WDI Education Indicators

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of World Development Indicators 2025

PRESS RELEASE

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Pakistan's education spending at 1.9% of GDP, signs of recovery post-2021 offer hope for reform – **WDI Education Indicators**

Islamabad, May 27th, 2025

Gallup Pakistan, as part of its Big Data Analysis initiative, is looking at World Development Indicators 2025, the primary World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized international sources. The broader Big Data Analysis Initiative series' main aim is to provide data. Implications of these data points for development sector as well as wider socio-political ramifications is something we would like to trigger in relevant circles.

Main messages emerging from this report:

1. **Pakistan has the potential to reclaim momentum in education spending**, as seen during peak years like 2006, and recent signs of modest recovery suggest space for policy renewal.
2. **Despite regional competition, the broader South Asian trend of declining education allocations provides contextual cover**, positioning Pakistan's challenges within a wider fiscal recalibration.
3. **Pakistan's youth-heavy demographic profile presents a strong case for prioritizing education**, particularly at the primary level, as a high-impact investment in national development.
4. **Education spending in Pakistan is currently low but not static**, with 2022 and 2023 reflecting slight improvements in budget allocation after a period of decline.
5. **With the right governance and public finance strategy, Pakistan can close the education investment gap** and lay the foundation for long-term, inclusive growth.

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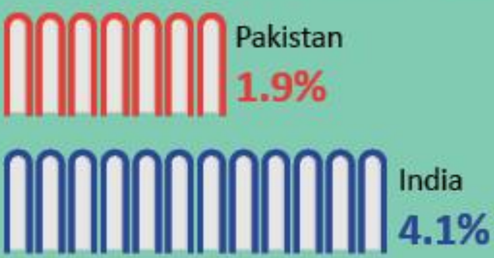
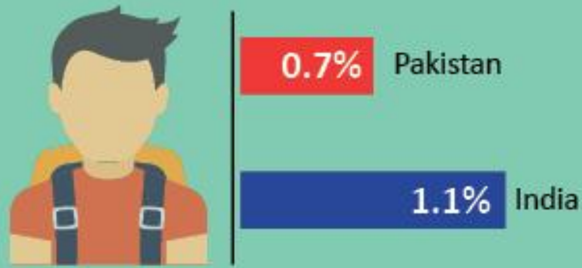
In 2023, Pakistan spent **1.9%** of its GDP on education, compared to India's **4.1%** and the South Asian average of around 2–3%.

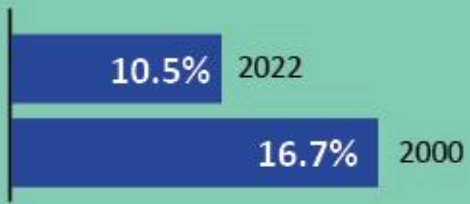


Primary education accounted for **0.7%** of Pakistan's GDP in 2023, while India allocated **1.1%**—a notable difference in early-stage investment.



Education's share in Pakistan's government spending was **8.3%** in 2023, down from a peak of **15.3%** in 2006 but up from **7.8%** in 2021.

South Asia as a whole saw a drop in education's share of total government expenditure, from **16.7%** in 2000 to **10.5%** in 2022.



In 2006, Pakistan devoted **15.3%** of its total government spending to education, demonstrating capacity for stronger commitment when prioritized.

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Source: World Developmemt Indicators 2024-2025

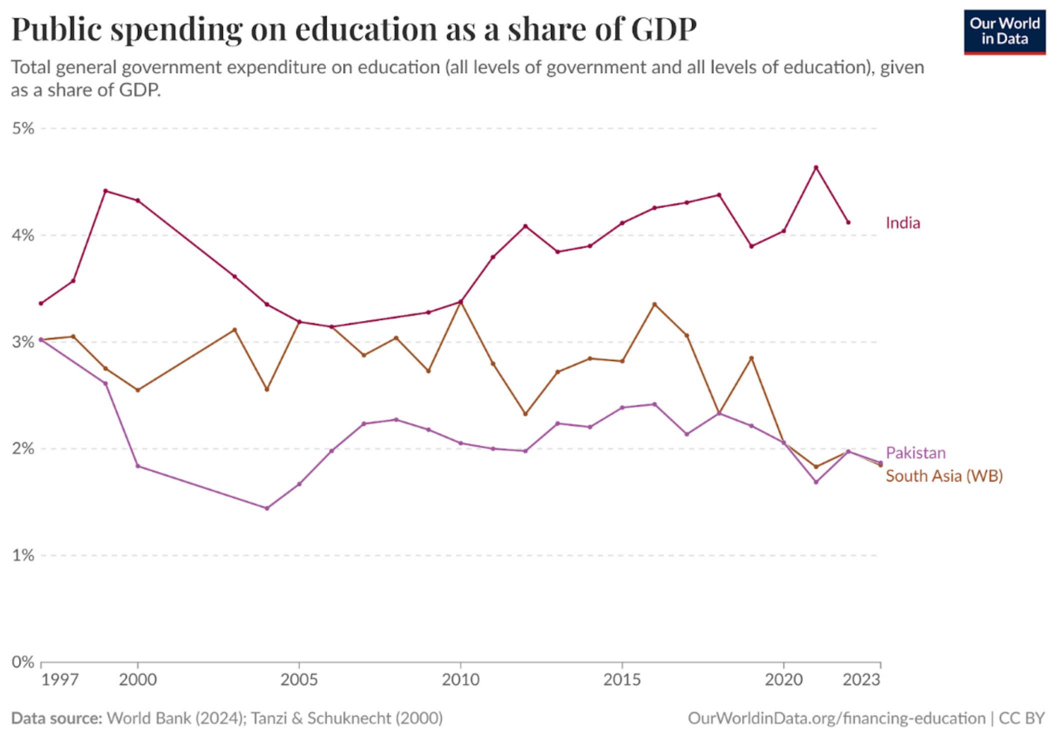
Key Findings

1. **In 2023, Pakistan spent 1.9% of its GDP on education**, compared to India's 4.1% and the South Asian average of around 2–3%.
2. **Education's share in Pakistan's government spending was 8.3% in 2023**, down from a peak of 15.3% in 2006 but up from 7.8% in 2021.
3. **Primary education accounted for 0.7% of Pakistan's GDP in 2023**, while India allocated 1.1%—a notable difference in early-stage investment.
4. **In 2006, Pakistan devoted 15.3% of its total government spending to education**, demonstrating capacity for stronger commitment when prioritized.
5. **South Asia as a whole saw a drop in education's share of total government expenditure**, from 16.7% in 2000 to 10.5% in 2022.

The 2025 edition of the World Development Indicators (WDI), compiled by the World Bank and OECD, offers a valuable lens to examine and compare trends in public education financing across countries. For Pakistan, this year's data underscores persistent challenges in public spending on education but also reveals opportunities for realignment and reform. Viewed comparatively—especially with reference to regional neighbours like India and broader South Asian averages—the insights are both sobering and instructive. Importantly, the WDI's standardization of data across countries allows for fair, evidence-based assessments and presents a strong basis for dialogue around public investment in human capital.

Public spending on education as a share of GDP

Pakistan's education spending as a share of GDP has mostly followed a downward trajectory over the past two decades, falling from 3% in 1997 to 2.1% in 2010, and further to 2% by 2022. In the most recent year of available data (2023), this figure dropped slightly again to 1.9%. This is particularly concerning when set against India's continued upward trend, from 3.4% in 1997 to 4.1% in 2022, and the broader South Asian pattern, which despite some recent decline, had peaked at 3.8% in 2010 and has remained relatively stable in the 2-3% range over the years. It is worth noting that Pakistan and South Asia were once nearly aligned in education spending, but regional averages have become increasingly difficult to maintain due to divergent national trends.



(Fig. 1) Source: World Bank (2024)[1,2]

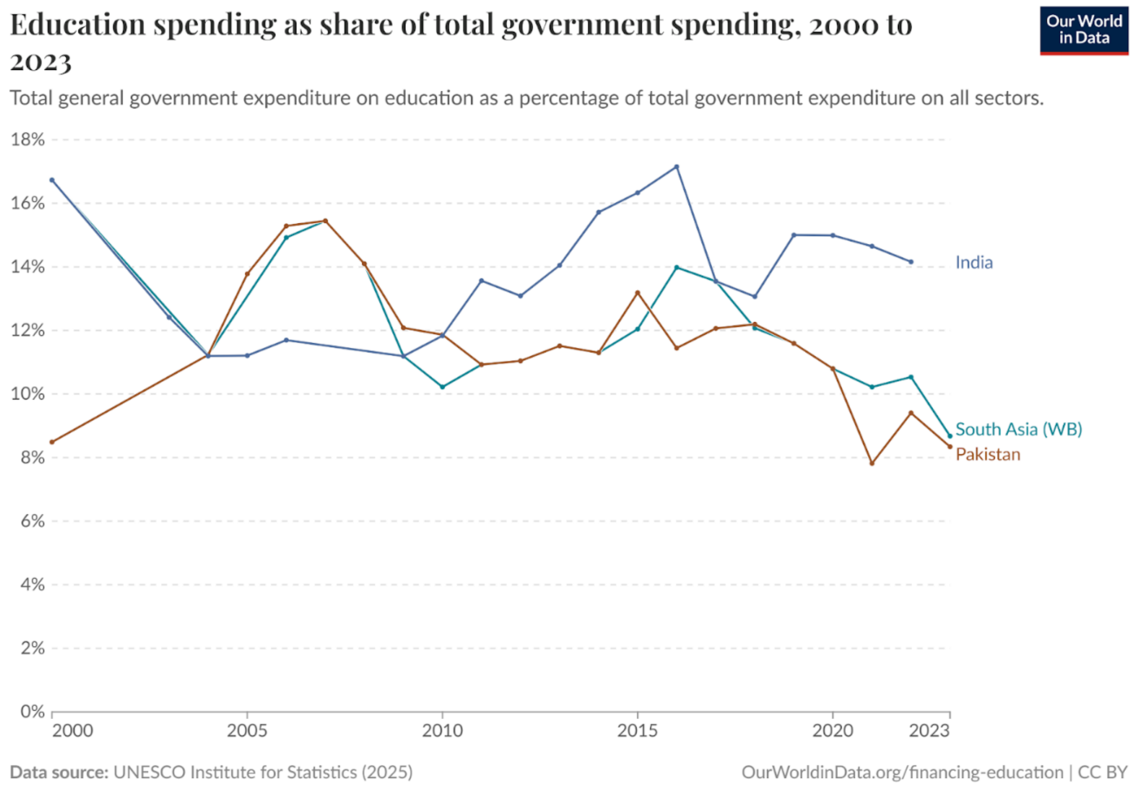
[1] World Bank Education Statistics (EdStats), World Bank, 2023. Licence: CC BY 4.0. [https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0038480/education-statistics]

[2] https://ourworldindata.org/financing-education

Education spending as share of total government spending, 2000 to 2023

When examined through the lens of total government expenditure allocated to education, a more nuanced picture of Pakistan's commitment to human capital development begins to emerge. Between 2000 and 2023, Pakistan's education budget as a share of total government spending experienced considerable fluctuations. It rose from 8.5% in 2000 to a high of 15.3% in 2006, reflecting a period of intensified focus on education within national priorities. This momentum, however, was not sustained, and by 2021 the share had dropped to a low of 7.8%. Encouragingly, there was a partial rebound to 9.4% in 2022, though this slightly declined again to 8.3% in 2023.

In comparison, India's spending on education has generally remained higher and more consistent. Starting at 16.7% in 2000, India's education share dipped to 11.7% in 2006 but then rose steadily, reaching a peak of 17.2% in 2016 before settling at 14.2% in 2022. These figures indicate a sustained prioritization of education in India's public budget, positioning it as a key pillar in national development. South Asia as a region, meanwhile, saw a collective decline in education's share of total government spending over the same period, moving from 16.7% in 2000 to 14.9% in 2006 and further down to 10.5% in 2022.



(Fig. 2) Source: World Development Indicators (WDI), The World Bank (2025)[3]

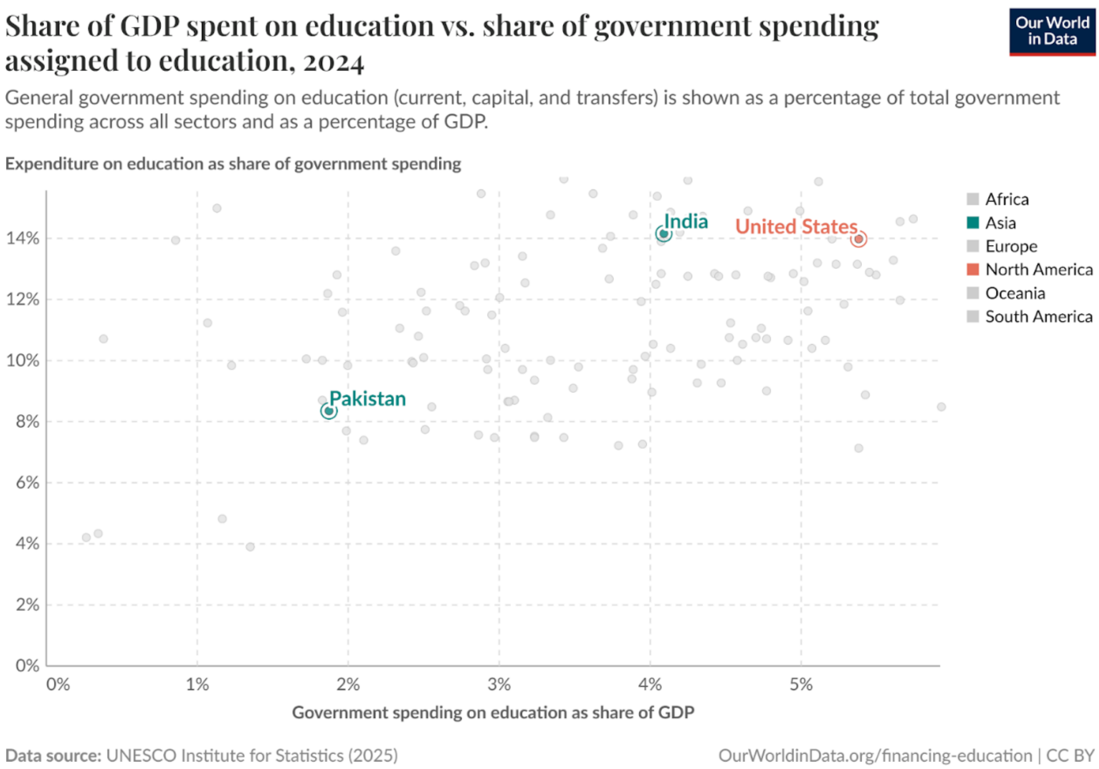
While Pakistan's current levels remain lower than both India and the South Asian average, the broader regional trend of declining education allocations offers important context. The overall drop in South Asia's education spending as a share of government budgets suggests that many countries in the region have faced competing fiscal pressures or changing priorities over time. In that light, Pakistan's ability to regain some ground post-2021—even modestly—signals the

[3] https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0037712/World-Development-Indicators

potential for renewed commitment and course correction. The 2006 peak demonstrates that Pakistan is capable of scaling up its investment in education when the political and economic climate allows. Revitalizing such momentum through consistent policy focus and improved governance in public finance management could allow Pakistan not only to catch up with its regional peers but also to reassert education as a cornerstone of national development strategy.

Moreover, as Pakistan navigates a complex fiscal landscape, the education sector remains a viable and high-impact area for targeted investment. The youth bulge in Pakistan's demographic profile underscores the strategic importance of ensuring adequate education financing. Reinvesting in education—especially at foundational levels—can drive long-term returns in terms of social equity, economic productivity, and national resilience. Despite past volatility, the path ahead for Pakistan holds significant promise if the political will can be mobilized toward sustaining and enhancing public education funding.

Share of GDP spent on education vs. share of government spending assigned to education



(Fig. 3) Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2025)[4]

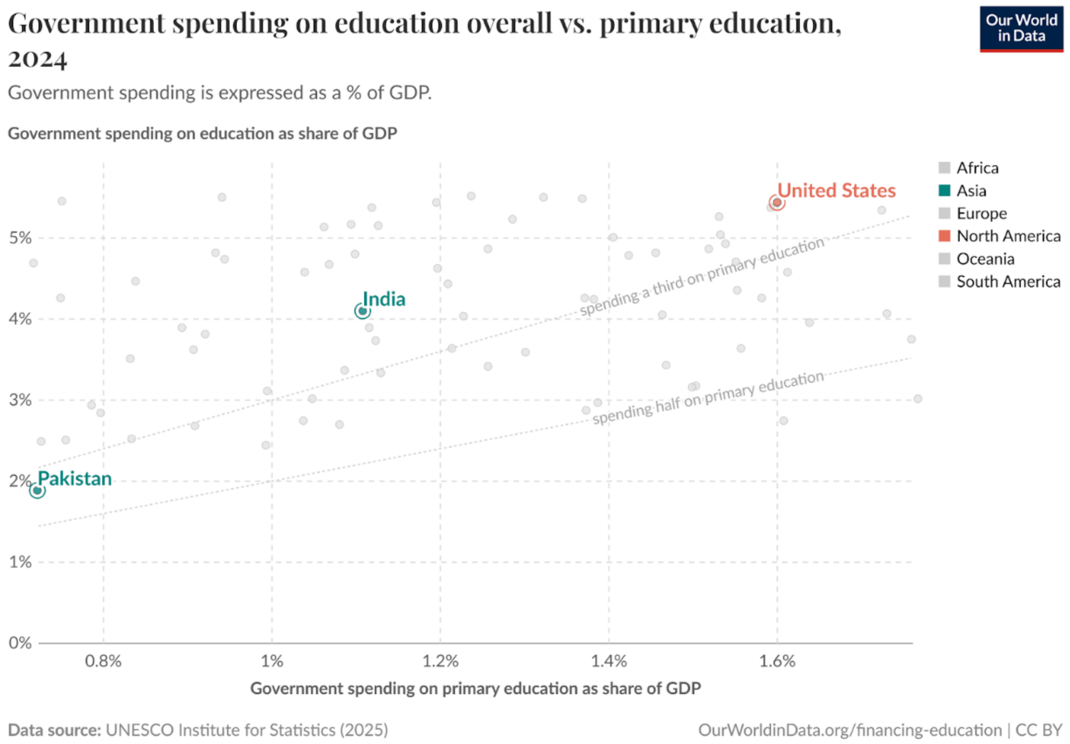
The contrast between Pakistan and its regional peers becomes even more pronounced when examining education spending through both GDP-based and budget-based lenses. In the 2024 snapshot, Pakistan's public expenditure on education stood at 1.9% of its GDP, with education comprising 8.3% of its total government spending. These figures suggest that while the country does allocate a segment of its national income and budget to education, the scale and emphasis remain relatively limited. India, in comparison, allocated 4.1% of its GDP and 14.2% of its government budget to education in the same period—more than twice the proportional GDP investment and a significantly larger share of overall spending. The United

[4] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Education, https://uis.unesco.org/bdds, 2025 [https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/resources/bulk/

States, a high-income country with a very different economic profile, nonetheless continued to assign considerable importance to education, spending 5.4% of GDP and 14% of total government expenditure on the sector. Although direct comparisons with high-income nations are not always appropriate due to structural and fiscal differences, the consistent global emphasis on education investment underscores its universal value as a driver of progress.

Government spending on education overall vs. primary education

A closer examination of how education budgets are internally structured further illustrates the disparity in priorities, particularly concerning early education. In 2023, Pakistan devoted 0.7% of its GDP to primary education, making up just over a third of its total education expenditure. India, meanwhile, spent 1.1% of its GDP on primary education, representing a stronger commitment to foundational learning. The United States again outpaced both, with 1.6% of GDP allocated solely to primary education. Investment in primary education is a key metric because it directly correlates with long-term developmental outcomes—higher literacy, improved cognitive skills, increased school retention, and stronger human capital. Pakistan's comparatively lower investment in this crucial area risks perpetuating structural deficiencies in its education system and widening the gap in opportunities and outcomes for its youngest citizens.



(Fig.4) Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2025)

Nonetheless, the outlook is not without hope. Pakistan has demonstrated in the past—most notably in 2006—that it has the fiscal capacity and institutional mechanisms to prioritize education when the political environment aligns. The partial recovery in education spending after 2021, even if modest, is a reminder that course correction is possible. It signals that public discourse and policy momentum around education remain alive and could be re-energized with the right interventions. Targeted increases in primary education funding, supported by strategic public financial management and cross-sectoral alignment, could serve as a catalyst for broader systemic improvement.

Taken in its entirety, the data provided by the World Development Indicators presents a sober yet action-oriented assessment. While Pakistan lags behind both regional averages and specific comparators like India in its current levels of education spending, this shortfall offers a clear direction for reform. The regional context—where South Asia overall has seen declining education allocations as a share of government budgets—suggests that Pakistan is not alone in navigating complex fiscal trade-offs. However, Pakistan's large youth population, rising demand for skills, and shifting labour market dynamics all amplify the urgency of revisiting education as a national priority.

Looking ahead, the opportunity lies in recalibrating the country's development strategy to more centrally feature education—not as an expenditure, but as a long-term investment. The multiplier effects of such investment are well-documented: improved productivity, social mobility, innovation, and democratic participation. In particular, prioritizing primary education and ensuring equitable access across provinces and socioeconomic groups can lay the groundwork for sustained and inclusive growth. If Pakistan can seize this moment to realign its fiscal priorities and reimagine its education policies, it can not only close the gap with its regional peers but also build a more resilient, skilled, and forward-looking society.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was started by Bilal I Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. Bilal explains the rationale of the series: "*The usual complaint from academics and policy makers is that Pakistan does not have data availability. Our experience negates that. Pakistan has lots of data, but it is not available in a usable form and not widely accessible. At Gallup we plan to bridge this gap in terms of accessibility and use of data. The Gallup Big Data series has earlier worked with data sets such as PSLM, Labour Force Survey, and Economic Survey reports as well as National Census Reports and Election Commission Data sets. The current series is using the 7th Population Census of Pakistan 2023 dashboard, which provides a variety of demographic statistics. We hope that these series are useful, and we welcome both feedback as well as possible collaborations as we create a public good in the form of useful data sets in Pakistan.*"

Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

Wish to know more about the World Development Indicators 2025?

The World Development Indicators (WDI) is the primary World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized international sources. It presents the most current and accurate global development data available, and includes national, regional and global estimates.

You can find more information on World Development Indicators at:

https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0037712/World-Development-Indicators

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