



Policy Brief



THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE POST-18TH AMENDMENT BALOCHISTAN

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INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010 is the most important political development in the recent history of the country. The Amendment devolved many important subjects to the provinces through the abolition of the concurrent list. All key subjects related to school education came under the exclusive legislative and executive jurisdiction of the provinces.

This study reviews and examines the school education management and financing trends in the post-devolution Balochistan and employs a political economy approach to understand why increased financing and improved management framework are not translating into commensurate improvements in education outcomes, notably access and learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative research methodology. Given the complex and multi-dimensional nature of education service delivery, the single case study design was adopted as it allows for an intensive and detailed examination of a complex set of factors.

Primary data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with respondents involved in school education delivery. Purposive sampling was applied based on the characteristics of participants and nature of the study. For secondary data, this study relied primarily on official data, budget figures, sector plans and reports of the Secondary Education Department and other relevant departments of the Government of Balochistan. Moreover, research papers and books on education delivery and management were reviewed. Lastly, the insights and observations made by the Principal Investigator of this study, who was involved as a participant in various education sector reforms, were also reviewed and analyzed to understand the informal processes and norms affecting education service delivery.

Descriptive statistics were used to identify budgetary trends and analyze quantitative data on school education's inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Furthermore, thematic analysis was applied to analyze the primary data of qualitative nature derived from the transcripts of KIIs and FGDs. Findings of thematic analysis of primary data were triangulated with the help of secondary data and participant observations.



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FINDINGS

Overview of Education Reforms in the Post-Devolution Period

In the post-18th amendment period, the Government of Balochistan (GoB) introduced a number of reforms in the legal, institutional and governance and management framework of school education. Key reforms included the adoption of the Compulsory Education Act 2014, development of five-year sectoral plans, devolution of certain financial and administrative powers to district (District Education Authority and District Education Authority) and sub-district tier (clusters), and introduction of a data-driven monitoring system (Real Time School Monitoring System and Complaint Management System) (SEDb, 2014; SED 2014). Furthermore, mother languages were introduced as additional subjects in schools (Alif Ailaan, 2018).

Education Financing in the Post-Devolution Period

The introduction of reforms in the policy, legal and management framework of school education were supplemented by increased budgetary allocations for education.

- The overall education budget of Balochistan increased nearly seven times between 2009-10 and 2021-22, rising from PKR 13.8 Billion to PKR 90 Billion approximately (FD, 2008-2021). The highest annual growth rate of 43% was recorded in 2013-14 when a newly-elected government came into power through what were the first general elections held in the post-18th Amendment period.
- The average share of education in the overall provincial budget averaged 18.24% during the period 2013-2021 compared to the 14.57% share between 2007 and 2012 (FD, 2008-2021). This level of spending on education is not far from the global financing benchmarks for education set by the international community for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 04, which is 15% to 20% of total public expenditure (Mundial, G.B. & UNICEF, 2016).
- The development budget for education follows the same pattern as the overall education budget. In nominal terms, the development budget of education has increased eight times between 2009-10 and 2021-22, increasing from PKR 2.3 Billion to PKR 17.93 Billion (P&DD, 2008-2021).
- The salaries of education employees have also increased significantly over the past ten years.

Education Outcomes in the Post-Devolution Period

The increased public spending on education has improved the availability of few basic schooling inputs, namely physical infrastructure, classroom material and sports equipment. Similarly, reforms in education management have improved strategic planning (de-jure) and availability of data to monitor a select number of inputs such as enrolment, teacher attendance, physical infrastructure etc. (SED, 2014).

In terms of education outcomes, limited gains have been recorded in reading and arithmetic skills at the primary and middle levels in the post-devolution period (ASER, 2019).

Notwithstanding the gains in education infrastructure and data regime and marginal improvement in reading and arithmetic skills, most indicators related to access, learning and equity have remained stagnant (PBS, 2021). Few outcome indicators have even recorded marginal decline. The most important access indicator is the proportion of out-of-school children, which has not recorded any



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meaningful reduction in the post-devolution. Instead, the proportion of enrolments in public schools as a percentage of total school-age children has remained stagnant around 22% between 2014 and 2019 (EMIS, 2014 – 2019).

Why are Education Outcomes Progressing Slowly?

Notwithstanding the marginal gains, Balochistan lags behind the rest of Pakistan on nearly all outcomes of education (PBS, 2021). There are two major explanations for the slow progress of education outcomes

Firstly, learning outcomes aren't recording significant improvement because learning is not the objective of education policy and practice. This lack of prioritization of learning is manifested in the following ways:

- Key stakeholders involved in the education delivery chain, both on the demand and supply side, have a very poor understanding of learning or quality education.
- Learning-related inputs such as curriculum, textbooks, language, teacher effectiveness and motivation, classroom environment and assessments, hardly receive any serious policy attention and resources (SED, 2020). Instead, major chunk of discretionary finances as well as high-level policy attention are directed towards construction of new school buildings and provision of missing physical facilities to existing schools (P&DD, 2011-2020).
- Learning outcomes are not measured and monitored in the official data regime pertaining to education (SED, 2014). Consequently, learning remains missing from the agenda of politicians, bureaucrats as well as parents.

Secondly, expansion of schooling appears to have remained a strategic priority of education policy and practice but it hasn't experienced significant improvement either because serious policy incoherence among various elements of education system has undermined the latter's capability to ensure timely and reliable provision of all inputs necessary for enrolling and retaining children in school. The management of human, physical and financial resources available for education is too poor and inefficient to translate into major gains in schooling outcomes.

Key proximate factors responsible for the inefficient management of education resources include but are not limited to weak policy and legal framework (SED 2020), centralized and politically-driven strategic planning processes (Ex-additional Secretary Education; Chief of Section Education; Head of High School; Head of Middle School; Community Representative), outdated and discretionary workforce management system, unavailability and opacity of data on performance of key actors, and ineffective accountability mechanisms at different levels in the education delivery chain (SED, 2021).

Understanding the Politics of Education Delivery

This study employs the analytical framework of political settlement advanced by Mushtaq Khan (2018) to understand the deeper causes of poorly-progressing education outcomes. Critical examination of the manner in which formal and informal power is organized in Balochistan reveals that the political settlement in the province is fragile and predatory characterised by high degree of political exclusion, fragmentation, competitive clientelism and personalised institutions. The nature of political settlement has affected education provision in profound and diverse ways, which are as follows:

- High degree of political exclusion has led to domination of the public discourse by issues of conflict and questions over legitimacy of the ruling coalition. This, in turn, has resulted in a situation whereby service delivery issues remain relatively low in agenda-setting and accountability debates.
- High level of political fragmentation has discouraged broad-based and programmatic provision of public goods and encouraged targeted provision because smaller ethno-regional political parties and independents are unlikely to get political returns on investments in system-wide reforms. This also makes agreement on a major policy shift or reform highly difficult. Furthermore, fragmentation combined with the fragile nature of political settlement mean that the time horizons of political elites are awfully short.
- The most important implication of the fragile, exclusive and fragmented political settlement for education provision is that there is almost negligible alignment of elite interest with improving learning outcomes as the latter don't produce visible and rapid returns. In contrast, there is partial alignment with expansion of schooling but only insofar as it enables elites to divert public goods to consolidate and expand their patronage networks. Education is the biggest civilian employer in the province. Compared to other sectors, education can deliver both popular legitimacy and access to a great many public goods that can be distributed directly to favoured groups and regions. These public goods include schools, jobs, public procurement contracts and transfer postings at favoured positions and in favoured regions. The political pay offs of these tangible goods fit well with the short-term time horizons of the ruling elites. The dominance of patronage considerations explains why there is considerable policy incoherence even for access-related objectives.
- The dominance of informal institutions, such as ethnic identity and tribal networks and norms, has influenced education delivery in significant ways. First, ethnic diversity has made coalition politics a structural reality of politics in the province, which in turn has facilitated the 'ethnification' of major decisions pertaining to allocation of public resources, goods and services, jobs, and creation of new administrative units (Gazdar, 2007). From selection of site for infrastructure project to appointment and postings at important positions, nearly all major decisions with regards to the planning, management and monitoring of school education are shaped largely by ethno-regional consideration at the provincial level and tribal politics at the local level (H. Kakar, personal communication, March 2022; Head of High School). Similarly, the working and management of education workforce is highly politicized and influenced by informal institutions and social norms. Secondly, coalition politics and regionally-segregated settlement pattern of ethnic groups have also impeded and diluted accountability as responsibility for performance of public sector institutions can't be fixed or attributed to a particular party. Formal arrangements function as intended only insofar as they are aligned with the interests of the powerful actors.
- Additionally, tribal norms of in-group solidarity, reciprocity and credible threat of social sanctions often shape individual behaviour in ways that may foster disregard for and poor compliance with formal rules and processes (Lambsdorff, Taube, & Schramm, 2005). Tribalism has weakened formal mechanisms of accountability (Gazdar, 2007) at local levels. For example: many parents stay away from school affairs and are reluctant to hold teachers or heads of schools accountable because tribal norms of in-group solidarity and credible threat of social sanctions trump formal arrangements.

The political settlement lens reveals that elite interest in Balochistan is aligned neither with the goal of improving learning nor schooling. Instead, it is aligned strongly around provision of targeted benefits to patronage networks. The resultant poor quality of education has pushed and encouraged



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the relatively educated and well-off classes to opt out of public schooling. The result is that there is a lack of an organised and powerful constituency to exert pressure on the education system at the local and provincial levels.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a strong need to make the political settlement more inclusive and stable. This may require entail political reconciliation with armed militant groups as well as steps to ensure free and fair elections so that genuine representatives of the people are elected.
- Federal design may be altered to either create greater incentive for emergence of cross-ethnic political parties or enable ethno-regional parties to get simple majority in the provincial assembly. The latter can be achieved through enhancement of powers of Senate and the former can be achieved through division of the province into two provinces. Both are likely to reduce political fragmentation across ethno-regional lines.
- Identify, engage and recognize political champions of education so that they have an incentive to advocate for education reforms in public as well as agenda-setting debates.
- Identify and harness key political moments that can be leveraged for a greater focus on improving education outcomes.
- Devolve day-to-day administrative affairs of education to lower tiers to promote local accountability and reduce unnecessary burden at the provincial level.
- Generate political incentives to focus on access and learning outcomes by supporting data-based information campaigns that highlight issues out of school children and poor education quality.
- Create data-based tools that may enable civil society and other actors on the demand side of education to measure progress on education outcomes and attribute progress or decline to political representatives.
- Promote social awareness by supporting campaigns that highlight the unhealthy role of tribal social norms and sensitize local communities about the need to engage in school affairs.

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