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Gallup Pakistan Analysis of AESR-Pakistan 2025 Foundational Learning

PRESS RELEASE

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of AESR-Pakistan 2025

Only 52% Class 5 Children Can Read a Story, 56% Read English Sentences, and 50% Can Do Division: ASER 2025 Reveals Persistent Foundational Learning Gaps

Islamabad, June 23rd, 2026

Pakistan has made substantial progress in getting children into school, but the ASER 2025 findings show that enrollment has still not translated into strong foundational learning. Analysis of the ASER Pakistan 2025 report (available at: **www.aserpakistan.org)** shows that by Class 5, only 52.3% of children can read a Class 2 level story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 56.3% can read English sentences, and 49.6% can do two-digit division. The data suggests that while learning improves steadily with grade progression, a large proportion of children still remain below basic competency levels even after several years of schooling. The pattern is especially concerning in the early grades. In Class 3, only 12.4% of children can read a story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, only 13.8% can read English sentences, and just 9.1% can do division. This indicates that the learning crisis emerges early and continues through the schooling cycle, leaving many children unable to acquire skills expected at lower grade levels.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

What data points this current edition covers:

This analysis is based on ASER Pakistan 2025 (National, Rural-Urban) learning assessment data. Indicators covered include: Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto reading levels, English reading levels, and arithmetic competency among children aged 5–16, with particular focus on class-wise progression, school type differences, gender differences, rural-urban variation, and out-of-school children. Full report available at: *www.aserpakistan.org*. **Note:** Learning indicators for school type, gender, and area are reported for children aged 5–16, reflecting overall competency levels rather than class-specific outcomes.

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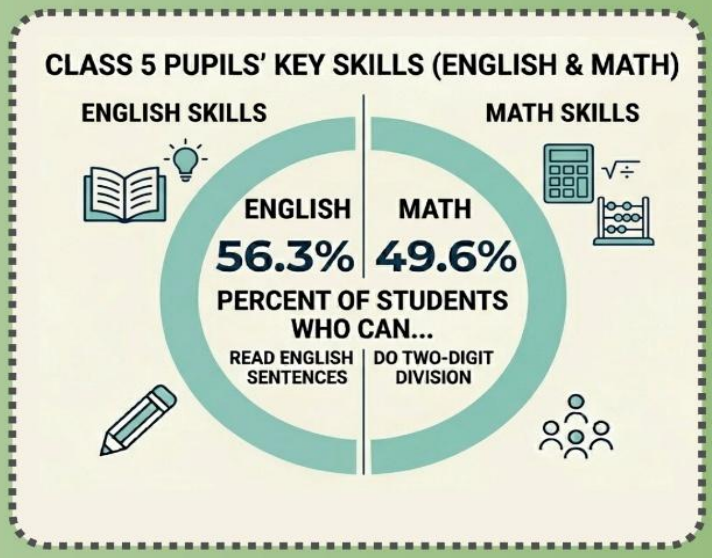

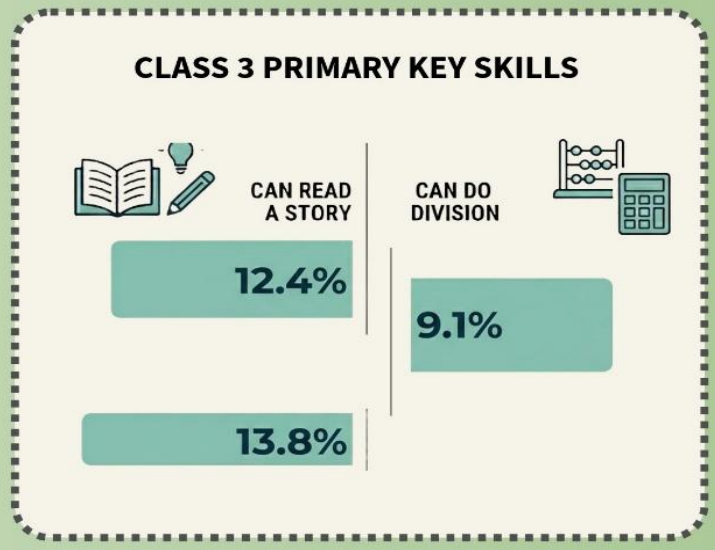

Private school students perform better than government school students, but learning levels remain far from universal in both systems.

Gender and rural-urban gaps in 2025 are relatively modest compared to the much larger gap by schooling status.

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Source: ASER Pakistan 2025, National (Rural-Urban), School Survey Data, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA).

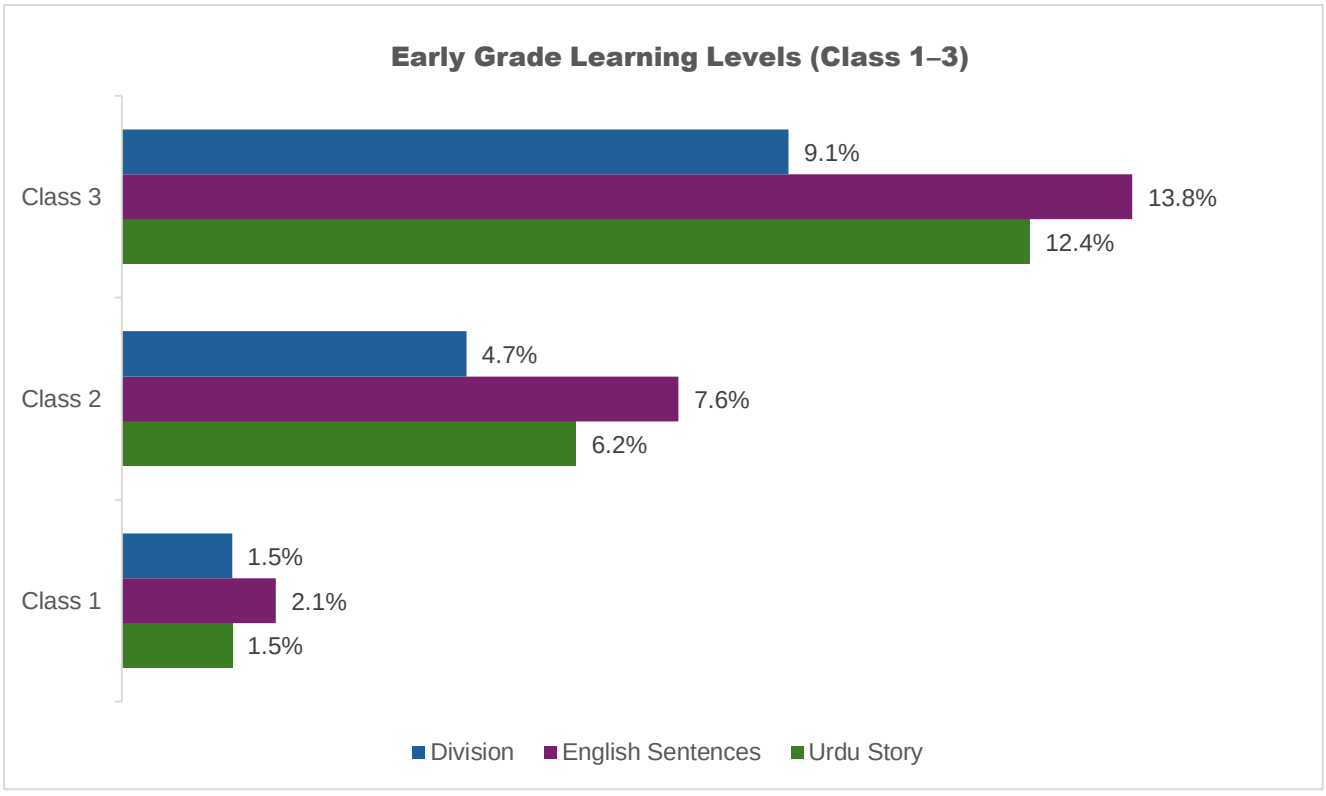
Key Findings:

1. In Class 5, only 52.3% of children can read a Class 2 level story in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto.
2. In Class 5, only 56.3% can read English sentences and 49.6% can do two-digit division.
3. In Class 3, foundational learning remains extremely low: 12.4% can read a story, 13.8% can read English sentences, and 9.1% can do division.
4. Private school students perform better than government school students, but learning levels remain far from universal in both systems.
5. Gender and rural-urban gaps in 2025 are relatively modest compared to the much larger gap by schooling status.
6. Out-of-school children show extremely low competency levels across all three domains.

1. Pakistan's Learning Crisis Is Most Visible in the Early Grades

The strongest message emerging from the 2025 learning tables is not simply that learning levels are low, but that they are already alarmingly weak by the early grades. In Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, only 1.5% of Class 1 children can read a story, rising to 6.2% in Class 2 and 12.4% in Class 3. In English, only 2.1% of Class 1 children can read sentences, 7.6% in Class 2, and 13.8% in Class 3. Arithmetic follows the same pattern: only 1.5% of Class 1 children can do division, 4.7% in Class 2, and 9.1% in Class 3. These figures suggest that the system is not ensuring timely acquisition of foundational skills in the grades where those skills are supposed to take root.

This aligns closely with the broader framing note in the report, which explicitly identifies a "Grade 3 crisis" in Pakistan's education system. The problem is not merely that children are struggling in higher classes; it is that many are moving through the system without mastering the basics early enough. Once that foundation weakens, later learning becomes slower, more fragile, and more unequal. By the time children reach middle grades, the system is often trying to compensate for deficits that should have been addressed much earlier.

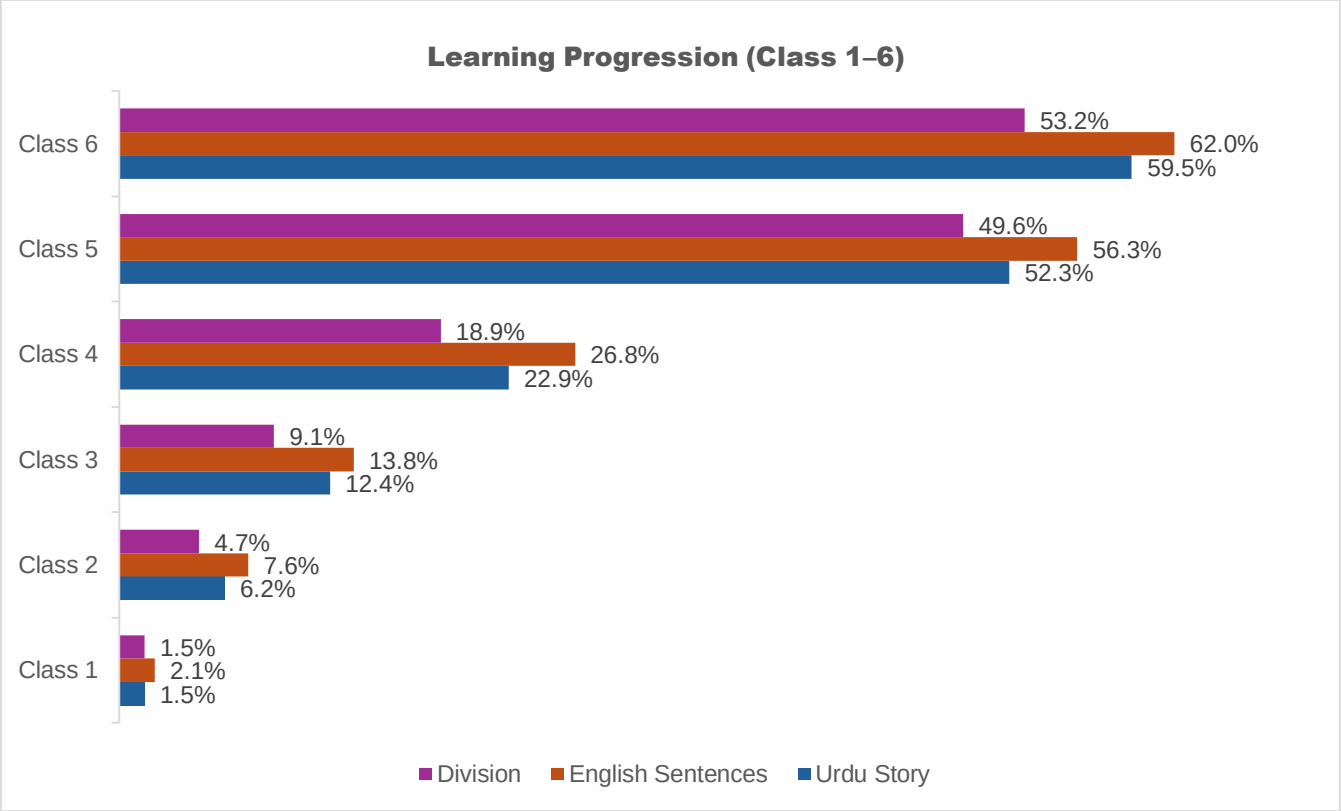


Source: *ASER Pakistan 2025, National (Rural-Urban), School Survey Data, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA).*

2. Learning Improves with Grade Progression, But Too Many Children Still Fall Short Even by Class 5

The class-wise data clearly shows that learning improves steadily from Class 1 onward. In Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, story reading rises from 1.5% in Class 1 to 52.3% in Class 5 and continues upward in later classes. In English, sentence reading rises from 2.1% in Class 1 to 56.3% in Class 5. In arithmetic, division rises from 1.5% in Class 1 to 49.6% in Class 5. This upward trend is important because it shows that children are learning over time; the issue is not complete stagnation, but rather insufficient learning relative to the number of years already spent in school.

That is what makes the Class 5 figures so important. By this stage, roughly half of children can demonstrate foundational competency, but that also means that roughly half still cannot. In other words, after five years of schooling, the system is still leaving a very large minority of children below even basic reading and numeracy thresholds. This is precisely why the ASER report argues that rising enrollment alone cannot be treated as success. More children are in school, but too many are still not learning at the level expected for their grade.

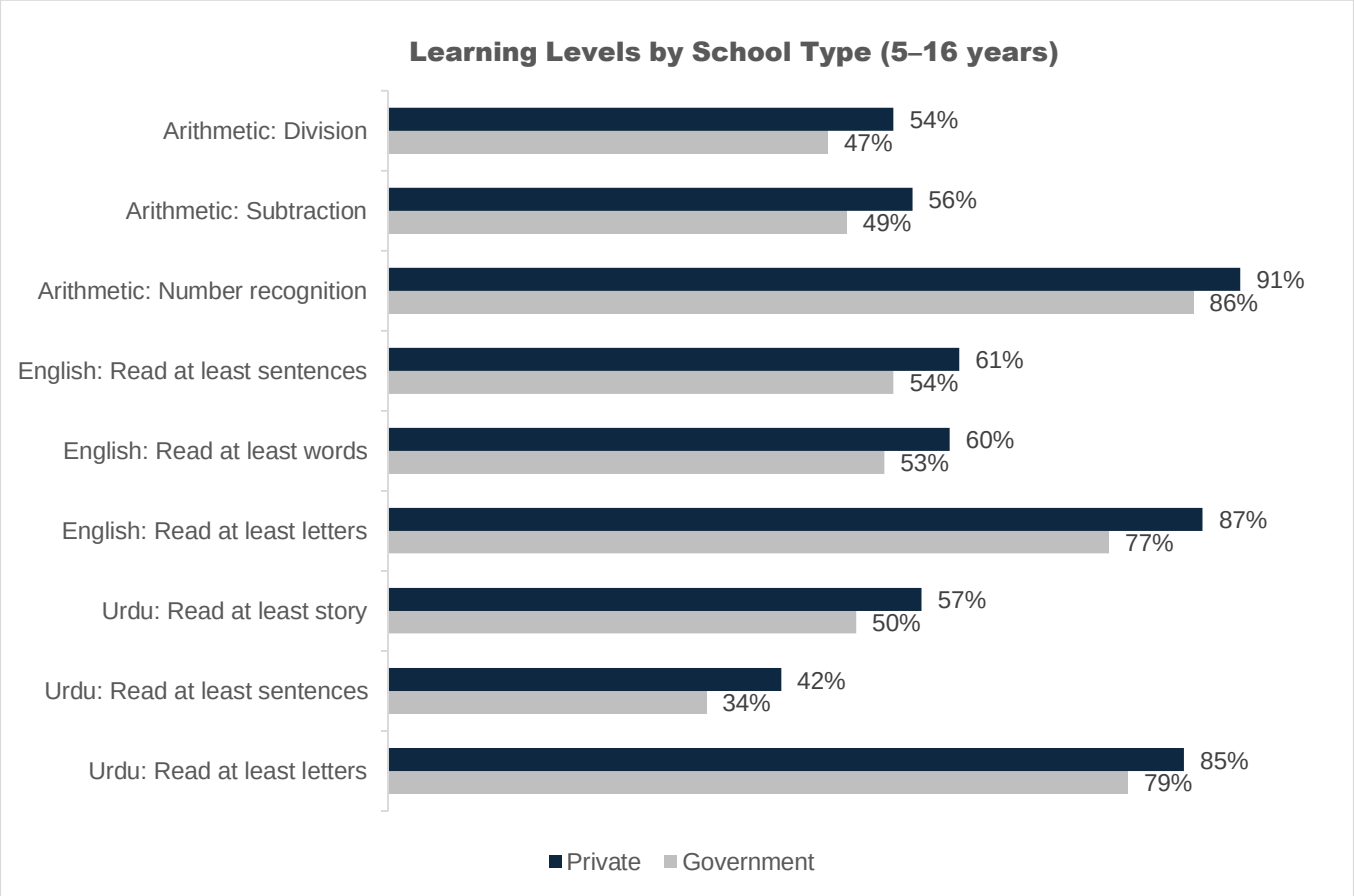


Source: *ASER Pakistan 2025, National (Rural-Urban), School Survey Data, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA).*

3. Private Schools Perform Better, But Neither Sector Is Delivering Universal Foundational Learning

The school-type breakdown shows a clear private-school advantage across all three domains. In Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 85% of private school children aged 5–16 can read at least letters, compared to 79% in government schools; 42% in private schools can read at least sentences, compared to 34% in government schools; and 57% can read at least a story, compared to 50% in government schools. In English, 87% of private school children can read at least small letters compared to 77% in government schools, while 60% can read at least words compared to 53% in government schools, and 61% can read at least sentences compared to 54% in government schools. In arithmetic, 91% of private school children can recognize numbers 1–99 compared to 86% in government schools, 56% can do at least subtraction compared to 49%, and 54% can do division compared to 47%.

The gap is real and consistent, but it should not be overstated beyond what the data supports. The report itself notes that differences between public and private schools exist, but are "not large enough to indicate that either system is delivering consistently strong learning outcomes at scale." That is the right conclusion here as well. Private schools appear to perform better, but even in the private sector the outcomes are far from universal. The fundamental challenge, therefore, is system-wide: one sector is doing somewhat better than the other, but neither has solved the foundational learning problem.

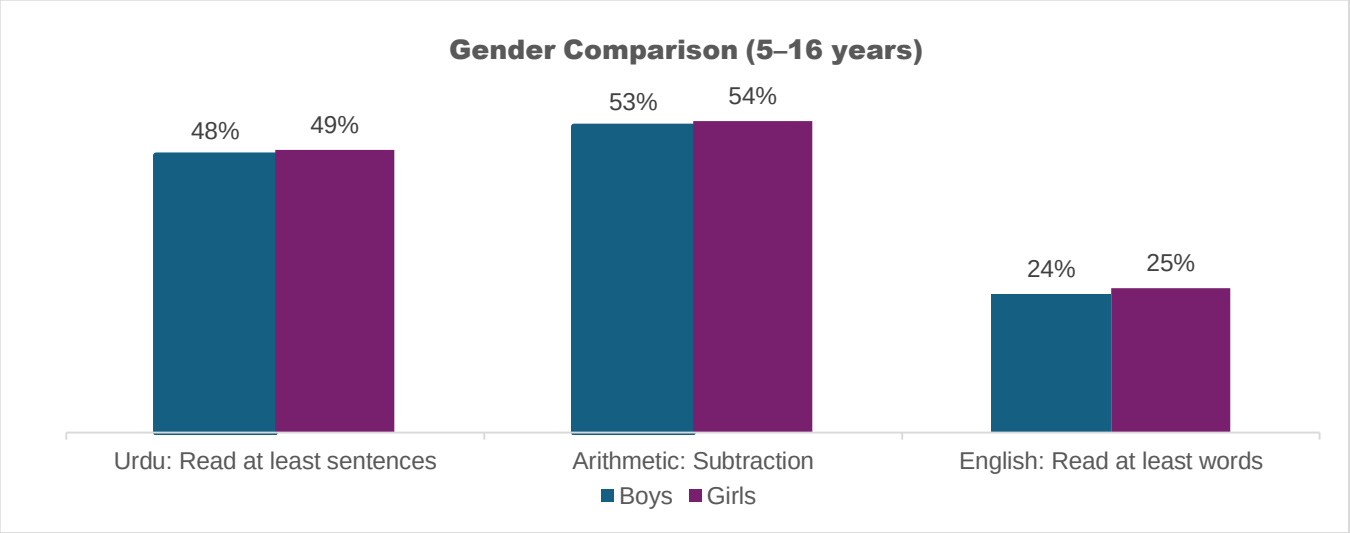


Source: *ASER Pakistan 2025, National (Rural-Urban), School Survey Data, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA).*

4. Gender and Rural-Urban Gaps Exist, But They Are Smaller Than the Overall Learning Deficit

One of the more nuanced findings in the 2025 tables is that gender and rural-urban differences among children aged 5–16 are present, but relatively modest compared to the overall scale of low learning. In Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, 49% of girls aged 5–16 can read at least sentences compared to 48% of boys, while rural and urban children are both shown at around 48–49%. In arithmetic, 54% of girls can do at least subtraction compared to 53% of boys, and rural and urban children are again very close at around 53–54%. In English, the gender and area split shown in the chart is effectively the same, at around 24–25% reading at least words.

This is important because it suggests that the central problem in 2025 is not primarily one of wide gender divergence or stark rural-urban fragmentation in these national aggregates. Rather, it is the broad weakness of foundational learning across the board. The report also notes some positive signals on gender parity, observing that girls are performing slightly better than boys across several indicators. That is encouraging, but it should not distract from the larger message: parity at a low level is not the same thing as strong learning performance.



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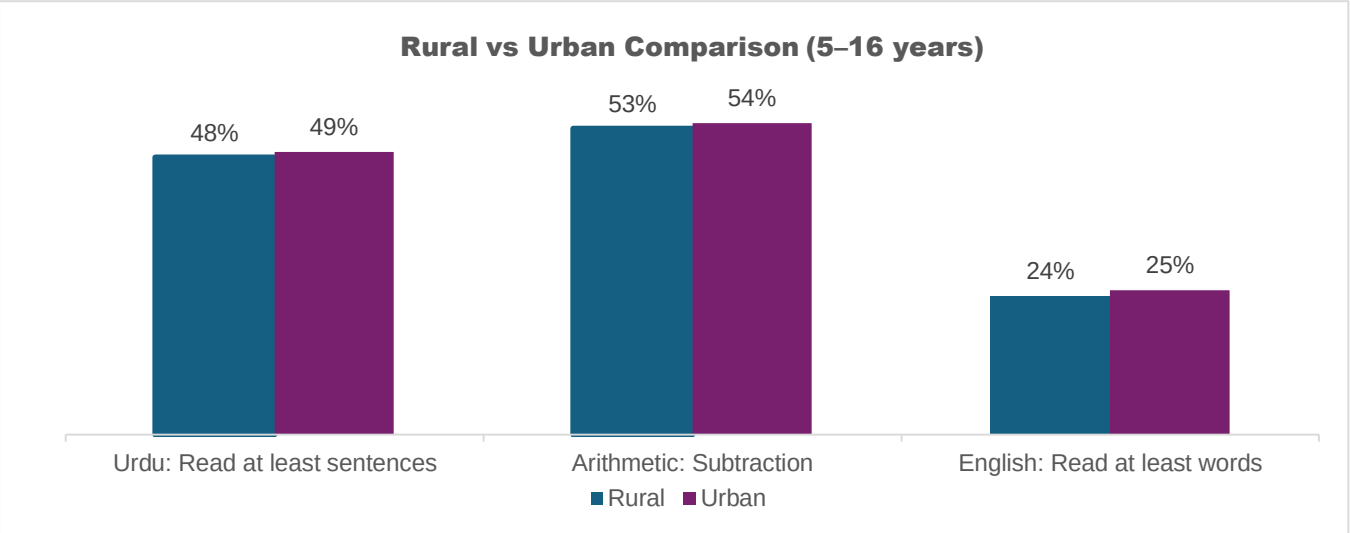
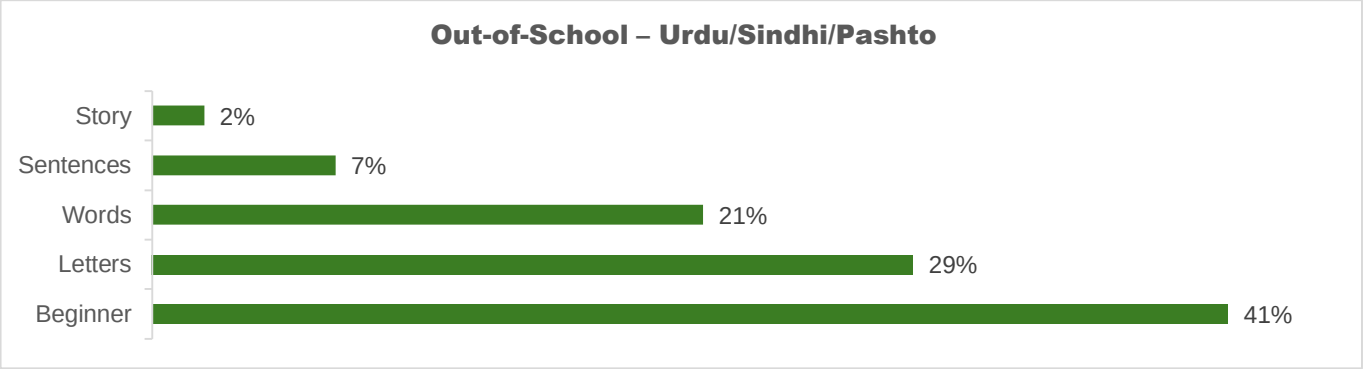


5. Out-of-School Children Show How Deeply Learning and Schooling Are Connected

The out-of-school learning charts provide some of the most striking evidence in the entire dataset. Among out-of-school children aged 5–16, learning levels remain extremely low across all domains. Only 7% can read sentences in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto and just 2% can read a story. In English, only 12% can read words and 1% can read sentences. In arithmetic, only 5% can perform subtraction and just 1% can do division. These indicators reflect extremely limited foundational competency among children outside the schooling system. These figures are dramatically lower than those observed among children who remain in school.

This matters for two reasons. First, it reinforces the central role of schooling in enabling at least some progression in foundational competencies. Second, it shows that the learning crisis is even more severe among the children who are already outside the system. In other words, Pakistan faces a dual challenge: children who are enrolled are often not learning enough, while children who are out of school are learning almost nothing on these measures. This makes dropout, exclusion, and weak early learning mutually reinforcing problems rather than separate policy issues.



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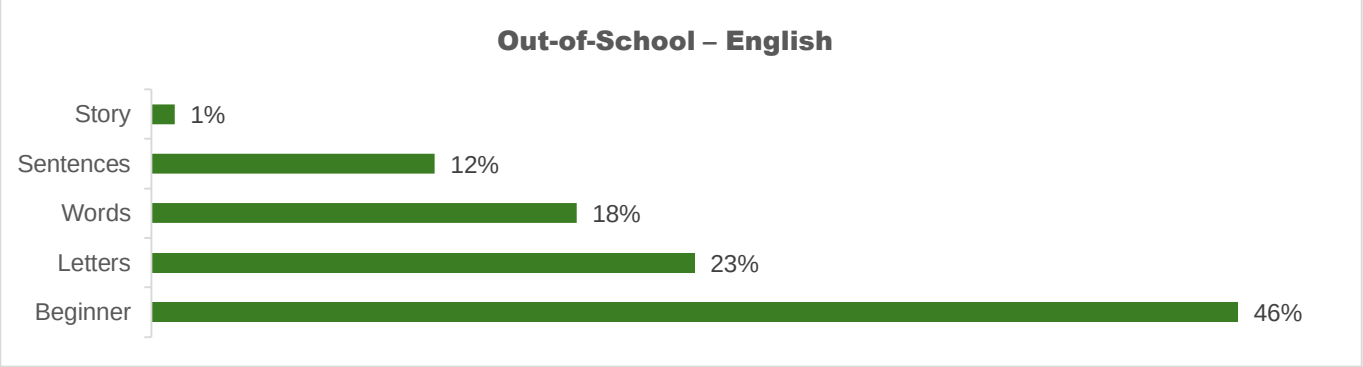
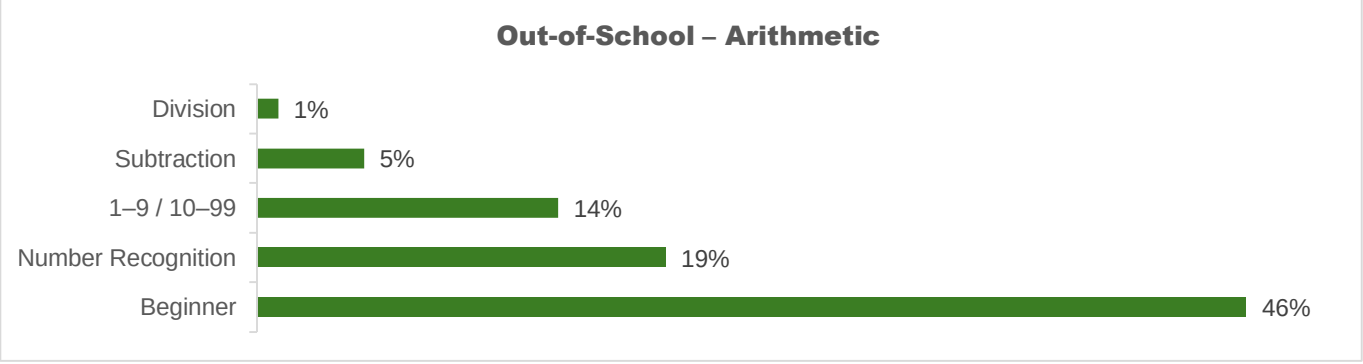
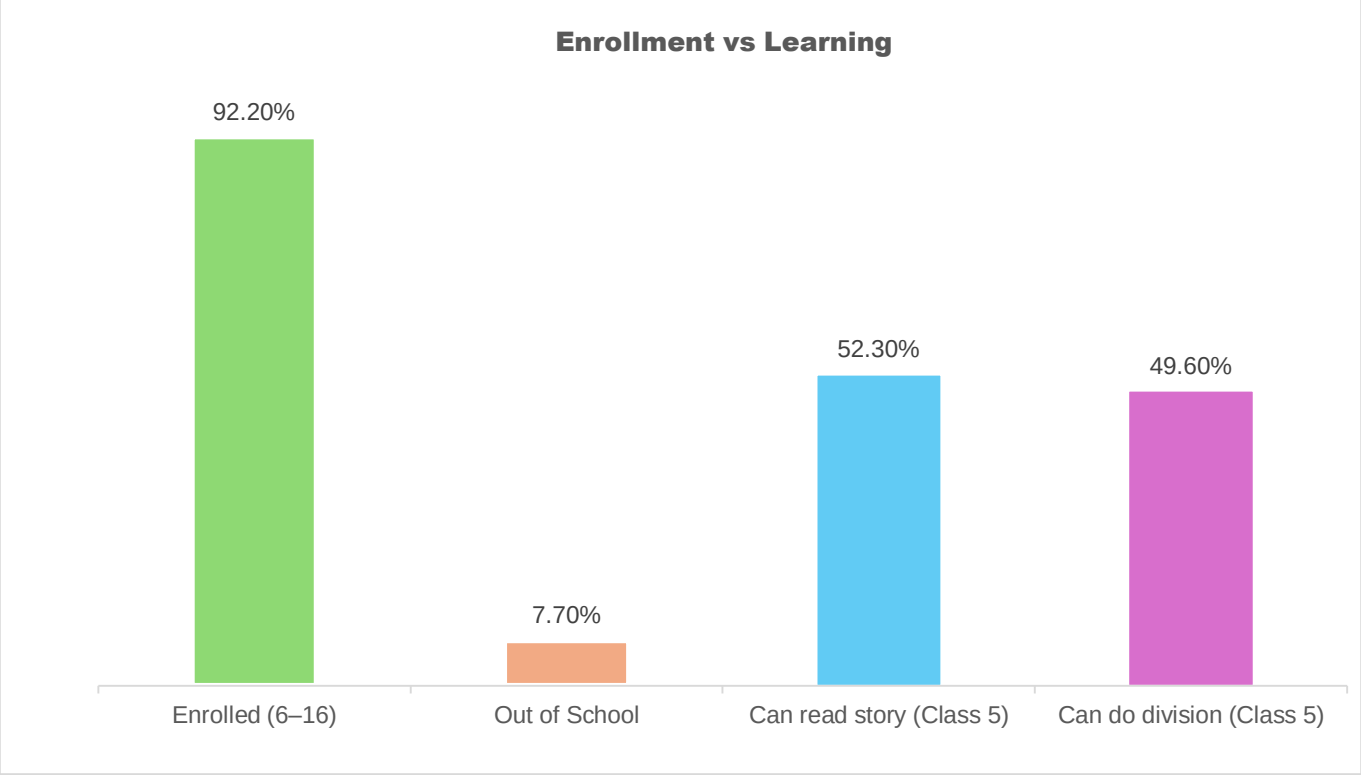




6. The Data Supports a Stronger Focus on Foundational Learning, Not Just School Participation

The report's broader narrative is clear that access has improved substantially, with 92.2% of children aged 6–16 in school and only 7.7% out of school. But it also repeatedly stresses that access without learning is not enough. The learning tables strongly support that interpretation. Even by Class 5, only around half of children reach basic competency in story reading, English sentence reading, or division. This means that enrollment expansion, while important and encouraging, has not yet translated into robust foundational learning for a large share of children.

That is why this dataset should not be read as evidence of failure in access, but as evidence of a transition in the national education challenge. Pakistan is no longer dealing only with a question of bringing children into school. It is increasingly confronting a more difficult question: how to ensure that children who are in school actually acquire reading and numeracy skills at the right time. The report's own framing around curriculum alignment, instructional support, and early-grade pedagogy makes this interpretation especially important.



Source: *ASER Pakistan 2025, National (Rural-Urban), School Survey Data, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA).*

7. Conclusion

The ASER 2025 learning data delivers a clear message: Pakistan's foundational learning crisis begins early, persists through primary school, and remains visible across reading, English, and arithmetic. The encouraging side of the story is that learning rises steadily with grade progression, girls perform at least as well as boys in several indicators, and enrollment remains high. But the harder truth is that by Class 5, only around half of children reach even basic foundational competency in core subjects. That means the problem is no longer only whether children are in school, but whether the school system is enabling them to learn in time.

The most accurate title for this story is therefore not about a single subject or a single gap. It is about the broader pattern across the data: Pakistan's learning crisis starts early, and even after five years of schooling, too many children remain below basic competency.

About the ASER Pakistan 2025 Report

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2025 is a nationally representative, citizen-led household survey that assesses children's schooling status and foundational learning outcomes across Pakistan. The survey covers all children aged 3–16 in sampled households, administering basic reading and arithmetic assessments to children aged 5–16.

ASER 2025 marks a significant methodological milestone. For the first time, the survey has transitioned to a census-based, nationally representative sampling framework, developed in technical collaboration with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) and drawing on Enumeration Blocks from the 2023 Population and Housing Census. Using a stratified, two-stage sampling design with defined probabilities and weights, the survey now produces estimates representative at the district, provincial, and national levels within a unified framework. In 2025, 95% of data were collected digitally via a dedicated mobile application, enabling real-time entry and automated consistency checks.

Due to this methodological shift, ASER 2025 results are not directly comparable with previous rounds. The 2025 dataset should be treated as a new baseline for rigorous, long-term trend analysis.

The report was published on March 26, 2026, by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) with support from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), and a network of civil society partner organizations across Pakistan.

For the full report, visit: www.aserpakistan.org

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.

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