

SUMMAAGNI SUSTAINABILITY STRUGGLE: FREE QUALITY EDUCATION TO UNDERPRIVILEGED NEIGHBORHOODS

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On Saturday, November 14, 2022, at 10:00 a.m., Mr. Amer Mahmood convened his team to revise the mission and vision of the Summaagni Education Trust (SET). In January 2020, Mr. Mahmood had joined SET as an executive director. SET was a non-profit organization operating schools in Punjab from the Punjab Rural Education Program (PREP). Mr. Mahmood faced the challenging decision of expanding SET schools into Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan.

He felt the weight of his responsibilities on his shoulders, not just for expansion but also for sustaining SET's operations. If he failed to implement effective operations in these rural areas, his credibility - and the survival of SET - would be at risk.

Summaagni Education Trust

Summaagni Education Trust (SET) was a not-for-profit, non-governmental private organization and social enterprise established in 2014 with a one-room office as a teacher training institution. Syed Waqas Jafri joined as President and Amir Cheema as General Secretary of SET in June 2016, and SET became an officially registered trust with a Board of Trustees. By that time, SET had introduced the *one-class-one-teacher model* of school education. It launched the Punjab Rural Education Program (PREP) project in 2016 with a vision *“to achieve 100% literacy in Pakistan.”*

Earlier, the Read Foundation, using the one-class-one-teacher model, was already working successfully in Pakistan's AJK (Azad & Jammu Kashmir) area. The connection of the SET founders with the Read Foundation and the passion to contribute to society's development underlay SET's launch.

At its launch in 2014, SET started as a teacher training institution and adopted *“100% literacy in Pakistan”* as its vision. At that at a time in Pakistan, the government allocated a meager budget for education, and Pakistan's primary school enrollment rate was a mere 46%, the lowest in South Asia. On the other hand, the drop-out ratio from government-owned primary schools was an alarming 54%. Pakistan ranked 144th among 175 countries in literacy, with literacy rates of 57% for adult males and 28% for adult females. Literacy in rural areas was a mere 34%. Thus, the vision to achieve 100% literacy was challenging, if not impossible, especially for an NGO.

The Secretary General of the SET, Mushtaq Mangat, admitted,

“While the organization's vision was to achieve 100% literacy for Pakistan, it did not work 9 [...]. It was perhaps too bold, ambitious, and unachievable a target that we set forth for ourselves without considering our capacity and capability.”

“Leadership for the 21st century” was also adopted as a vision statement for a short period. However, the vision and mission were revisited in the year 2020 in a Strategic Review Workshop attended by members of the Board, executive committee, and the regional and district managers, held at the Changa Manga Forest Rest House on January 12-13, 2020, when Syed Amer Mahmood joined as Executive Director. The workshop deliberations resulted in a new vision, mission, and set of values for the organization, which was later formally approved by the Board and adopted by SET (Exhibit 1).

“Better society through value-based education” was carved as the vision, and *“to explore and strengthen the potential of students through Modern education in terms of technology and training with the active participation of the community”* was adopted as the mission for the organization. The top team also enlisted and committed to *“transparency at all levels, commitment to the cause, mutual respect, and excellence”* as the set of core values that SET would uphold. The title of the PREP project was renamed the *“Pakistan Rural Education Program.”* It reflected the increasing scope of the project as now the PREP schools were also working in the Federal Capital Islamabad, Mansehra, Bagram, and Attock (see Exhibit 2).

Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad Gondal, founder Secretary and former President of SET, said:

“We are flexible and continuously learning and this commitment to ongoing learning and improving accordingly is our greatest strength.” Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad Gondal, who had been very effective in mobilizing funds from overseas for the project and was planning to tour the USA, Europe, and the Gulf to mobilize even more funds, added: *“We must remain committed to our ideology, to the cause of education and the sponsors and stakeholders of SET to sustain success.”*

Summaagni Education Trust faced a few challenges, especially in its flagship project, Punjab Rural Education Program (PREP), which was meant to educate underprivileged children primarily in rural Punjab. Since the inception of the PREP project and the opening of the first Summaagni School in 2016, total reliance was placed on funding from international donors as well as local Pakistanis, *i.e.*, from external means. This raised concerns about capacity, quality, technology,

and control while rendering the organization vulnerable to sustainability threats. The Board of SET, in its last meeting, had also asked the Executive Director and the Executive Committee to work out plans around three areas of focus on two provinces located in Pakistan, Baluchistan and KPK (Exhibit 3).

The Executive Director of PREP, Syed Amer Mahmood, and his team had been working hard on the assignment to put up concrete plans regarding expanding operations into Baluchistan and KPK while considering the sustainability of the PREP project. This plan had to be presented to the Board in the next meeting scheduled in June 2022. In its deliberations on the modalities of the assignment, the Executive Committee had several arguments, which reflected the issues that needed to be sorted out.

Mr. Ahmed Sher had raised an issue concerning expanding PREP activities to Baluchistan and KPK:

“A marketing anomaly that PREP, which earlier was an acronym for ‘Punjab Rural Education Program’ although now replaced with ‘Pakistan Rural Education Program,’ certainly with its roots and 99.5% existence and operations in Punjab, is to be introduced in Baluchistan and KPK? Has somebody thought about whether we should retain PREP or introduce a new project like BREP (Baluchistan Rural Education Program)/ KPK rural education program, and if so, what would be the working framework?”

Mr. Jamshed also touched upon the issue when he commented, *“Shouldn’t we consider the sensitivities of the people of Baluchistan/KPK while naming the project and suggesting the control mechanism?”* Agreement on the name change was accepted, making it crucial to consider the sentiments of the stakeholders in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) when developing governance.

While framing the issues, Amer thought that the Board had entrusted him with a huge responsibility and that he was being tested to his limit. To arrive at a resolution, he decided to

consult his team, which has been with him through all thick and thin. Amer immediately called a meeting of the core team at the head office of SET for Saturday, November 14, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

Pakistan Rural Education Program (PREP) – The Beginning

The Pakistan Rural Education Program (PREP) project of the Summaagni Education Trust started in 2016, with 22 schools in the rural areas of three districts in Punjab, namely Faisalabad, Sargodha, and Gujrat. All the 22 schools were launched with the support of like-minded friends with whom the founders had personal contacts. As such, only personal connections were explored, and no media campaign was launched to attract sponsors or to muster a response from society. In 2017, the number of schools increased to 52; it rose to 115 in 2018 and 176 in 2019 (see Exhibit 4). The number kept on increasing each year. The organization's records showed 240 schools in 2020 and 262 schools in 2021. The growth of the Summaagni schools continued, and the number of schools reached 271 in 2022 and 278 in 2023.

Since its launch in 2016, PREP has had to close down 35 schools for several reasons, and the year 2020 – 2021 alone witnessed the closure of 25 Summaagni schools. As schools closed, SET faced the problem of resource degradation.

According to SET's Executive Director, Syed Amer Mahmood, 2016 was the period of PREP launch characterized by a team of motivated volunteers committed to the cause and dedicated to the vision. The period from 2018 – 2021 was a period of real growth for the project, which brought promises and challenges. The phenomenal growth led to issues of *"quality, communication, control, capacity, sustainability, incorporate and expand technology usage."*

Mushtaq Mangat was made Secretary General, and Syed Amer Mahmood joined as Executive Director of SET in 2021 to take up the challenge of consolidation and management of the challenges that had result from rapid growth. Despite meager resources, the phenomenal growth of the PREP project owed to the sincerity of purpose and the untiring efforts of a selfless team committed to the cause.

The Executive Director, Syed Amer Mahmood said,

“Earlier, there was much overlapping as no proper division of work was defined, and everybody was performing a support role. Titles of the team did not truly reflect the specific responsibilities. While hiring, commitment to the cause was the primary consideration, instead of relevant experience or expertise.”

In 2023, 278 Summaagni schools were part of the PREP program, with a student body of 34,469 (see Exhibit 5). PREP provided value-based education in 25 districts of Punjab, as well as in Islamabad, Mansehra, Batgram, and Attock.

The Challenges Ahead

Expansion of The Project

Although 2018 – 2021 has been a period of consolidation, some of the Board members were concerned about the slower growth of schools from 2021 – 22. The Board considered further expansion of the Summaagni network to KPK and Baluchistan to be made a priority. Given the instability in the KPK and Baluchistan, some Board members were concerned that the establishment of the Summaagni schools network in the two provinces was an uphill task. Before committing resources to the two provinces, political and economic conditions needed to be taken into account.

Buildings and Financial Status

Rent and salaries were the two major operational expenses at the 278 schools of SET. Only 19 schools operated in buildings wholly owned by the Summaagni Education Trust, while five schools used permanently rent-free school buildings offered by sponsors. Moreover, 30 schools were currently in buildings for which the landlords did not charge rent. Nobody was sure how long this facility would operate in buildings without rent. SET, however, paid rent for buildings for 223 Summaagni schools. The report on the financial situation presented to the Board in its meeting held on January 25, 2020, revealed that out of the total 278 schools, 155 schools were generating some savings for the Trust, 10 schools were break-even, and 112 schools were showing a loss (see Exhibit 6).

Fee Structure

As a charity-based not-for-profit organization, Summaagni Education Trust offered quality education at a moderate fee structure. Fees started at PKR 100 per month in 2017, and till the year 2020, the Board only allowed an increase of PKR 10 in the fee (to make it PKR 110 per month). Later, in the year 2021, the price was increased again to PKR 220 per month, which included a Trust Fund, *i.e.*, PKR 10 per month per student. The fee structure was competitive compared to government schools, but the initiative by the Punjab government to offer free education, bags, and books, as well as a scholarship to the students and support provided by the Punjab Education Foundation, did not augur well for the Trust schools (see Exhibit 7).

Employee Retention

While the competitive environment and government initiatives posed challenges to SET, employee retention also surfaced as a problem. Realizing this challenge, management employees' salaries were increased by almost 16%. However, any increase in teachers' wages would significantly impact the budget, given the large number of teachers, 1,519.

Sources of Funding and Sponsors

During July-December 2020, SET could mobilize resources to Rs 4.9 billion (\$USD 1 = Rs 167.9), almost 11.45% of the total revenue generated. The remaining revenue came from the fees collected from students, sponsorships and donations (see Exhibit 8). This meant that almost 88% of the revenue received during July-December 2020 came from student fees. Each student at Summaagni paid PKR 30 per month. During July – December 2022, PKR 34.3 million (\$USD1 = PKR 275) was received as school fees, which amounted to 79.4% of the total income generated in the same period. Whereas PKR 3.9 million was collected as Trust Funds from 34,469 students (9.9% of the total revenue received in the same period). PREP Manager Mr. Shaheed ul Haq said, *“Our student body is our greatest strength, and this will help us to lessen our reliance on the donors and sponsors”* (Exhibit 9).

Summaagni Education Trust and its PREP project relied heavily on funding from external means and was supported by sponsors, both individuals and organizations. However, the regular support for the organization came from Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO), Plan International, Prem Rawat (USA), Foundation of Faithful (UK), Helping Hand (USA), Rotary Club Pakistan, Summaagni Education Forum (Norway), Education Foundation (UK), and the Sheikh Zaid-ul-Nihan Foundation. The government of Punjab was not providing any funding for the project.

The scope and plans of the Summaagni Education Trust called for an increase in the sources of funding, and at the last meeting of the Board held on December 25, 2020, the Chairman asked for a comprehensive plan to meet this end. Currently, 30% of funding came from institutional resources, while 70% of funding was an outcome of personal relations of the directors.

As such, Summaagni observed a hybrid funding model, *i.e.*, charity plus fees-for-service. The Resource Mobilization Department was instrumental in securing funding for SET. Almost 70% of funding came from overseas sources, whereas 30% was locally generated. In the latter half of 2022, SET spent over PKR 43 million to maintain its current level of services, while the revenue

generated during this period exceeded expenses by almost PKR 0.9 million. After nearly nine years in operation, resource mobilization had become a primary and urgent focus (see Exhibit 10).

Shutdowns of Schools

While the phenomenal growth of the Summaagni school network had been unparalleled, the closure of certain Summaagni schools had been a matter of concern for the Board. Since its launch in 2016, SET had to close 35 schools for several reasons. 2018-20 alone witnessed the closure of 25 Summaagni schools. In 2021-2022, out of the 25 schools that had opened, only 17 schools survived. The reasons attributed to the closure of these schools varied, including operational problems, financial constraints, lack of alternate buildings, community issues, migration of the student body to competing schools or schools in nearby districts, etc. The updating program of the Punjab Education Foundation for private schools, through which certain private schools offered free education and books, also resulted in the closure of some schools. Earlier, the efforts and initiatives of the Punjab government to increase primary enrollments in the province, such as no fees, scholarships, and making it mandatory for parents to enroll their children in schools, had also caused an impact on the Summaagni network.

Competition

When enquired about the Summaagni schools' competition, the Secretary General of SET, Mushtaq Mangat, claimed, *“there is no competition. We are working for a noble cause, and, whosoever individual or organization is in this field, we offer them our support and seek cooperation with them.”*

When the same question was put to Executive Director Syed Amer Mahmood, he replied:

“Since the launching of PREP in 2016, through to the present, times have changed and we are facing intense competition. When we launched PREP in rural Punjab, only government schools existed, and then, only one school per village, but now there are almost ten schools per village. Given this competition, awareness created by the vibrant media, gradual acquisition of urban character by the rural areas, and soaring rates of civil work and infrastructure development have increased our operations and fixed costs. The stakeholders are demanding better infrastructure and academic quality. The retention of teachers who now have better opportunities has also become our major concern.”

Technology

SET did not incorporate technology in the expansion of Summaagni schools. Funds for SET were utilized only to manage and sustain operations, SET had not considered technological needs such as projectors, online teaching, internet connections, and computer classes, which required proper electricity. Thus, including technology was a new value, and a new challenge, for SET, especially in underprivileged areas.

Exhibit 1. Vision, Mission, and Organizational Values of SET (2017)

Vision: *“Better society through value-based education”*

Mission: *“To explore and strengthen the potential of students through Modern education in terms of technology and training with the active participation of the community across Pakistan.”*

Values:

*Transparency at All Levels
Commitment to the Cause
Mutual Respect, and
Excellence*

Exhibit 2. Pakistan Map



Exhibit 2, cont.*Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics*

Year	County	Population
2017-2020	Baluchistan	12.335 million
2017-2020	KPK	35.502 million
2020	Overall Pakistan	227.2 million
Youth Development Index		
2020	0.517	Pakistan
2019	0.520	Pakistan
2018	0.510	Pakistan
2017	0.503	Pakistan
2016	0.492	Pakistan
Literacy Rate of Pakistan Province		
2020	Baluchistan	43.6%
2019	Baluchistan	44.2%
2018	Baluchistan	44.7%
2017	Baluchistan	45.3%
2016	Baluchistan	45.9%
Literacy Rate of Pakistan Province		
2020	KPK	53.0%
2019	KPK	54.0%
2018	KPK	54.9%
2017	KPK	55.9%
2016	KPK	57.0%

Exhibit 3. Summaagni Schools 2020 - Network Information

Narowal	8	Faisalabad (South)	15	Multan	3	Sargodha (South)	9
Gujranwala	8	Faisalabad (North)	15	Khanewal	11	Chakwal	7
Sheikhupur	1	Jhang	21	Muzaffargarh	5	Khushab	12
Lahore	3	Toba Tek Singh	9	Bahawalpur	6	Attock	3
Sialkot	10	Rahim Yar Khan	13	Gujrat (South)	8	Jhelum	2
Mansehra	12	Dera Ghazi Khan	12	Gujrat (North)	9	Islamabad	4
Bagram	1	Vehari	12	Mandi Baha ud Din	13	Rawalpindi	9
Mianwali	8	Bhakkar	8	Sargodha (North)	9	Bahawalnagar	1

Exhibit 4. Growth of PREP Schools 2016-2023

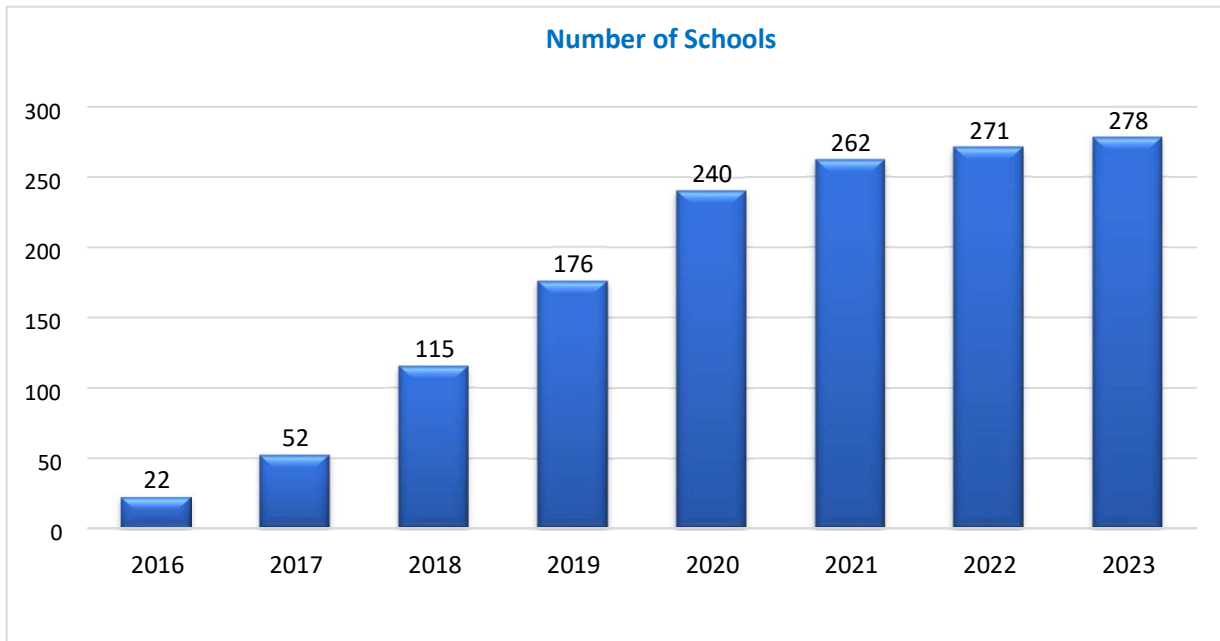


Exhibit 5. Growth in Student Enrollment at PREP Schools 2017-2023

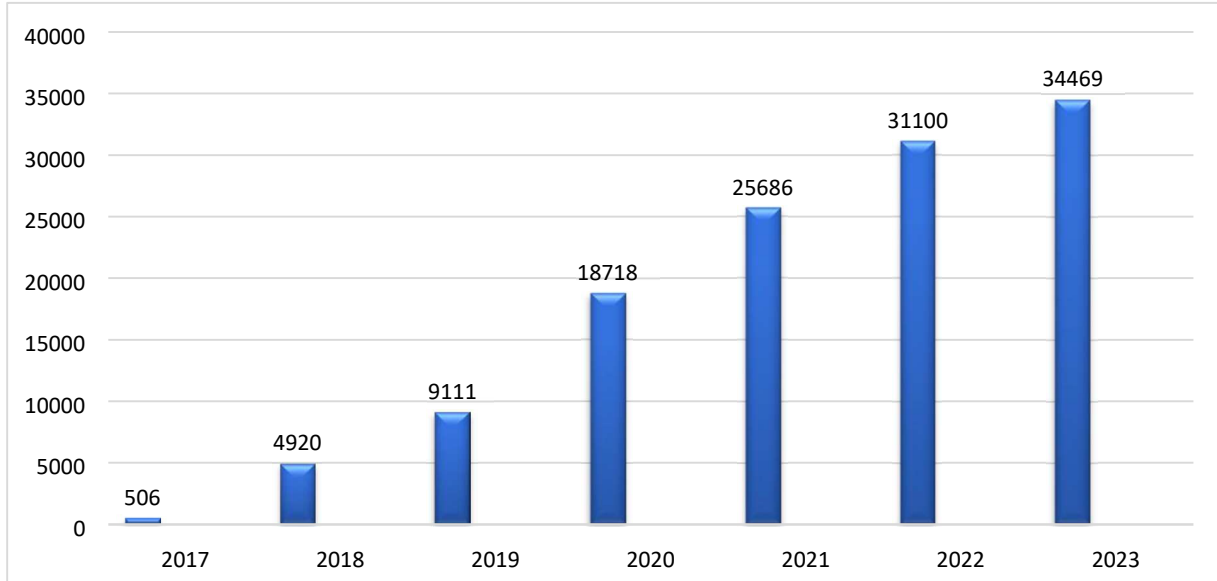


Exhibit 6. PREP Buildings and Financial Status 2020

	Owned	Permanent Free	Free	Rented
Building Status	19	5	30	223
Financial Status	Saving	Break Even	Loss	
	155	10	112	
Avg. Student/ Class		Avg. Student/ Teacher	Avg. Students/School	
19		23	24	

Exhibit 7. Deserving Students at PREP and Monthly Scholarships

	Previous	Admitted	Dropped	Present
Registered Orphans	1,281	1,056	120	2,217
Total Deserving	15,976	2,578	1,532	17,022
Total Scholarship /Month	Previous	Avg. / Stud	Present	Avg. /Stud
	1,123,634	35	1,388,366	40

Exhibit 8. Financial Highlights: Income - July 2020 to December 2021 (PKR '000)

	Amount	Percentage
Donations	4,949,172	11.4 %
Trust Fund	3,927,853	9.09 %
School average fee	34,325,483	79.4 %
Miscellaneous	19,224	0.05 %
Total	43,221,732	100 %

Exhibit 9. Adoption Status - PREP Schools 2020

Students Adopted by the Donors	1,345
Schools Adopted by the Donors	88
Life Time Members	99

Exhibit 10. Financial Highlights: Expense - July 2020 to December 2021 (PKR '000)

	Amount	Percentage
Schools	33,200,018	77.2 %
Head office	8,767,006	20.4 %
Girls Colleges	467,189	1.1 %
Capital Cost	551,526	1.3 %
Total	42,985,739	100 %





Ragni Lund is an MS Scholar in Finance at Sukkur IBA University, where she also earned her BBA with a specialization in Finance. Along with studying, Ragni is also employed in the Finance & Accounts Department at Sukkur IBA University. During her undergraduate studies, she developed a passion for writing and successfully published nearly 25 short articles in prominent newspapers such as The Nation, Tribune, Pakistan Observer, and Pakistan Today. In an MS program, she published an article titled "FinTech Landscape in Saudi Arabia and the Role of Islamic Finance" in a well-known magazine and a research paper titled "Macroeconomic Dynamics and Panel VAR-Analysis in Developing Countries" in a reputable journal. Her strong research background fuels her ongoing contributions to academic publications. This expertise allows her to excel in her professional and scholarly roles.



Summaya Phulpoto is an MSc candidate in Marketing at Sukkur IBA University and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration (BBA) with a specialization in Human Resource Management from Shah Abdul Latif University. With a robust background in research and data analysis, she has contributed to various significant projects, including analyzing the scope and psychological correlates of homelessness in Sindh, exploring food security and drought mitigation in Tharparkar, and examining financial inclusion in Sindh. As a freelancer since 2019, Summaya has provided research consultancy, data analysis, and creative writing services, consistently delivering insightful and impactful findings. Her expertise spans qualitative and quantitative analysis, report writing, and content creation. Summaya has also presented papers at national conferences and published articles in newspapers.



Zahid Ali, an MS finance scholar at the Institute of Business Management (IoBM) Karachi, has previously earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from Sukkur IBA University. Zahid Ali is actively engaged in research as well as in the banking industry. He has more than one and a half years of experience in Banking, specifically in Remittances, compliance, and Finance departments. Zahid Ali has achieved milestones in the banking industry by completing a Junior Associateship of the Institute of Bankers Pakistan (JAIBP) Stage 1 and 2 with distinction. Apart from this, He has published Blogs and articles in The Nation, Dawn, and other newspapers. He is currently engaged in scholarly writing in different international journals, by linking his professional industry experience with academia to solve real-world problems.



Asad Ali Qazi is an Assistant Professor in Supply Chain Management at Sukkur IBA University Pakistan, serving since 2017. He earned his PhD from the University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy, focusing on circular procurement.



Sarwar M. Azhar, a recognized scholar in the fields of management and marketing with more than three decades of experience and a distinguished career as a business manager, established the Pak American Institute of Management Sciences in 1983. By founding Pamir Knot College, which provided primary and secondary education, he significantly broadened his influence in the field of education. Dr. Azhar, who enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Nottingham University Business School in 1998, has authored over forty-five research papers and edited "Globalization," an influential volume that has received 600+ citations. His extensive and diverse impact extends over several decades, establishing a significant and lasting presence within the scholarly world.



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