of 3.74. The strongest agreement centered on capacity building and continuous quality improvement: teachers overwhelmingly endorsed that training programs enhance teaching effectiveness (SS33; $M = 4.02, SD = 0.82$; 281 agreed, 85.2%), that feedback is used to improve school practices (SS35; $M = 3.98, SD = 0.82$; 278 agreed, 84.2%), that schools regularly evaluate their performance (SS34; $M = 3.90, SD = 0.80$; 270 agreed, 81.8%), and that teaching innovation is encouraged (SS36; $M = 3.88, SD = 0.88$; 261 agreed, 79.1%). Operational resilience (SS30; $M = 3.77, SD = 0.82$; 74.2%) and leadership prioritization of skill development (SS32; $M = 3.62, SD = 0.98$; 68.8%) also received solid endorsement. Slightly lower, though still positive, ratings were observed for systemic consistency over time (SS29; $M = 3.57, SD = 0.83$; 63.0%), policy continuity (SS28; $M = 3.51, SD = 0.97$; 65.2%), and in-school professional development opportunities (SS31; $M = 3.45, SD = 1.06$; 196 agreed, 59.4%; 76 disagreed, 23.0%), suggesting that while teachers value training highly (SS33), access to school-level professional development opportunities (SS31) remains uneven.

4. Discussion

The present study investigated socio-cultural and organizational barriers that exist for the teachers (N=330) teaching in government schools located in four tehsils of District Sargodha, and their views regarding school vitality and institutional sustainability. After reverse scoring the items in constraint scales which were worded positively, it was seen that there exists a dual structure of pressures prevailing among the respondents. Specifically, the existence of community-based constraints as well as a very distinctive dichotomous organizational environment, coupled with an exceptionally high level of school vitality and sustainability, exists. Considering that the sample consists mostly of rural respondents, the above results highlight the influence of macro-level policy barriers as well as socio-economic barriers at the family level on the public schools in Pakistan.

One of the key aspects of the current research work has been that of highlighting a significant dichotomy within the organizational setting in the case of government schools in District Sargodha. Contrary to dysfunctional organizational structures, the dichotomy in the current case is between the constraints due to human resource-related factors external to the organization, and those due to management within the organization. Three workload and staffing stressors recorded the highest constraint scores across the entire survey: non-teaching extra duties, overcrowded classrooms reducing instructional effectiveness, and teaching staff shortages generating excessive work pressure.

Such item-level results reflect the administrative challenges faced by the province as reported in the Annual School Census 2024-25, which found the shortage of more than 320,000 teachers in the province's public school system, such that several thousand schools had only one teacher or lacked teachers in large numbers (Express Tribune, 2024; Punjab School Education Department, 2025). Internationally, critical teacher shortages and administrative work overload have been recognized as major causes of diluted instruction and occupational stress (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2024). Occupational Health Psychology literature shows that situational constraints or barriers at the organization level that limit employees from translating effort into performance are among the best predictors of occupational frustration and exhaustion in different cultures (Spector & Jex,

1998; Liu et al., 2010). Recent research employing longitudinal and structural equation modeling demonstrates that work overload and large class size are associated with negative mental well-being and rapid emotional exhaustion in teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Wang, 2024). In the case of Sargodha District, where public school teachers are assigned state-level non-teaching jobs like election duty, census taking, and public health awareness programs while filling up vacancies in their teaching positions, overload becomes an immediate threat to classroom quality.

In striking contrast, reverse-scored items measuring internal school management registered low constraint ratings. Most respondents reported clear leadership direction from school heads, timely communication of important information, and reliable basic utilities such as water, electricity, and sanitation. Notably, the high reliability of basic utilities reported in District Sargodha exceeds the national public-school average reported in the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2023, where only 65% of government schools had clean drinking water (Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi, 2024). Moderate constraint levels were observed only for technological resources, instructional materials, and teacher participation in school decision-making. This pattern aligns with school leadership scholarship demonstrating that effective principals buffer staff through clear direction and internal organization, yet remain constrained when recruitment, teacher deployment, and administrative mandates are tightly centralized at the provincial level (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Contrary to the dichotomized organizational constraints, socio-cultural barriers affected the community-school relationship from multiple dimensions. The structural constraint of household poverty was the most prominent community barrier: 80.0% of teachers felt that the economic pressures of the family often lead to students being absent, and 80.9% felt that the students do not have learning materials due to economic limitations, along with 51.5% mentioning that families prefer their housework or employment over school attendance. This finding at the classroom level is reflected by the large-scale educational exclusion reported by Pakistan Education Statistics 2023-24 in Pakistan, with 25.1 million out-of-school children, of which 9.7 million were in Punjab (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2025).

Socio-cultural and gender-related norms were yet another factor which made things more difficult for children and youth in terms of their education. Nearly two-thirds of the surveyed teachers agreed on such preferential attitudes towards boys' education, affecting students' goals and early marriage norms, hampering further education. The findings above confirm the results of scientific studies carried out in Pakistan and the Global South at large (Ali & Syed, 2017; Jayachandran, 2019).

It is important to mention that the reverse scoring of positively worded home-school items helped identify a critical misinterpretation issue and showed that parents' non-engagement is a critical constraint in District Sargodha. Over 50 per cent of the respondents mentioned that there was no parental homework monitoring. Also, nearly 50 per cent of the participants indicated that there is no interest shown by parents in school activities, as well as no frequent interaction with parents. This does not mean that parents do not show any interest in their children's education process, but recent qualitative and mixed-method studies in rural Punjab demonstrate that low literacy levels of parents, rigid daily wage work schedules, and perceived social distance between rural homes and formal schools are major obstacles to active parental involvement (Ahmed, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024). Based on Epstein's (2018) overlapping spheres model, such communication channels, where parent-teacher contacts are established through visits or written notices that illiterate parents cannot understand, destroy home-school collaboration. It is also worth mentioning that low school council governance had the lowest socio-cultural constraint score.

Integrating the descriptive findings for School Vitality and School Sustainability provides critical insight into how District Sargodha's government schools continue to function despite severe staffing and socio-economic pressures. Within the School Vitality construct, relational and student-centered indicators received the strongest endorsement: fostering a caring student environment, positive peer relationships among students, active support for students' social well-being, and strong staff teamwork. Similarly, within School Sustainability, teachers strongly affirmed internal quality-improvement practices, including the effectiveness of training programs, using feedback to improve school practices, regular performance evaluation, and encouragement of teaching innovation.

Viewed through the lens of Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), collegial teamwork, constructive internal problem-solving, clear school-level leadership, and continuous feedback loops serve as vital social and organizational job resources. Consistent with recent empirical evidence on school organizational climate and faculty vitality (Bland et al., 2002; Kandemir, 2024; Wang, 2024), these internal relational strengths buffer teachers' work energy and sustain institutional resilience against acute external stressors.

Nevertheless, vulnerabilities at an item level in both outcome constructs indicate structural risks that cannot be addressed solely through internal collegiality. For instance, curriculum updates frequently were found to have the lowest vitality score, and in-school professional development and policy continuity had the lowest sustainability scores. The above agrees with the theory of sustainable educational leadership by Hargreaves & Fink (2006), according to which frequent changes in policies, inflexible curricula from above, and restricted access to local professional development programs compromise sustainability. Hence,

although District Sargodha schools are characterized by interpersonal vitality, sustainability of instructional quality entails structural congruence of provincial policy continuity and professional development with decreased workload.

Several contextual features of the sample warrant consideration when interpreting these results. Because 69.7% of respondents taught in rural schools and nearly half (49.7%) were drawn from Kot Momin Tehsil—an agrarian sub-district characterized by dispersed rural settlements and higher socio-economic vulnerability—the pronounced salience of poverty-induced absenteeism, lack of learning materials, and teacher shortages likely reflect acute rural-sector pressures. Furthermore, because all constructs were measured via teacher self-reports at a single time point, high ratings on internal school vitality and evaluation practices may partially reflect professional commitment and social desirability, underscoring the value of future multi-informant and longitudinal designs incorporating parents, students, and school heads.

5. Conclusions

This research study was undertaken to investigate the socio-cultural and organizational constraints faced by 330 government primary, elementary, and high school teachers belonging to four tehsils of District Sargodha, which include Sargodha, Bhalwal, Kot Momin, and Bhera. This research is based on the empirical findings obtained after reverse scoring of items. Therefore, it gives an empirical view of the impact of community-level pressure and systemic bottlenecks on the vitality and sustainability of schools. Generally, it is found that the schools in District Sargodha do not have the problem of internal decay but must work under a two-layered pressure structure of having human resource deficiency at the macro level and socio-cultural constraints at the micro level.

In terms of the organizational aspect, there is a stark divergence between the province-wide policy of staffing, on the one hand, and local school administration, on the other hand. Teacher shortages, class over-enrollments, and burdensome non-teaching administrative responsibilities constituted the primary operational stressors affecting the capacity for teaching, according to the results obtained in the whole study. In contrast, micro-level administration within schools, including directives issued by the school heads, prompt communication and functioning utilities, was seen as a relative institutional strength, while technological infrastructure, instructional materials, and teacher involvement in decision-making were regarded as moderate deficiencies.

Constraints in the socio-cultural category were more widely spread in the household/community ecosystem. Economic precariousness, as reflected by teacher perceptions of the fact that financial difficulties cause high rates of student absenteeism, make students lack basic learning materials, and force families to prioritize earning or domestic work over school attendance, was combined with male preference in education and early marriages. More importantly, reverse scoring of positively formulated home-school relationships proved that regular parental disengagement is an important constraint, in contrast to a secondary one: over 50% of the surveyed participants noted the lack of parental control over children's homework, almost half of them indicated lack of parental interest in school events, and 44.8% indicated infrequent communication between parents and teachers. On the other hand, school council governance showed low rates of constraint, but formal participation at the governance level does not transform into parental engagement at the household level.

Despite all these challenges, it is apparent that the teachers showed significantly high scores for both School Vitality and School Sustainability, based on good staff collaboration, a positive and socially supportive learning environment among students, constructive problem-solving and performance evaluation and feedback. The relational strength within the school is thus an important buffer that enables the school to continue working under trying circumstances. However, scores indicating less frequent updates in curriculum, professional development at the school and continuity of policies indicate some structural weaknesses that collegiality cannot fix on its own in the long run. To ensure vitality and sustainability of government schools in Sargodha District (and Punjab in general) therefore, requires a twin-track strategy: the provincial administration has to immediately address the issue of understaffed teaching positions, small classrooms and non-interference in teaching, and the district administration needs to provide the means for teacher development and build partnerships with economically disadvantaged and low-literate communities.

6. Practical Implications

The findings of this study carry the following concrete implications:

Although government schools in District Sargodha demonstrate strong internal relational vitality and commitment to quality improvement, these internal strengths cannot indefinitely offset upstream human-resource deficits. Persistent teacher shortages and non-teaching administrative mandates directly erode instructional capacity, signaling that provincial recruitment and workload policies are the primary levers for safeguarding classroom quality.

While principals in District Sargodha generally provide clear direction and maintain timely internal communication and reliable basic utilities, school-level leadership must pivot toward bridging the home–school divide. Because formal School Councils show relatively active governance participation compared to everyday household parental involvement, school heads have an underutilized institutional structure through which to mobilize community engagement.

Teachers strongly affirm the value of training programs in enhancing instructional effectiveness yet report uneven access to school-based professional development. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should therefore integrate practical modules on managing overcrowded classrooms and engaging low-literacy families, while non-governmental organizations can target acute material deprivation and poverty-induced absenteeism in rural sub-districts.

7. Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence, the following targeted actions are recommended:

- The Punjab School Education Department should expedite the filling of vacant teaching posts and establish maximum class-size thresholds, prioritizing underserved rural sub-districts such as Kot Momin, where staffing deficits strain instructional delivery.
- Education authorities should restrict the deployment of public-school teachers for non-instructional state tasks by assigning clerical, survey, and campaign responsibilities to dedicated administrative cadres, thereby protecting classroom teaching hours.
- To address widespread deficits in parental homework monitoring, parental interest in school activities, and parent–teacher communication, schools should replace formal written notices with accessible outreach—such as scheduled evening or weekend community meetings, brief voice-based mobile updates for low-literacy caregivers, and peer-parent outreach led by active School Council members.
- District authorities and development partners should provide free stationery, uniforms, and conditional attendance stipends to mitigate poverty-induced absenteeism and shortages of basic learning supplies. Simultaneously, local education committees should partner with community leaders to counter gender-biased educational aspirations and early marriage traditions.
- School heads and district officers should allocate targeted budgets to close moderate gaps in technological resources and instructional materials. In parallel, principals should formalize teacher participation in school decision-making and establish regular, school-based peer-learning workshops alongside flexible, localized curriculum enrichment.

8. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should pursue the following directions:

Future studies should apply multiple regression and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the direct, mediating, and moderating effects of socio-cultural and organizational constraints on school vitality and institutional sustainability.

Researchers should incorporate qualitative interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions with school heads, parents, School Council members, and students alongside quantitative surveys to uncover the underlying mechanisms driving parental disengagement and teacher workload strain.

Comparative studies across multiple districts of Punjab—as well as disaggregated subgroup analyses comparing primary, elementary, and high schools and urban versus rural localities—are needed to test the broader generalizability of these constraint patterns.

Longitudinal studies tracking schools before and after targeted teacher recruitment, administrative workload reduction, or structured parent-outreach initiatives would provide rigorous empirical evidence on which interventions most effectively sustain school vitality over time.

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