

What does school mean to children?

References:

[Siddiqui, N., Gorard, S., Bulsari, S., Saeed, S., Sarfaraz, H., See, BH., Dixon, P. & Pandya, K. \(2022\). Does school matter for early childhood education? Assessing cognitive and wider development of children in the Province of Punjab, Pakistan and State of Gujarat, India. School of Education, Durham, Durham University Evidence Centre for Education.](#)

[Siddiqui, N., Gorard, S., & See, BH. \(2022\). The importance of attendance at school in India and Pakistan. In *Making Schools Better for Disadvantaged Students*. Abingdon: Routledge](#)

[Siddiqui, N., Dixon, P., & Gorard, S. \(2023\). Is parental awareness of children's academic potential a good predictor of children's learning outcomes in Early Year's settings? Findings from two provinces in Pakistan and India. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 8\(1\), 100651.](#)

Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Punjab, Pakistan
Children	
Boys	307
Girls	309
School enrolment status	
Attended school (data sweep 1)	436
Not attended in school (data sweep 1)	180
Attended school (data sweep 2)	487
Not attended school (data sweep 2)	56
Total	616

School Dropout

Migration Rural to Urban

- I had lots of friends. I used to go to school even. I had many cousins to **play** with. When we came in the city it is better, but I don't go to school anymore and I miss all **my friends** and cousins who I used to **play** with. Here we have a TV only and I just spend all day watching dramas. There is **no one to talk**. (Saba, 6 years old).

Household poverty/ Change in family circumstances

- School was nice. I don't go to school because my **father lost** his job and we are **poor** now. My teacher was always asking for fees and in the end he said don't come to school if your parents don't **pay your school fee**. (Irfan, age 6 years)
- We are **poor** now. I liked school because I had friends. I have more friends and I play in the street all day now. (Imran, 5 years old).
- I used to go to school. **My father died and there was no one to look after us**. I stopped going to school. (Deeba, 6 years)
- I was in school and then we became poor. I had friends in school. My brother goes to school but I don't go. I stay at home with mum and help her. (Irum, 6 years).

School experience

- School was nice because we played with friends. My **teacher was not nice**. She used to **hit me** when I was naughty. I don't want to go back there. (Shazia, 5 years old).

Worse for girls

- I **help my mother**. I **cook and clean** house. I have a younger sister who I **look after** and we play. I don't have any friend. We don't play outside because my mother does not let us play outside. **She only let my brother** go outside and play with his friends. (Sana, age 6 years)

Attended School

Fun and Play

- We have a **big ground** in school, and we **play** there. (Salman, age 5 years old)
- I like school because we have a nice garden, and we play there. We have **toys** and **computers** in school. I like **lunch** time in school. (Ahmed, 6 years old)

Friends

- I like playing with my school **friends**. (Ayesha, age 4 years)

Teachers and School Activities

- We watch cartoons in school. There is music as well. We sing poems with our piano teacher. I like when we watch TV in school and play in school. Our **teacher Samiya is very nice**. I like her very much. (Amna, 5 years old)
- Miss Salma is my **favorite teacher**. I like her. She says I am good. I always get a star on my work as well. (Farah, age 6 years)
- I like school because our **teacher is very nice**. She **reads us stories and let us play** in the ground. She also makes us do **drawing** and **painting**. I like drawing and colouring pictures. (Salma, age 5 years)

Can be boring!

- Schools are closed now because of Corona. I like playing with kids in the street more than going to school. **I don't like studying at school**. It is **boring**. (Sarmad, age 7 years)

Never Attended School

Children in cheap workforce

I **work in this hotel**. My job is cleaning tables and washing dishes. I get paid every day and I give all that money to my mother. She works and we all have to work for money. My father has left us. The hotel owner is a very strict man. I sometime sleep in this hotel when it gets late at night. (Jabir, 8 years)

Poverty

I have to go to shop for work every morning. If I don't go to work, then we will not have **enough money** to eat food. My dad said we don't need school. (Adil, age 8 years)

I work in a factory shop three days a week. When I don't go to work we **play in the street** and there is a water pond. I know how to swim. (Sarmad, 6 years old)

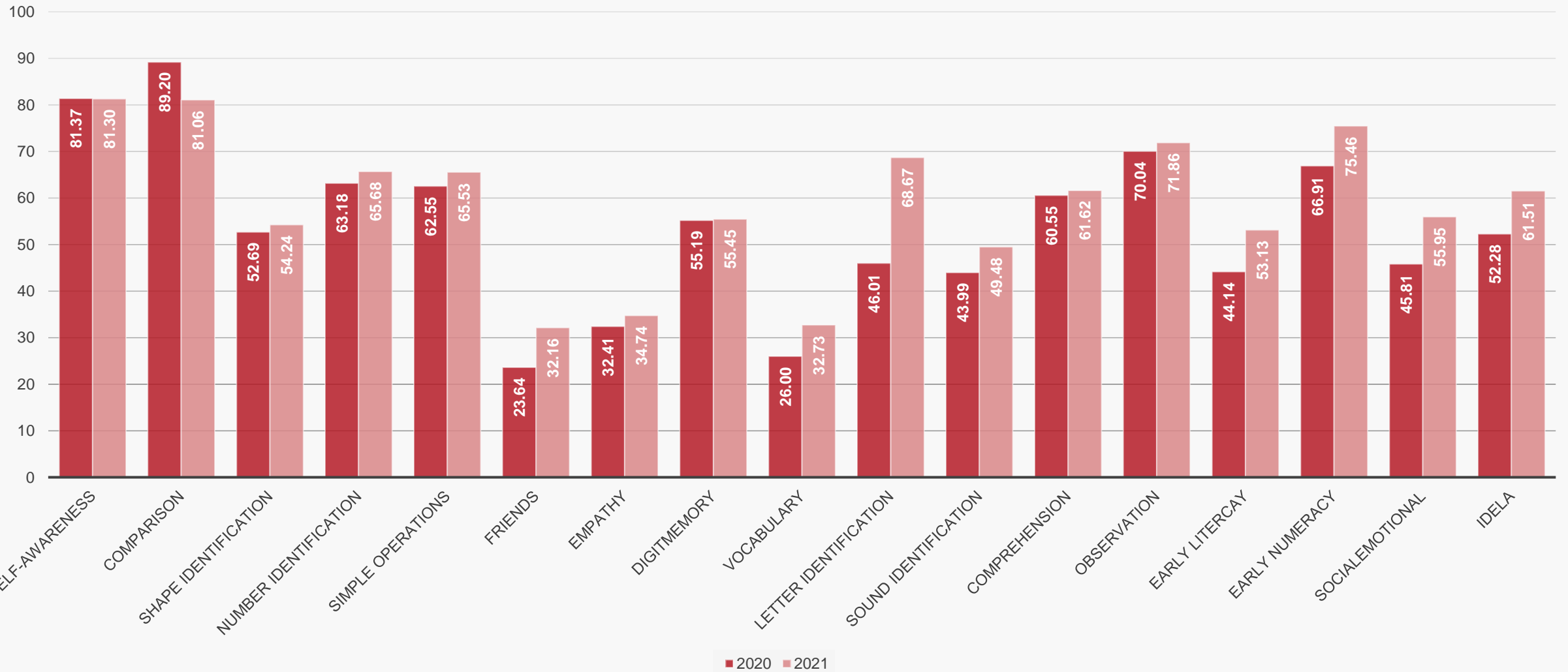
Children as carers

I **help** my **mother** at home. She is **always ill**. I clean house and bring water from the wells. It is heavy and hard to walk with water. I play with friends when we go to wells. (Saba, age 7 years)

Child abuse

I ran away from home because my father is a drug addict. He never sent us to school. He used to **beat me** very badly. My mother left home and we live with him now. I work in this shop now. The owner lets me sleep here. I will not go back to home because **beating hurts**. (Sajid, age 9 years)

Mean Scores for Years 2020 and 2021



Outcomes 2021 by patterns of school attendance

	Attended both years	Attended first year	Attended second year	Did not attend
Observation score	77.31	64.13	69.46	65.25
Literacy score	66.89	43.49	49.64	41.16
Numeracy score	85.28	61.54	69.20	54.46
Social emotional score	64.39	51.67	53.53	46.95
IDELA score Girls	73.50	50.32	57.56	49.56
IDELA score Boys	70.82	53.94	57.33	45.48
IDELA total score	72.19	52.23	57.46	47.52

Model for Total IDELA score, 2021

Step	R square	Increase in R square
Age in years	0.38	-
Sum of Assets	0.49	0.11
Total IDELA score 2020	0.65	0.16
Child went to school 2020	0.65	0.00
Child went to school 2021	0.67	0.02

Coefficients for model of Total IDELA score, 2021

Variable	Unstandardised coefficient	Standardised coefficient
Age in years	2.31	0.14
Sum of Assets	1.01	0.11
Total IDELA score 2020	0.50	0.51
Child went to school 2020	-1.99	-0.04
Child went to school 2021	10.42	0.17

Why school matters?

Learning begins before children are exposed to a formal school or given a structured environment for upbringing.

Substantial **learning** takes place even for those **children who never attend a formal school** in their childhood years of development.

There are **gaps** between the learning outcomes of children attending school or not, defined and measured in terms of **literacy** and **numeracy**.

Children who **attend school** have **opportunities** to learn more (of relevance to **literacy** and **numeracy** measures) as compared to children who do not attend school.

School provides environment for learning where educational **resources**, **social interaction** with peers and teachers play an important role towards **learning** and **attainment**. Children **not attending school** may not meet the same level of attainment in literacy and numeracy because **these skills** are often taught through **structured coaching**, implementation of **impactful learning approaches**, and **opportunities for regular practice**, and **feedback**.

The attainment **gap widens as children grow** up because children not in school usually **do not** have any other **alternatives** in catching up skills for literacy and numeracy.



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