JOURNAL OF PAKISTAN-CHINA STUDIES (JPCS)
Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2025(December)
P-ISSN: 2790-8887, E- ISSN: 2790-8151
DOI Prefix: 10.55733

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF CPEC ON REGIONAL COOPERATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BRT PESHAWAR-TORKHAM ROUTE'S POTENTIAL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceived impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on regional cooperation through the prospective development of the BRT Peshawar–Torkham corridor in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Employing a cross-sectional design, data were collected from a stratified sample of 778 respondents in Peshawar, comprising 747 individuals engaged in trade and commerce, 13 representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 18 BRT specialists, and 1 regional CPEC expert. A structured questionnaire, validated for reliability, captured demographic profiles alongside perceptions regarding CPEC and the BRT route. Descriptive statistical analyses, including frequency distributions and bar charts, were utilized for interpretation. Findings reveal that the majority of respondents were male, over 50 years of age, married, highly educated, engaged in the retail and service sectors, with over a decade of business experience, geographically located along the BRT–Torkham route, and frequent BRT users. Regarding the perceived impact of CPEC, 305 respondents (39%) agreed that it strengthens economic linkages among regional actors; 232 (30%) acknowledged its role in fostering peace and stability; 246 (31%) viewed it as a medium for cultural exchange; 295 (38%) identified it as a catalyst for socio-economic development; and 274 (35%) affirmed its potential as a regional game-changer. Similarly, perceptions regarding the BRT–Torkham route indicate that 201 respondents (26%) believed it would enhance cross-border trade; 338 (43%) considered it a viable safe corridor among the three countries; 346 (45%) reported its potential to reduce transportation time and logistical bottlenecks; 328 (42%) anticipated increased employment opportunities; and 197 (25%) agreed it aligns with CPEC's vision of regional connectivity. Given these insights, the study

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underscores the strategic imperative for relevant stakeholders and policy actors to expedite the development of the BRT–Torkham corridor to harness the trilateral benefits of enhanced economic cooperation, regional stability, and integrative infrastructure development.

KEY WORDS; China, Pakistan, Afghanistan CPEC, BRT, Peshawar, Tourkhim, Regional Connectivity, Trade, Tourism, Cross Culture, Employment.

INTRODUCTION

The China-Pakistan socio-economic and military relationship is deeper than the ocean and always remain higher than mountains since very long. Despite the variation in socio-culture and political setup of both the countries, the history of strong friendship goes back to the establishment of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and then soon after in early 1963 when the countries solved their interconnectedness way and boarders with mutual understanding, subsequently, a number of mutual agreements were signed, particularly of military agreements for ultimatum to India during Indo-Pak war in 1965(Kumar, 2006). Such like and other military, economic and political agreement were for the purpose to ease the pressure on western front which further strengthen the relationship between the countries. After passing each single day the relationship became stronger and more trustworthy then the previous in all aspect of socio-economic and global changing political environment. By year 1979-1980 the China international policy switched to economic based relationship and thus China -Pakistan friendship had become the most trusted ally throughout globe. The important turning point in relationship between China-Soviet Union and China-India pushed China to shift on some of the issues it supported Pakistan on. However, the core of the relationship stood firm even after the Cold War, collapse of the Soviet Union and the 9/11 attacks on the US.

Pak-China Relations in 21st Century

As it is evidence from history that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a long and cooperative relationship with People's Republic of China. A close attractiveness of perceptions and common interests remain the sign of two-sided relations mostly based on mutual interest and collaboration. This relationship is considered the Golden Age to Strengthen Economy, Military, Strategic as well as environmental relationship and Cooperation and Bilateral Comradeship (Lijun, 2006). Together they are engaged with most popular project of air defense like JF-17 Thunder, K-8 Karakorum drive for preparing air ship, space technology, AWACS systems, Al-Khalid tanks and the Babur

cruise missile as well (Lei, 2015). Further, in very recent war and dog fight between Pakistan and India the J10 of China not only proven a reliable resistance to Rafal of France but with help a number of Indian well-known Fighter were shoot deed through advance technology of J-10 C. this was a surprised test of not only the technology but the friendship and collaboration of Pak-China, which have become talk of the street. Besides, the military, the China is also one of the biggest stockholders in the Gwadar Deep Sea Port, development and upgradation of different electric energy resources, advancing of transportation and communication and tourism as well (Noor, 2025).

BUS RAPID TRANSIT

To solve massive traffic problem with advance transportation at affordable price services to local as well as outsider passengers in city Peshawar, in 2013, the then government of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa proposed a scheme for urban mobility in the city. The peaceability of the project was assigned and requested to City Development Initiate for Asia (CDIA), which was completed in 2017 with 20 years urban transit plane to the government. Soon after, the construction on project started under the supervision of Peshawar Development Authority (PDA), executed and formally opened on 13 august 2020. Further, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), is the urban mobility transportation popularly known as Zu-Peshawar, in full operation in the capital city of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan (The Daily the Dawn, 2018). This system operates in two major sections, the one is east-west corridor which includes 30 stations starting from Chamkani and ends with Karkhano bus station with exclusive routs and advance buses running from dan to dusk and late night. Similarly, the second part of this Zu system comprises on network of sectionals routs where specialized services are provided with enter and exit system to cover the busy streets of the city. while the second part consists of a network of feeder routes in which buses can enter and exit the system to travel on city streets. Additionally, central network of Zu consists on 30 stations and is mostly elevated (around 49%) while 38% is at grade, and 17% in underpasses. The line has 3.4 kilometers of underpasses, 10.5 kilometers at grade, and 13.7 kilometers elevated. The entire busway is fenced to prevent unauthorized pedestrian crossings and to prevent vehicular traffic from entering. Stairs, elevators and bridges were built to allow pedestrians to cross the BRT corridor (Aftab, 2017).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is considered one of the important part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), signifies a main collaboration amid the two countries. More broadly, CPEC objective is to connect Asia, Africa, and Europe. The initial cost of CPEC was $46 billion, but it later rose to $62 billion and will connect 67 countries. In April 2015, the Chinese President visited Pakistan and signed 51 MOUs and 11 projects, among which the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the most important (Ahmar, 2015). CPEC is a combination of different projects including, infrastructure development, renewable resources of energy, Gwadar port, trade and commerce industries, transportation and interconnectivity and tourism development specifically between China and Pakistan with an initially estimated cost of $46 billion. This project continues the policies of Pakistan and China over the past decade to expand and deepen their traditional friendship and economic and trade relations. It is intended to realize China's initiatives for promoting physical and commercial connectivity with neighboring countries to achieve the goal of greater regional integration in Asia. Trade routes and cultural development are other major potentials and objectives of CPEC (Khalid, 2011). Alongside economic development, this project has the capacity to enhance tourism, as tourism is an emerging industry and aligns with China's goal to advance tourism with neighboring Asian countries. China's tourist industry mostly relies on wildlife, safaris, cultural and pilgrimage tours, adventures, and sports like paragliding, and tourism for such purposes has great potential among the general public in Pakistan. Ongoing ang Proposed projects under CPAC (Shah, 2015)

Ongoing Project Of CPEC

The CPEC is a multidimensional project working under the agreement signed between Pakistan and China. The major focus of the project is the socio-economic uplifting of the countries' economies through stable and affordable development. The major focuses of the project in Pakistan are the construction of Gwadar Port, promotion of the Karachi-Peshawar highway, Khunjerab Railway, motorway development across the country, Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, urban transit across the country, joint manufacturing sector development, development of hydropower generation, wind power, solar, and other renewable sources of development.

Significance of The Study

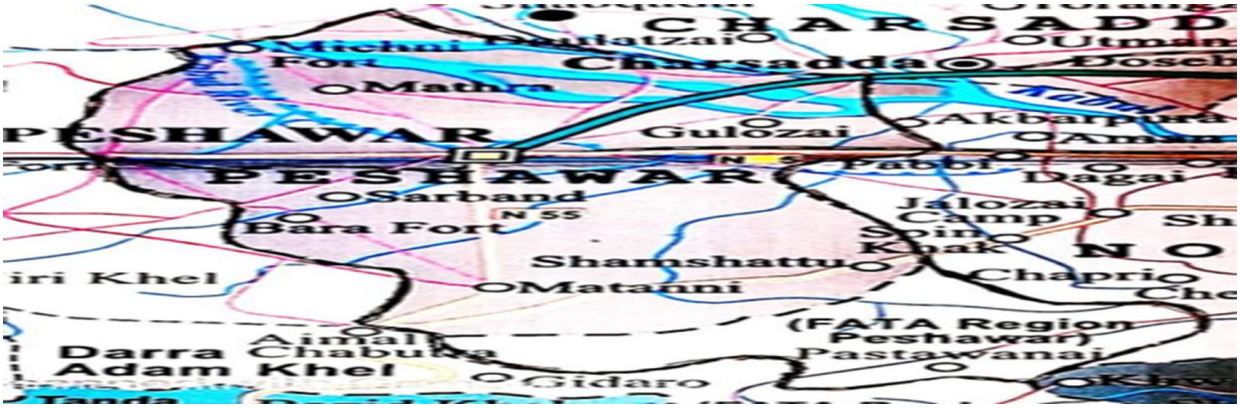
This study is important in multiple ways. It has the capacity to explore and strengthening regional connectivity, socio-economic development, security and stability, cultural exchange and people-to-people relations and sustainable development of tourism in the region. The Bus Rapid Transit

(BRT) route Peshawar to Afghanistan through Torkham-Pass can one of the proper ways of transportation and communication in terms of people, goods, and services from local markets to across the border, aligning with the economic dimension of CPEC. Further, this BRT route could be the most affordable way of transportation in the region for uplifting the socio-economic condition of the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan, whereas China can purpose economic benefits through infrastructure development and manufacturing industries in the region. Consequently, eliminating poverty and improving the socio-economic well-being of the local public particularly, of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, the country Afghanistan can benefit in accessing the country productivities to the international market through CPEC, which is strongly aligned with China's interest in economic stability in the region. Alongside, this study is helpful in understanding the cultures of the three countries and promoting people-to-people connectivity, resulting in building trust in trade and cooperation in the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, a safe way of traveling among people of the three countries with advanced security measures will be assured, consequently resolving the security problems for China's professionals under stable urban transit belt and framework necessary for mutual trust and collaboration among these three countries.

Methodology

The current study was carried out in Peshawar city of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan for intensifying China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral cooperation through CPEC in sociological way and the future potential of BRT Peshawar-Torkham routes in regional connectivity. Peshawar is the capital city of North Pakistan (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) located the near the border of country Afghanistan. This city has been remained the rout ways for carwans (Merchants) since Mughal empire where it was used is path for trade between India and Central Asia. The recent administrative structure of Peshawar consisted upon seven tehsils namely; Peshawar city, Shah Alam, Mathra, Chamkani, Badabera and Peshtakhara tehsils respectively. Further the total population of District Peshawar's is 4758762 persons with sex ratio for male is 104 Male to 100 female and literacy ratio is 64 % for Female and 42 % for female population of the district (Pakistan Bureau of Statistic, 2017). The Khyber Pass route between Peshawar and Afghanistan strengthen its economic privileges for local and international trades since time long. Moreover, the cross-section-based study design was followed for the current study, where data was collected from general public, members of chamber of commerce and industries and all stakeholder of BRT and

CEPAC. This study design is the most common design used for quantitative studies in social sciences. further, this is the simplest design usually adopted for caring out study on prevalence of any social issue and attitude of people regarding the developmental projects in a specific region, by taking a cross-section of population in single visit (Kumar, 2011).



https://pakistanalmanac.com/kp-peshawar/

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sample size refers to the number of participants or observations included in a study (It is a critical component of research design, as it affects the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Khan et al., 2023). Keeping in view the needs and nature of the study as well as population, the purposive sample techniques was followed for collection of primary information in the field. Purposive sampling techniques is most suitable when gathering information from specific portion of study population. Moreover, this is applicable when the researcher required information from stakeholder involved in the project or organization and have more relevant knowledge about the problem. As the stakeholders are general people of the regio, member of chamber and commerce and industries, BRT as well as CEPAC experts, thus purposive sample was most accurate and exercised (Palinkas et al., 2015). Further, the selected sample size was proportionally allocated to each Strata's as per Bowley (1926) formula given below.

According to the study report of Ismail (2024), the general shopkeeper and small-scale registered business in Peshawar city are 143211, the registered members of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2391, and BRT official website the total number of employees of BRT is 3500 approximately, including 10 % women and 90 %-man employee and the number of CEPC Expertise are 21 people in the region. Thus, total number of study population is 149123 for which 778 sample size has been calculated. Further, according to the proportional allocation formula, 747

number of samples has been studied from general portion of population, 13 from Chamber of commerce and industry, 18 from BRT employee and 01 number of sample respondent from CEPC Expert further constitute the sample population of the study.

$n_h = (N_h / N) * n$ ……(Equation----------A)

S/NO	Strata	Total Population	Sample Population	Total Sample Size
1	General Public	143211	747	778 with 95 confidence level and 3.5% Margin of Error
2	Chamber of Commerce and Industry	2391	13	
3	BRT-Persons	3500	18	
4	CEPC Officer	21	1	
Total	4	149123	778	

Data Collection, Reliability, Indexation and Data Analysis

A structured questionnaire encompassing demographic information, dependent and independent variable of the study with five Likert scale procedure was used for taking primary information regarding the study dynamics i.e., Trilateral Cooperation through CPEC, independent variable while BRT Peshawar-Torkham dependent variable**.** To reduce the inconsistency the reliability test was applied upon 100 sampled respondents' views, collected in polit study**.** The reliability of the scale for the current study was checked and measured through Cronbach's (1951) Alpha test where an Alpha value of 0.6 and above was considered sufficient for consistency and thus appropriate for indexation (Khan et al., 2024; Khan, 2023). Ghazali, (2008) is of the view that a value of 0.6 and above was considered minimum and enough for internal consistency and appropriate for indexation, whereas 0.8 is very significant for reliability. Thus, a reliability value for Trilateral Cooperation through CPEC was measured as 0.644, and similarly for BRT Peshawar-Torkham dependent variable as followed as 0.73 for further indexation. Moreover, the data was analyzed in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics. At descriptive analysis the demographic variable were expressed in frequency and percentage alongside bar charts, where as the CPEC and BRT variable were presented in frequency and their distribution in tabulated form with suitable

discussion. All the primary information has been supported with secondary information of the study.

Results and Discussion

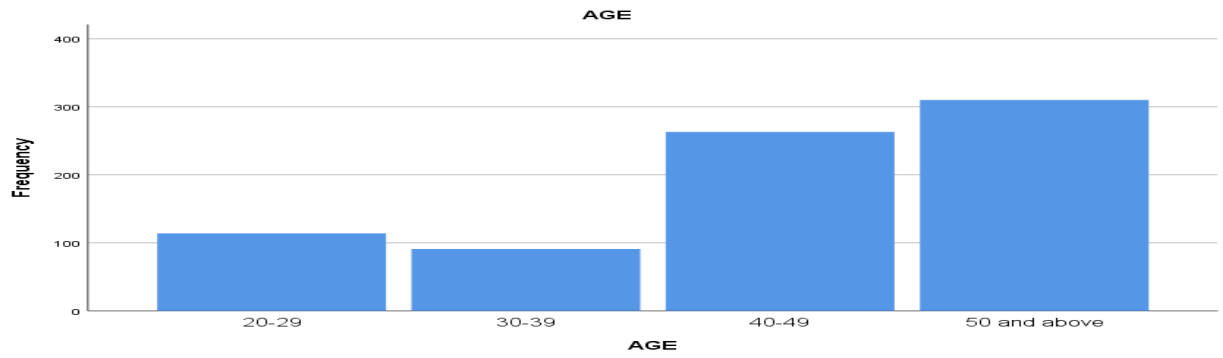
Demographic Information of the Respondent

The demographic information of sample respondents is always important in any type of research, particularly in knowing perception of the people regarding any social problem or ongoing mega project in the specified region. Further, such information enables the researcher as well as the reader and policy makers to fully understand the problem and its nature through professional lens. Demographic information like Age, Gender, Education, and professional relevance further strengthen the significance of the study, validity of the research, and consequently, comprehensive approach for further exploration and solution of the problem accordingly (Khan et al., 2024). Keeping in view all these important, the demographic information of respondents have been analyzed with frequency and percentage alongside Bar Graph representation for improved and advanced clarification. The detail are given under.

Age of the Respondents

According to field information, the majority of sample respondents were above 50 years (310 – 40%), followed by the age category 40–49 (263), then 20–29 (114), and lastly the age group 30–39, which included 91 participants. The detail in table and bar chart is given below.

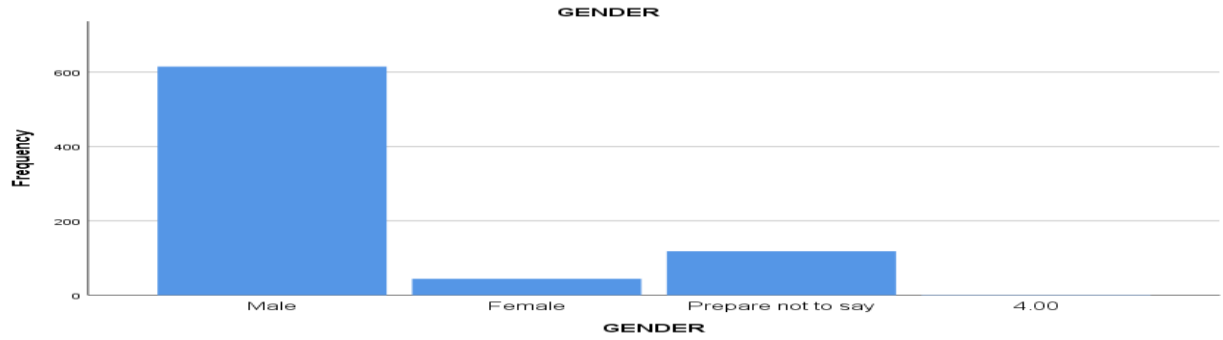
Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage %**
20-29	114	15
30-39	91	12
40-49	263	34
50 and above	310	40
Total	**778**	**100**



Gender

The majority of the sample population were male (615 – 79%), followed by females as 44 in number, while 118 sample respondents did not disclose their gender.

Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage%**
Male	615	79.0
Female	44	5
Prepare not to say	118	16
Total	**778**	**100**

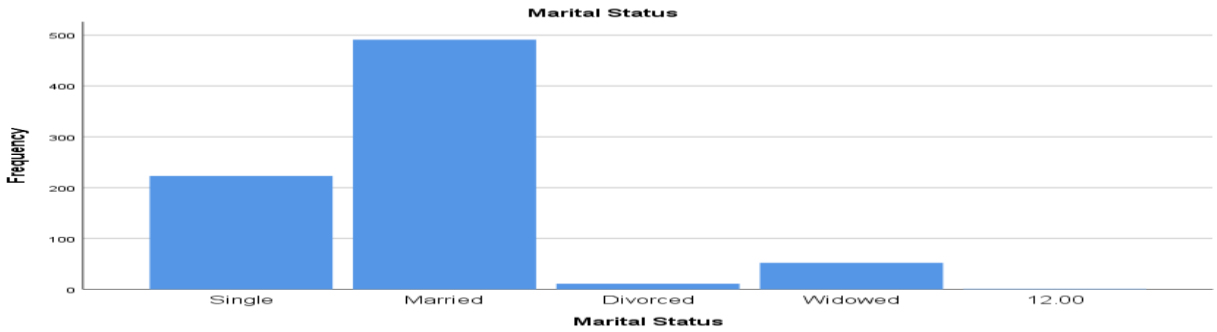


Marital Status

The field information further indicates that 223 number of respondents were single, 491 were married, 11 were divorced, while 52 were widowed. This indicates that the majority of sample participants were married.

Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

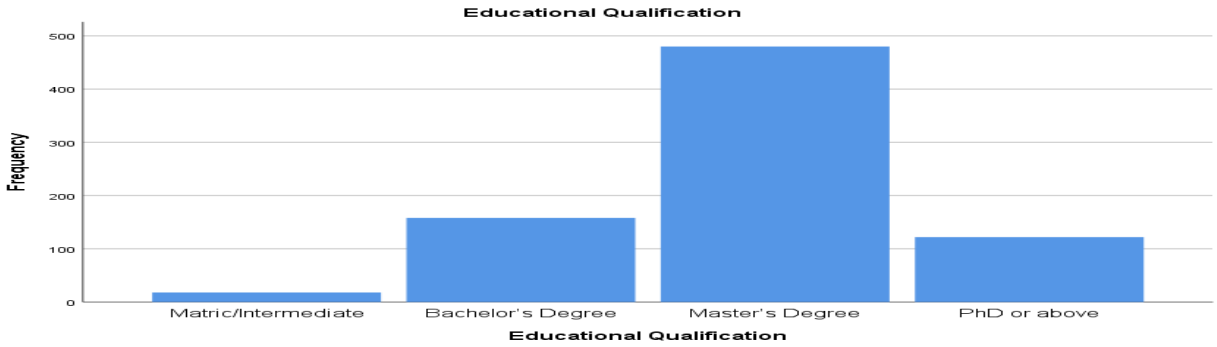
Single	223	29
Married	491	63
Divorced	11	2
Widowed	52	6
Total	**778**	**100**



Educational Qualification

Education qualification is another important demographic variable, where 18 number of participants were educated up to Matric/Intermediate, 158 were Bachelor's degree holders, while majority, i.e. 480 participants, were Master degree holders, as well as 122 numbers of sample respondents were PhD qualified. Such information strongly indicates that the greater portion of the population were highly educated, suitable for knowing their perception regarding the potential of CPEC and BRT route in the region.

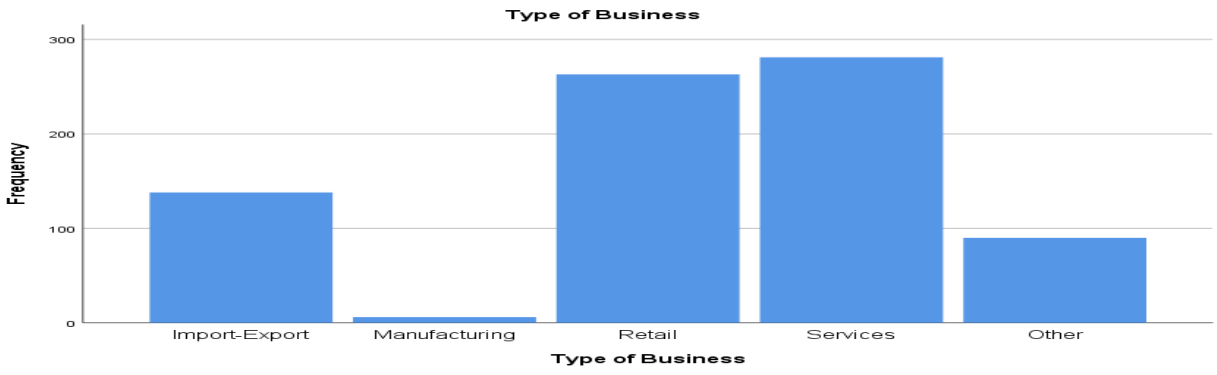
Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Matric/Intermediate	18	2
Bachelor's Degree	158	20
Master's Degree	480	62
PhD or above	122	16
Total	**778**	**100**



Type of Business

As this a very closely related study to business and trade development, therefore, the business of the sample respondents is too much important to be measured. In this regard, 138 sample respondents were related to import-export business, 6 number from manufacturing sector, 263 were related to retail, while 281 number of respondents were related to services sector in the region.

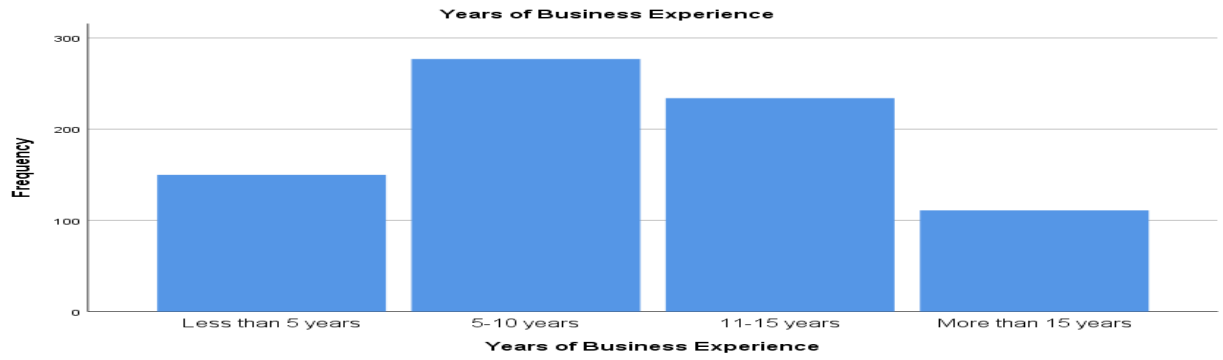
Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Import-Export	138	18
Manufacturing	6	1.0
Retail	263	33
Services	281	36
Other	90	11
Total	**778**	**100**



Year of Business Experience

The intensity of business expertise is too much crucial in study like this. The business experience were measure where 150 number of sample population's business experience were noted as less than 5 years, 277 from 5–10 years, 234 number were noted as 11–15 years, while 111 number of respondents' business experience were found as more than 15 years.

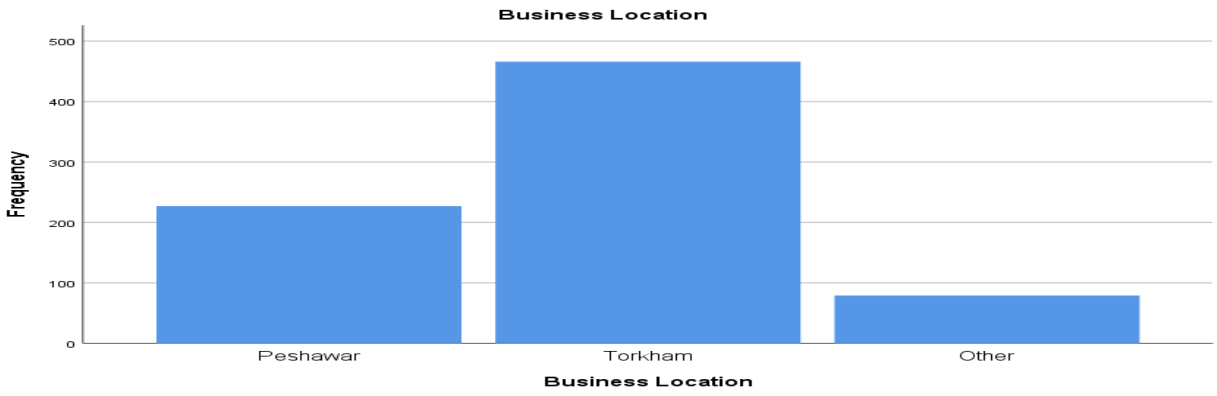
Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Less than 5 years	150	19.4
5-10 years	277	35.9
11-15 years	234	30.3
More than 15 years	111	14.4
Total	**778**	**100**



Business Location

The 227 number of sample respondents' business location was Peshawar, 466 were noted from Torkham, while the remaining 79 numbers were from other parts of the region.

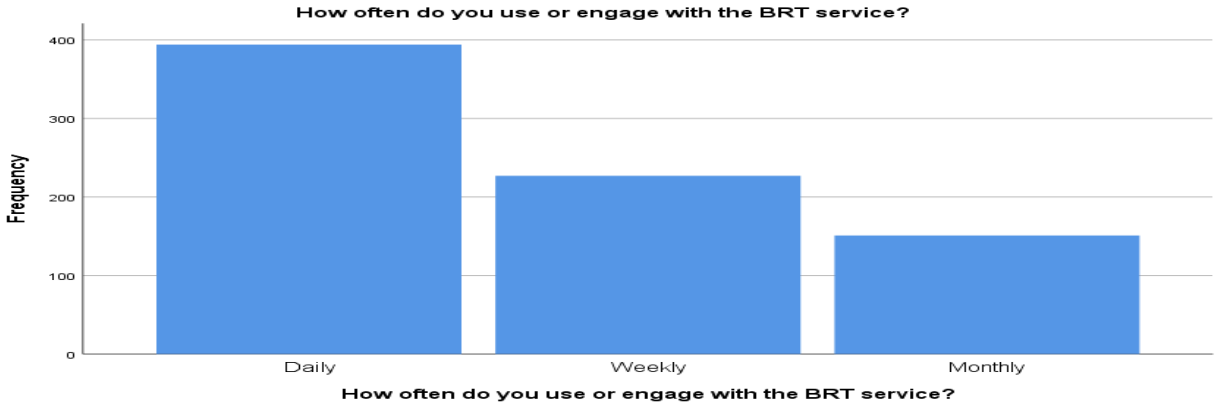
Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Peshawar	227	29.4
Torkham	466	60.4
Other	79	10.2
Total	**778**	**100**



How often do you use or engage with the BRT service?

Keeping in view the major objectives of the study, the use engagement with BRT is also important. In this regards, majority of sample respondents (394 - 51%) showed that they are using BRT daily, 227 used BRT weekly, while a very low portion, i.e. 151, that is 19%, using BRT on monthly basis.

Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Daily	394	51.0
Weekly	227	29.4
Monthly	151	19.6
Total	**778**	**100**



Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Perceived Impact of CPEC on Regional Cooperation

The field information regarding the perceived impact of CPEC on regional cooperation was analyzed with frequency and distribution of the statement in five-level Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In this regard, 44 number of sample respondents were found strongly disagree, 191 were disagree, 147 remained neutral, 305 were agree, and 91 number, which is 11 percent of the total sample population, were strongly agree to the statement that "CPEC has strengthened economic ties among China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan." Similarly, the statement "I think CPEC plays a vital role in fostering regional peace and stability" was formulated where majority of the sample respondents, i.e., 232, that is 30 percent, were found agree to the statement, while 129 (17) were strongly agree to the statement. Such like field information strongly confirms that sample respondents were aware and their perception was in favor of potential of CPEC that could be the source of regional development, particularly through communication, tourism, and connectivity of the allied regions.

While proceeding in the field data, the next statement was CPEC and smooth trade operation in the region. Accordingly, 78 numbers of sample respondents were found strongly disagree, 154 were disagree, 197 remained neutral, while once again majority of respondents, 244 (31), were in favor of the statement, while the remaining 18% of total population were strongly agree that CPEC can be the greatest source of smooth trade operation in the region. The CPEC and political understanding among China-Pakistan and Afghanistan, where majority of respondents, 186, were agreed, while 92 confirmed strongly agree to the statement. CPEC and business was a next statement put forwarded to understand the perception of the people, where 67 number of respondents were strongly disagree, 243 disagree, 190 remained neutral, and 151 expressed their perception in favor of the statement, while 127 were strongly supporter of the statement. Further, the results in table show that majority of sample respondents (246) show their agreement, while 86 were strongly in favor that "CPEC encourages educational and cultural exchange among China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan" in the region. Similarly, the respondents' perception was viewed regarding CPEC provides platform for conflict resolution among the China-Pakistan and Afghanistan, where 279 (36) of sample respondents remained agree to the independent statement, while once again 68 sample respondents noted their perception as strongly agree that clearly indicates the potential and role of CPEC in peace building in the region.

The mutual trust among participant countries was another statement measured through five-level, where majority of sample respondents agreed, 259 (33), while 60 (8) were strongly agree that CPEC can be the best source of building mutual trust in the region. The perceived impact of CPEC was also measured, where majority of sample respondents, 326 (42), confirmed this statement; also 96 (12) numbers of sample participants strongly expressed in favor. Moreover, in univariate analysis, CPEC as a source of inclusive growth in the region was also identified, which was confirmed by 295 (38) majority of the sample respondents. "Local communities benefit socially and economically from trilateral CPEC collaborations" was asked in field data for knowing the perception of sample respondents in the universe, where majority of people, 389 (50), remained agreed, and similarly, 73 (9) were strongly in favor of CPEC's role in inclusive development.

Furthermore, "The involvement of Afghanistan in CPEC strengthens Pakistan's regional positioning" was asked to know the perception of the respondents, where once again 10 number of sample respondents were found strongly disagree, 186 were disagree, 236 were agree, while majority, 277 (37), remained neutral to the statement. Integrating the remote area of the country and province into trade through CPEC was another asked question for knowing the perceived impact of CPEC on regional cooperation in the study population. In regard to this statement, 214 (28) were found agree, while majority of the respondents, 304 (39), were found strongly agree to the statement. Further, the leading role of China in multilateral partnerships in South Asia was also supported by majority, 239 (31), of the respondents. Similarly, 274 (35) numbers of participant views supported that "CPEC's cooperation model can serve as a blueprint for other regional initiatives"; also 263 (34) of respondents out of total supported the statement "The CPEC initiative respects local identities and cultures during development processes," and 255, which is 32 percent sample respondent, confirmed and expressed their views regarding "CPEC promotes people-to-people diplomacy across the region."

The analysis of field data reveals that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is widely perceived as a catalyst for enhancing regional cooperation by strengthening economic ties, promoting peace, and boosting trade. This aligns with existing research, which highlights CPEC's potential to transform the region economically and socially (Surahio et al., 2022). Specifically, the BRT Peshawar-Torkham route is seen as a key driver for socio-economic development, cross-cultural exchange, and tourism growth, supported by improved infrastructure (Khetran & Khalid,

2019). Furthermore, studies confirm that CPEC has deepened economic linkages between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, serving as a game-changer especially for Pakistan and China (Jin et al., 2024). Overall, there is a positive acknowledgment of CPEC's role in advancing regional development through better connectivity, communication, and integration (Allauddin et al., 2020).

Table; Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Perceived Impact of CPEC on Regional Cooperation

S/No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	CPEC has strengthened economic ties among China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.	44(6)	191 (25)	147 (19)	305 (39)	91 (11)
2	I think CPEC plays a vital role in fostering regional peace and stability.	65(8)	155(20)	197 (25)	232(30)	129(17)
3	CPEC facilitates smoother trade operations across regional borders	78(10)	154 (20)	156 (20)	244 (31)	146(18)
4	The trilateral cooperation through CPEC promotes political understanding among the three nations.	87(11)	181(23)	184(84)	186(25)	92 (12)
5	CPEC projects contribute to long-term infrastructure development in the region.	146(19)	171(22)	170(21)	160(7)	131(16)
6	Through CPEC, local businesses in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are gaining more regional access.	67 (9)	243 (31)	190(24)	151(19)	127(16)
7	CPEC encourages educational and cultural exchange among China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.	68(9)	219(28)	154(20)	246(31)	86(11)
8	CPEC provides a platform for addressing regional conflicts diplomatically.	14 (2)	263(34)	154(20)	279(36)	68(8)
9	Trilateral cooperation through CPEC enhances mutual trust among participating countries.	14(2)	181(23)	264(34)	259(33)	60(8)

10	CPEC has increased opportunities for cross-border employment in the region.	15(2)	180(23)	161(8)	326(42)	96(12)
11	Regional cooperation via CPEC supports inclusive growth and development.	9(1)	161(20)	243(31)	295(38)	70(9)
12	Local communities benefit socially and economically from trilateral CPEC collaborations.	59(8)	121(16)	136(18)	389(50)	73(9)
13	The involvement of Afghanistan in CPEC strengthens Pakistan's regional positioning.	10(1)	186(24)	277(37)	236(30)	69(9)
14	CPEC is effective in integrating remote areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into regional trade.	5(0.5)	140(18)	70(9)	214(28)	304(39)
15	China's participation in CPEC enhances multilateral partnerships in South Asia.	56(7)	196(25)	229(29)	239(31)	58(8)
16	CPEC's cooperation model can serve as a blueprint for other regional initiatives	9(1)	166(21)	264(34)	274(35)	65(8)
17	The CPEC initiative respects local identities and cultures during development processes.	13(2)	189(24)	261(33)	263(34)	52(7)
18	CPEC promotes people-to-people diplomacy across the region.	13(2)	172(22)	272(35)	255(32)	66(8)

Source; Field Survey-2025

The frequency and percentage of Perceived Potential of BRT Peshawar–Torkham Route

Alongside the CPEC, the perceived impact of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT-Peshawar), its proposed route, and extension through a mega project like CPEC was also discussed, and a number of statements were formulated during the field study. In this context, the statement "The BRT Peshawar–Torkham route will improve cross-border trade significantly" was asked to measure the perception of the sample respondents, where 63 respondents were found strongly disagreeing with the statement, 176 were noted as disagree, 273 remained unanswered, while 201 agreed, and 105—

that is, 14 percent—were found strongly agreeing with the statement. Similarly, the majority of respondents, 338 (43%), agreed that the route can serve as a safe corridor between Pakistan and Afghanistan. 346, that is 45 percent of the total population, responded in agreement that the route will reduce transportation time and logistic challenges among these three countries. Likewise, 335 (43%) respondents viewed the route as one that will lead to increased regional connectivity and peace in the region. Further, the statement "Local employment opportunities will rise with the operationalization of the BRT Torkham project" was asked, where 328 (42%) people were found to agree, while 66 (5%) viewed it as strongly agree. The route can improve access to health and education among the three countries; 213 participants confirmed agreement, while 255—that is 33 percent of the total sample—showed strong agreement with the question. "The route will boost tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal regions" was another leading question, where once again the majority of sample respondents, 300 (39%), confirmed the statement, and likewise, 108 strongly agreed with the statement. Social communication on both sides—Pakistan and Afghanistan—can improve, which was confirmed by 166 (21%) people, while 133 (17%) were strongly in favor of this portion of the scale. Further, "This route will better enhance the development of border districts," where 238—that is 31 percent—approved the statement, while 50—that is 6 percent—strongly agreed with the statement. Regarding the statement "Public support for the BRT Torkham route is essential for its long-term success," 99 people strongly rejected the statement, 179 were disagree, 291 remained unanswered, 106 agreed with the statement, while 103 strongly agreed with the statement. Similarly, "The route will enhance the strategic importance of local markets in Peshawar," where once again the majority of sample respondents agreed with the statement.

Lastly, the statement "The BRT Peshawar–Torkham route aligns with CPEC's broader vision of integration" was formulated to assess the perceived impact of the BRT Peshawar–Torkham route, where 162 respondents negated the statement, 214 remained neutral, 197 agreed, while 116 were found to strongly agree. Keeping in view all the above results of the primary information, the majority of the sample respondents strongly perceived the positive impact of the BRT Peshawar–Torkham route in trilateral cooperation and integration, peacebuilding, employment opportunities, socio-economic development, and as a way of smooth and meaningful communication. Thus, it can reshape the geo-political sketch of the region.

The secondary information strongly support the results of the primary information of the study. The potential ramifications of the Bus Rapid Transit Peshawar–Torkham route, particularly in conjunction with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, have elicited diverse perceptions regarding its capacity to foster cross-border trade, regional connectivity, and socio-economic advancement (Khan et al., 2020). While a segment of respondents expressed reservations about the route's immediate impact on trade facilitation, a considerable proportion acknowledged its potential to serve as a secure conduit between Pakistan and Afghanistan, thereby mitigating transportation bottlenecks and logistical impediments (Khetran & Khalid, 2019). Furthermore, a significant number of participants concurred that the route could catalyze heightened regional integration and contribute to the establishment of peace within the region (Ali et al., 2021).

Table; Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Dependent Variable-Perceived Potential of BRT Peshawar–Torkham Route

S/No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The BRT Peshawar–Torkham route will improve cross-border trade significantly.	63(8)	136(17)	273(35)	201(26)	105(14)
2	This route can serve as a safe corridor for goods and people between Pakistan and Afghanistan.	28(4)	127(16)	152(20)	338(43)	133(17)
3	BRT to Torkham will reduce transportation time and logistical challenges.	58(8)	81(10)	175(22)	346(45)	118(15)
4	The route will contribute to regional peace through increased connectivity.	14(2)	243(31)	134(17)	335(43)	52(7)
5	Local employment opportunities will rise with the operationalization of the BRT Torkham project.	58(8)	195(25)	131(17)	328(42)	66(5)
6	This route will enhance access to healthcare and education for remote border areas.	69(9)	118(15)	123(17)	213(27)	255(33)

7	The route will boost tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal regions.	82(11)	119(15)	169(22)	300(39)	108(14)
8	Social integration between communities on both sides of the border will improve through this route.	114(14)	84(11)	281(36)	166(21)	133(17)
9	The route will lead to better investment prospects in border districts.	60(8)	184(24)	246(32)	238(31)	50(6)
10	Public support for the BRT Torkham route is essential for its long-term success.	99(12)	179(23)	291(37)	106(14)	103(13)
11	The route will enhance the strategic importance of Peshawar in regional cooperation.	60(8)	136(17)	242(31)	257(33)	83(8)
12	The BRT Peshawar–Torkham route aligns with CPEC's broader vision of integration.	89(11)	162(21)	214(28)	197(25)	116(15)

Source; Field Survey-2025

Conclusion

This study examines the perceived impact of CPEC on regional cooperation through the proposed BRT Peshawar–Torkham corridor. Using a cross-sectional survey of 778 respondents—including traders, Chamber of Commerce members, BRT experts, and a CPEC specialist—the research gathered demographic and perception data via a validated questionnaire. Results show strong support for CPEC as a driver of economic linkages, peace, cultural exchange, and regional development. Likewise, the BRT–Torkham route is widely viewed as a safe, trade-enhancing corridor with potential to reduce transport delays and boost employment. The findings highlight the urgent need for stakeholders to prioritize the corridor's development to maximize regional integration and cooperation.

Dedication; This literary work is dedicated to my parent, family and especially to my life partner and companion, my beautiful children Aman Khan Malik, Malik Hashim Khan and Malik Khushal Khan. Thank you for all your love, support, and amazing patience throughout my difficult time. Thank you for always being my sunshine and making my days worthwhile.

The Scholar at Large-Khan

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