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**Decentralization and Education in Pakistan: A
Critical Assessment of Provincial Autonomy in
Policy Implementation**

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Decentralization and Education in Pakistan: A Critical Assessment of Provincial Autonomy in Policy Implementation

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Abstract

Since Pakistan passed the 18th Amendment provinces now have more power to set and deliver education policies. This research examines how much provincial freedom helps schools provide better education to all students. Our research examines the benefits and ongoing challenges of provincial education policies in Pakistan through steps like studying policy development and provincial control systems. Each province's educational system now develops unique reforms through decentralization but regions still differ greatly in quality and the federal-provincial connection is weak plus officials have limited ability to carry out their work. Research shows that better government leadership needs to work together with states to spread education resources fairly throughout all provinces. The research suggests improving governance effectiveness requires training schemes and common teaching guidelines with strict performance standards in Pakistan's education system.

Keywords: Decentralization, education policy, 18th Amendment, governance, provincial autonomy, policy implementation, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Governments worldwide use education decentralization to enhance their administrative and financial systems to give people better access to quality and efficient learning programs at their local schools. After the 18th Amendment went into effect in 2010 Pakistan pursued decentralization as a main policy to give provinces greater authority over education affairs. Although decentralization helps improve government operations many barriers from Pakistan's

system and political conditions limit its successful use. Decentralization assists in fixing regional gaps and making local adjustments plus gives groups the chance to participate in administration. The Pakistani government allows provincial and local entities to control education management in order to give better service delivery where schools need it most. Transitioning from central control to local control shows the government needs stronger institutions and better uses of resources plus federal-provincial teamwork improvement (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). Weak administrative systems and inexperienced local staff cause problems in Pakistan while political involvement hinders effective school decentralization. The provinces hold administrative control but limited financial authority undermines their ability to implement educational changes (Khilji et al. 2022).

Background on Decentralization Post-18th Amendment in Pakistan

In 2010 Pakistan made a major shift in governance when the 18th Amendment moved control of administrative tasks and policy creation from federal authorities to individual provincial governments. The amendment gave provinces more freedom to run their own government services especially in education, health and agriculture departments. The amendment transferred 17 federal ministries including education to provinces so they could better serve their local needs and resolution of regional disparity challenges. The government established new provincial powers to improve local decision-making about education affairs. Provinces obtained power over their education system elements that the central government previously managed (Rana 2020). The government planned to transfer education decision-making powers to local areas in order to provide better management and fix unequal learning conditions. The switch revealed many problems especially insufficient organizational preparation and problem connecting governmental levels with inadequate resources. Despite Punjab making progress on education performance Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did well whereas Sindh and Balochistan struggled according to Hafeez in 2021 research. The decentralized process meets tough barriers particularly when underserved provinces lack budgetary and administrative power to handle their expanded duties. Federation and local government partnership guidelines must improve to avoid poor policy results. Federal government workers regularly oppose transferring their resources to provincial control according to Shah et al. (2017). Decentralization will succeed better by developing provincial abilities and resources plus improving cooperation between government levels. Our nation needs these measures to solve education gaps between areas while building a lasting system.

Objectives of Decentralization in Education

After the 18th Amendment Pakistan moved educational authority to the provinces to solve major governance problems. This part will describe how education decentralization achieves its goals within provincial self-rule and educational achievement. The main goal of this model gave provinces full freedom to create teaching standards that match local regional requirements. Officials meant this move would tackle unequal education result issues and tailor learning rule to local settings (Rana 2020). Education governance needed to run more smoothly by changing how the central government works to put power into provincial hands. The new system aimed

to deliver faster decisions and improve local strategy adoption according to Osman & Subhani (2016).

Our focus also extended to smarter distribution of educational resources between provincial areas. The wanted public money to move directly from federal sources to provinces which helped them fill education gaps (Hafeez, 2021). Decentralization focused on getting teachers parents and community leaders from local areas more involved in developing school policies. Local stakeholders participation in policy decisions was predicted by Shah & Ahmad (2017) to create public ownership and responsibility. Under decentralized governance provinces received support to develop unique policies that fix education problems they face including low reading skills and poor schools. Experts believed that allowing each provincial region to shape their own education policies would lead to better equality in learning opportunities (Faiz, 2023).

Research Questions and Scope

This segment defines the main research topics and details the study's focus area which examines how decentralization and provincial freedom impact Pakistan's education policies.

The research follows these specific questions to understand its subject matter:

1. The 18th Amendment changed how education governance operates in Pakistan leading to different results in policy outcomes. (Khilji et al., 2022)
2. Does provincial self-rule effectively balance education quality between different areas of Pakistan? (Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, 2024)
3. Which problems affect provincial governments when they try to put education policies into action under separate power arrangements? (Sarwar et al., 2022)

Theoretical Framework

The Pakistani government decided in 2010 to give provinces more authority over education planning and execution through the 18th Amendment reforms. Decentralization helps local authorities make better services under governance theory as Farooqi and Forbes 2019 suggest. The theory of decentralization sets basic rules to evaluate how administrative and financial authority moves from national to local departments. Decentralization boosts how resources are used and enables local executives to personalize services while making officials more accountable. While the theory predicts these problems the education sector in Pakistan shows weak institutional performance and elite control as reported in Kalia (2015). The plan includes institutional capacity measurements because they determine if decentralized school governance works well. Poor organizational capability and resource shortages alongside small amounts of technical expertise prevent Pakistan from receiving full value from its decentralized system. Improving these foundations becomes necessary to effectively implement guidelines into reality (Khilji et al., 2022). The political economy view examines how people with authority use their power in education reform decisions. Political interference with resources between Pakistani provinces makes it hard to establish fair university control (Nabi & Nazir 2021). This research framework uses different ways of understanding decentralization in Pakistan's education sector to produce complete findings. By bringing these tests together it shows what provincial freedom brings plus how our systems resist correct policy delivery.

Definition of Decentralization and Its Types

When governments pass power to subnational bodies at both provincial and local levels they are practicing decentralization. The method brings decision-making power to citizens to improve how government operates and answers to the people. Decentralization exhibits three main types of systems that influence government authority: political before administrative and financial control.

National governments receive permission to establish their own policies and run their own affairs in political decentralization efforts. The government gives selected provincial or district representatives the right to create laws through the delegation of power. Following the 18th Amendment in 2019 Pakistan started giving provinces the power to make decisions in educational matters and other sectors (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). Administrative decentralization grants provincial and local governments permission to manage services while also putting their approved policies into action. Each Pakistani province oversees teacher hiring processes as well as creates schools' learning materials and leads educational monitoring across the province. Despite these weaknesses institutional capacity failures and leadership coordination troubles affect its performance in this sector (Khilji et al., 2022).

A system of financial decentralization gives subnational governments the right to get revenue from the public, decide what money does best, and make money work. Local governments need their own reserves to perform their duties properly. Fiscal decentralization in Pakistan helps increase educational performance by enhancing student enrollment numbers as demonstrated through research findings (Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, 2024). Different decentralization systems bring together political, administrative and fiscal control functions. Pakistan implements a hybrid system by allowing provincial governments much power but not fully establishing local administrative units so service delivery problems arise according to Rauf et al. (2017).

Relationship Between Decentralization and Education Outcomes

Educational systems perform better when power moves towards local authorities because they can create personal solutions and make local leaders responsible for them. Dollars also work better under these conditions. The influence of decentralization on education success in Pakistan depends on various organizational factors including the financial system and district leadership interactions.

Fiscal decentralization in Punjab has created better results for primary school attendance and literacy according to actual test data. District government control over budgets would enable them to manage education needs effectively which directly affects school performance (Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, 2024).

The decentralized approach to education service delivery shows different success rates in various regions across Pakistan. Punjab successfully applies its decentralized budget system while Balochistan faces institutional framework and financial resource challenges because of Khilji et al (2022).

Research finds that when education governance activity moves to local authorities they deliver better results through honest management of public funds. Local political activities in Pakistan make it harder to achieve successful decentralized policies as shown by Farooqi and Forbes in 2019. Local governments generally need better administrative staffing to carry out their policies fully because they lack the required skills. The limited local funding from incomplete fiscal decentralization stops educational reforms from taking place properly. Several studies have documented that the implementation system of administrative decentralization faces conditions that shift authority back to the center (Shabbir et al., 2017).

Local governments can best use decentralization when they receive training that builds their administrative and operational expertise. Provide financial support for institutions across the country based on their specific needs and development goals. The government should create laws that defend the self-governing capacity of local education institutions.

Decentralization in Pakistan: A Historical Overview

Pakistan has experienced important changes in its decentralization system through different periods with mixed results and obstacles. The following summary shows important stages of decentralization while describing its effects on education and administrative changes. Right after Pakistan won independence in 1947 the government decided to put control of education services in national authorities. Local power was difficult to expand because political unrest and poor governance structures made it hard to implement decentralization. During Ayub Khan's presidency in 1959 Pakistan implemented the Basic Democracies Ordinance for the first time to transfer authority to local government bodies. The government maintained full authority over education functions (Malik & Rana, 2019). The nation underwent fundamental decentralization practices during the General Pervez Musharraf presidency in 2001-2009. Under Local Government Ordinance 2001 district governments took charge of both administrative powers and financial management. To provide better public services especially education services the new governance structures transferred power to local authorities. Experts see problems in the local government reforms for using inadequate resources while building insufficient staff skills and letting provinces take over too often (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). Under the 18th Amendment of 2010 to the Constitution the government removed the Concurrent Legislative List to grant full control of education sectors to provincial authorities. Under this reform provincial governments gained complete power to create and run all education systems. The amendment created strong power-sharing issues between federal and state governments while uncovering skill deficits at both federal and state levels according to Rauf et al. (2017). Attempts to distribute education authority failed because provincial and local staff did not have adequate resources to handle educational operations. Main Bureaucratic Systems at Federal and State Levels opposed power transfers which blocked the plans to decentralize operations. Multiple political changes at the top made it difficult to continue education decentralization efforts according to Ahmed & Lodhi (2016). New research shows that Punjab province develops its education systems by using its new autonomy over money and operations to deliver better results. The Balochistan region

remains behind other areas due to poor resources and ability to deliver (Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, 2024).

Education Policies Before and After the 18th Amendment

Since 2010 Pakistan has made major policy changes in education governance with the 18th Amendment working as this turning point. This part analyzes key aspects of education policies ahead of and following the 18th Amendment by showing how they handled provincial control and executed policies.

Before the 18th Amendment took effect in 2010 both federal and provincial governments shared control over education as a concurrent topic. The national government handled the full process of creating education rules along with selecting and funding courses. Provincial governments struggled to create better solutions because their power to adjust policies fell short (Rana, 2020). Through the 18th Constitutional Amendment of Pakistan provincial governments acquired total power over 17 key ministries including education and removed them from national level administration. This historic change placed decision-making power in the hands of province governments so they could build school systems that address their regional requirements. The amendment made Article 25-A ensure each student has access to free public education without restrictions (Naseem & Mahmood, 2019). Following the amendment provinces took full authority to decide how education funds would be spent plus they became the only decision-makers for education policies and teacher talent selection. The shift proved difficult because of various problems that emerged.

1. Smaller provinces that needed development struggled to handle their new authority because they did not have enough workers or skilled staff (Hafeez, 2021).
2. Each province followed its own approach since there was no nationally accepted policy monitoring system that led education standards to vary between provinces (Ullah 2024).

The 18th Amendment calls for free public education for students aged 5 to 16 but its implementation remains unequal because provinces lack enough resources to fulfill the goal (Bibi 2015).

Each province explored its autonomy differently where Punjab succeeded in making progress while Balochistan failed due to poor management and inadequate funding (Ahmad et al., 2022).

The shift of education management power proves that we need:

1. The provinces needed to develop full organizational abilities to run their government-assigned duties well.
2. The central government should create an institution to oversee educational quality standards across the nation.
3. The provinces receive equal amounts of resources to even the differences in education quality across regions.

Shift from Federal to Provincial Control

Through the 18th Constitutional Amendment Pakistan made a fundamental governance change where it moved educational policy-making authority from federal control to provincial

authorities. Governments received more responsibilities in their own areas to improve efficiency and local authority. The transformation of federal authority into provincial power faces numerous obstacles as well as chances for enhancement.

Education governance fell jointly under federal and provincial government control when the 18th Amendment had not yet been adopted. Although federal leadership still supervised key education activities like university instruction and examinations provincial_school systems kept minimal oversight. Provincial governments assumed control over training institutions and other fields of education when the 18th Amendment repealed the Concurrent Legislative List in 2019 (Naseem & Mahmood, 2019). The transfer of provincial power let each region create regulations that match their economic needs. The provinces Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab used their autonomy to add more resources to their education system and attract more students. Discipline and unfair resource sharing place barriers in the path of development in Sindh and Balochistan according to Rauf et al. (2017).

1. Central authority still controls money distribution making some provinces unable to use their powers to solve academic gaps across regions.
2. Many states have trouble running their new tasks because they do not have enough qualified staff or modern technology systems.
3. The Higher Education Commission's continued presence in federal oversight causes issues that prevent provinces from fully exercising their power (Ullah 2024).

Lessons from the Transition.

4. Building up provincial abilities via training and developing systems helps provinces run their responsibilities better.
5. Provinces and the federal government should join efforts to set the same quality standards across schools and distribute educational funds fairly.
6. Putting in place monitoring systems at both authorities will assist in improving policy deliverance (Osman & Subhani, 2016).

Provincial Autonomy in Education

Under the 18th Amendment Pakistan's Constitution made significant changes to how the country runs by allowing individual provinces full power to manage educational matters. This part shows how educational control passed to provinces affects education delivery in terms of advantages and difficulties.

After the 18th Amendment the government removed education from joint federal-provincial control to set it solely under provincial administration. Since the Higher Education Commission remains under federal authority provinces run every aspect of education including lawmaking and planning. Each local province can make its own education policies that better serve the specific socioeconomic conditions of its area (Nosheen & Anwar, 2023). The provinces Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab embraced their new autonomy to create beneficial education laws concerning school facilities teacher training and curriculum development (Gaho et al., 2022).

1. Provincial authorities who run education face limited government funds that make it challenging to construct education buildings and facilities (Tahir & Tahir, 2023).
2. Weak intergovernmental coordination led different provinces to adopt their own education standards which made national education progress difficult (Faiz, 2023). Punjab stands out due to its effective institutions as education performance indicators improved in this province. Sindh and Balochistan remain trapped in perpetual problems because they have little money and poor administrative systems (Hafeez 2021).

Success Stories and Challenges in Implementation

The decentralized education system in Pakistan generates both practical successes and enduring problems. The results show us that integrated system control is difficult to apply across varied social economies and politics. Punjab leads other provinces in making decentralized governance effective for better education results. The increases in school attendance and teacher training success result from strong provincial independence according to Farooqi & Forbes (2019). Some provinces use decentralization to link their education and health authorities for better service and resource deployment according to Zaidi et al. (2019).

Challenges in Implementation

Provincial governments experience shortages of qualified employees who should manage their new responsibilities according to Shabbir et al. (2017). Local politics interferes with how power is split and services work because of this political intrusion. Federal and provincial agencies fail to work together effectively which creates differences in educational standards throughout different provinces (Zaidi et al. 2019). The limited production of resources in Balochistan and Sindh forces both provinces to confront widespread educational quality disparities (Hafeez, 2021).

Lessons for Future Implementation

Technical training and institutional improvement need financial support to enhance governance at provincial level. Local people and civic groups should have more influence in how policies address local requirements.

Critical Challenges

Decentralizing education in Pakistan brings many difficulties that reduce policy success and create unfair results. The system produces these problems because it operates without proper government coordination and lacks enough money alongside outdated methods.

Provinces usually do not have the competent staff needed to properly put education policies into action through decentralized control. When provinces lack proper administrative skills they cannot develop specific educational reforms according to Khilji et al. (2022). Poor training programs for educational staff increase service delivery problems as shown in Shabbir et al. (2017). Provinces with less financial resources like Balochistan and Sindh cannot invest enough money into improving their education system. Each section of Pakistan receives different quality teaching because of this issue (Zaidi et al. 2019). Provinces differ in educational service delivery because Rauf et al (2017) show regional differences in funding distribution. The national and local governments need better teamwork to agree on common curriculum details

and assessment policies in education across different states. When different education departments work independently they create separate policies and repeat initiatives (Ahmed & Lodhi, 2016). Different local political leaders resist sharing power to achieve decentralization's positive effects. Local politicians at provincial and district offices prevent proper use of resources and impact the hiring of teachers by confusing education programs (Akram 2020). The spread of power to local regions has not succeeded in fixing unequal education opportunities between different districts. Good educational progress in Punjab happens because this province possesses quality resources while underprivileged regions remain slow due to general organizational problems according to Hafeez (2021).

Regional Disparities in Educational Outcomes

Decentralization clearly shows us that public education benefits from one part of Pakistan far more than it does from another. Punjab achieved success because it runs better educational systems than Balochistan and Sindh whose problems persist due to ongoing administrative obstacles. Research indicates that education opportunities differ greatly from province to province especially in Balochistan where academics perform poorly. City areas perform better through enhanced funding and infrastructure support according to Wasim and Munir (2017). Education remains unequal across rural and urban areas in the country but rural female students suffer from the worst lack of access to school resources most among them (Uhammad & Drees, 2019).

Distribution policy changes should deliver equal access to resources in undeveloped regions to improve education quality. Special action plans need to be developed at schools in rural areas to help all students especially female students (Ahmed & Mujahid, 2021). The different levels of government in Pakistan struggle to work together effectively when they put new education policies into action.

The different education administrations across provinces create mismatched learning goals and teaching methods (Ullah 2024). When teams cannot communicate well they work on similar projects at the same time wasting resources (Ahmed and Lodhi 2016).

Recommendations: Intergovernmental Mechanisms: Establishing platforms for regular dialogue and collaboration between federal and provincial authorities. The federal government should develop monitoring standards to make sure provinces offer education of equal quality throughout the nation (Sarwar et al., 2022).

Provincial governments struggle to achieve good education results because they have trouble getting money and human resources for their education plans. Sindh and Balochistan struggle to fund building new education facilities and teaching training because of economic shortfalls (Hafeez, 2021). Provincial education systems struggle to improve quality because they cannot use their new powers because they lack professional staff and administrative support (Naeem et al., 2021). Provincial education departments need funds for teaching staff training so they can deliver superior results. The federal government should award provinces funding with requirements to help them cover their expenses and strengthen their performance (Zaidi et al., 2019).

Policy Recommendations

These following policy directions would help Pakistan's education sector get better returns from its decentralized system and meet its tough problems.

Strengthen Provincial Capacities

Provincial authorities should provide complete administrative training programs to education managers which focuses on enhancing their professional and business capabilities. Develop strong network systems across provincial government offices to manage education governance better and achieve policy plans effectively (Khilji et al., 2022).

Ensure Equitable Resource Allocation

To bridge economic differences between Sindh and Balochistan the federal government should shift public resources from prosperous regions to underdeveloped ones (Rauf et al., 2017). The government should give funding to education based on performance results in order to make sure funds act well (Sarwar et al., 2022).

Promote Federal-Provincial Collaboration

The federal and provincial education systems need an organization to unify their educational rules and standards through quality control systems (Zaidi et al. 2019). The federal government needs to create a supervisory system that makes sure provincial education plans work towards national education requirements (Ahmed & Lodhi, 2016).

Enhance Community Engagement

The school management committees have to become more powerful to hold teaching staff at the community level accountable and achieve better results in local education (Lohana et al., 2016). Invite NGOs and local groups to work with us for targeted education solutions.

Emphasize Long-Term Planning

The government needs to develop long-term education plans that protect their implementation even through political changes across administrations (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). Build an accurate data tracking system and analysis process to help policymakers make decisions based on solid information (Khilji et al. 2022).

Strengthening Federal-Provincial Collaboration

A joint effort between the national government and the provinces is necessary to achieve good education policy results across the nation. The partnership provides better guidance to all stakeholders and lets us apply standards across different provinces without wasting money.

The federal and provincial governments should create education councils to meet regularly and enable better communication about education policies and programs. These councils help both bodies work together to update learning materials and solve schooling funding inequalities (Farooqi & Forbes, 2019). The federal government should create shared national monitoring guidelines to help provinces align their education aims with nation-wide quality and service requirements (Mitru et al., 2021).

Addressing Capacity-Building Needs at the Provincial Level

Many provincial governments lack enough resources to run education policies successfully at the local level. Governments must work to fix these issues to improve learning results across

every education zone. The provincial administration needs to establish training courses to prepare education supervisors and teachers in technical and managerial abilities (Khilji et al., 2022). The government should direct federal grants to create new capacity-building programs in Sindh and Balochistan provinces especially (Hafeez 2021).

Mechanisms for Accountability and Transparency

Teams must report their education work results openly while following improved guidelines to make decentralized policies work better across all areas. To check policy enforcement create independent national and provincial monitoring bodies (Javed 2020). Local communities should take part in reviewing school policy work to make sure everyone at the base level is responsible (Farooqi and Forbes 2019). Use data-based reporting methods to share exact progress updates with everyone who needs this information (Khoso et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Education decentralization in Pakistan via the 18th Amendment has granted advantages alongside obstacles for educational systems. Despite provincial authorities gaining direct education control and setting specific policies practitioners and government bodies across Pakistan have difficulties working together because of limited hardware and money and different standards between provinces. Punjab took control of education to make better results by using its new authority. Governments that apply decentralization correctly achieve both better student registration numbers and better administrative workflows according to research by Mehr-un-Nisa and Ghafoor (2024). The provinces Balochistan and Sindh experience financial shortage and administrative weakness that hinders effective education reform implementation according to Ahmed & Lodhi (2016). Testing environments suffer because different provinces do not follow education standards in proper alignment with each other due to low intergovernmental partnership (Khilji et al., 2022). The best way for Pakistan to help decentralization benefits work better is by working better with the provinces using both good communication and single education rules. Give provincial governments resources to learn better administrative and technical skills. Distribute funds equally between regions to help students from all parts of the country study at quality schools. Both Pakistani governments need to team up and serve the distinct learning needs across all parts to make educational decentralization successful.

Summary of the Critical Assessment

The 18th Amendment let educational powers shift to individual Pakistani provinces which has changed how Pakistan controls schools. Our evaluation shows both positive outcomes and difficulty faced in this system. The province of Punjab uses decentralized authority to build better education facilities and achieve better results which proves how regional control works best (Mehr-un-Nisa & Ghafoor, 2024). The educational system continues to vary strongly between provinces because imTouchable underdevelopment plagues Balochistan from a lack of sufficient funding and unwieldy administrative procedures (Wasim & Munir, 2017). The federal and provincial governments fail to collaborate effectively through their educational plans which make education standards and financial resources differ across states (Ahmed & Lodhi, 2016).

Our assessment requires us to build stronger partnerships between national and provincial governments while distributing funds well and training staff effectively to make decentralization work to its full potential.

Recommendations for Future Reforms

The government should create intergovernmental workgroups to unite provincial education policies nation-wide according to findings by Sarwar et al. in 2022. The authority needs to develop teaching and management training for provincial educators to improve their bureaucracy systems. Connect economic support to educational services as conditional grants help decrease resource trouble across different education levels between prosperous regions and remote areas (Rauf et al. 2017). Establish effective standards for tracking educational results and checking how resources are spent to show transparent practices (Farooqi and Forbes 2019). Design education systems to serve the special characteristics of each province and especially support rural and underdeveloped regions according to Ahmed & Lodhi (2016).

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