

School Education in Post-18th Amendment Balochistan: A Political Economy Perspective

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In the wake of devolution of education to provinces through the 18th Constitutional Amendment, there has been a noticeable increase in public spending on school education. Moreover, certain reforms have been introduced in education planning, management and monitoring. These measures have enhanced availability of physical infrastructure and reading and writing material for schools and improved education monitoring. There is also evidence of marginal improvements in overall literacy rate and reading and arithmetic skills.

Notwithstanding the limited gains, the reforms and increased public spending have not translated into commensurate improvements in schooling and learning outcomes. Analysis of proximate causes indicates that learning outcomes are not improving because the various elements of education system are not aligned around the goal of learning. In contrast, expansion of schooling appears to have remained a strategic objective of education delivery but it hasn't experienced significant improvement either because of the existence of serious policy incoherence among various elements of education system. Prevalence of centralised, politically-influenced, discretionary and outdated planning and management practices combined with ineffectiveness of accountability mechanisms across the education delivery chain have undermined the effectiveness of well-intended reforms.

A deeper exploration of these issues through the “political settlement” lens reveals that education outcomes aren't recording major improvements because elite interest is aligned neither with the goal of learning nor access. Instead, elite interest is aligned more around patronage politics. Short-term, clientelist, political objectives govern education provision, owing to the highly fragile, exclusive, fragmented and personalised nature of political settlement. The predatory nature of political settlement has adversely affected both the design and implementation of reform initiatives.

Keywords: School Education, Devolution, Education Outcomes, Political Settlement, Politics of Education, Balochistan

1. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010 represents the most pivotal development in the country's recent constitutional history. This amendment, among others, re-defined the federal governance framework by

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devolving authority over social subjects to the provinces. The most significant governance outcome of the Amendment was that the health and school education subjects fell under the exclusive legislative and executive jurisdiction of the provinces (Institute of Social & Policy Sciences, 2012).

In the wake of the adoption of the 18th amendment, nearly all provincial governments have introduced reforms in education management and enhanced financing for education but these have produced partial results at best (Andrabi & Macdonald, 2019; Naviwala, 2016). The Government of Balochistan too enacted a number of reforms in education management. These reforms encompassed various aspects of education delivery, ranging from strategic planning to the provision of basic inputs and monitoring of education outcomes (Kakar & Naveed, 2018; Secondary Education Department, 2020; Zaka, 2018). Furthermore, the public spending on education also witnessed a significant rise in the post-devolution period. However, despite these reforms and increased spending, education outcomes have either recorded only marginal improvement or remained largely stagnant.

This study aims to map and review the trends in school education management and financing in post-devolution Balochistan and analyse why enhanced financing and reforms have not led to commensurate improvements in education outcomes. The study has followed a qualitative research methodology with desk research and key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders as the main sources of data.

This paper is structured into four principal sections. The first section offers a comprehensive review of the current literature, exploring the impact of alterations in education governance on educational outcomes. The second section presents an overview of major reforms and trends in education management, financing, and outcomes during the post-devolution era. The third section delves into the immediate factors contributing to the sluggish progression of education outcomes. Finally, the last section employs a political settlement perspective to unveil the underlying determinants and limitations influencing the public provision of education in Balochistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Decentralisation has been advocated as a means to improve service delivery and manage ethnic diversity in low and middle-income countries (Ahmad, Devarajan, Khemani, & Shah, 2005). Proponents argue that decentralisation enhances allocative and productive efficiency by aligning public services with local preferences and increasing accountability of sub-national governments to citizens (Channa & Faguet, 2016; Faguet & Sanchez, 2008; Garcia & Rajkumar, 2008; Kahkonen & Lanyi, 2001).

However, empirical evidence on the impact of decentralisation on public service delivery is mixed and inconclusive (Ghuman & Singh, 2013; Robinson, 2007; Shah, Thompson, & Zou, 2004). Studies have shown that decentralisation can also hinder service delivery, widen inter-regional disparities, and increase corruption and rent-seeking by local elites (Azfar & Livingston, 2002; Bardhan, 2002; Shen, Zhao, & Zou, 2014). Existing literature further reveals that the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms is contingent upon various factors, including the design, scope, and process of decentralisation, historical legacies, the presence of local structures of accountability, the capacity of sub-national governments, political competition and quality of governance,

and the quality of formal and informal institutions (Ahmad, et al. 2005; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Faguet, 2014; Kahkonen & Lanyi, 2001; Sow & Razafimahefa, 2015; Sujarwoto, 2017). These factors highlight the interplay between technical and political considerations, as well as the influence of power dynamics and quality of formal and informal institutions on service delivery outcomes.

In the context of education, it is widely recognised that deficits in education provision cannot be solely attributed to technical challenges in policy design and implementation. Recent scholarship acknowledges the role of both technical and political factors in shaping educational outcomes (Bruns, Macdonald, & Schneider, 2019; Bruns, Schneider, & Saavedra, 2023; Corrales, 2006). For instance, the World Bank Development Report (WDR) 2018 reveals that unhealthy politics, characterised by a 'misalignment' between education policies, goals and practices, contributes to the intractability of education reforms and the slow progress in improving educational outcomes (Bank, 2017).

Within the literature concerning the politics of education, there is a growing consensus that differences in political economies are critical to explaining variations in performance of countries in relation to adoption and implementation of education reforms, especially those addressing learning outcomes (Kingdon, et al. 2014; Kosack, 2012; Levy, 2022; McLoughlin & Batley, 2012). Although limited in number, existing research studies on the political economy of education reforms have investigated the role of formal as well as informal institutional processes and de-facto power relations (Corrales, 2006; Hicken & Simmons, 2008; Mangla, 2022; Pritchett, 2013; Stasavage, 2005), ideas as well as incentives (Corrales, 2006; Mani & Mukand, 2007), and actors operating at multiple levels, including parents and communities, teacher unions, bureaucracy and political parties (Arif, Nihayah, Rarasati, Revina, & Usman, 2022; Bano & Dyonisius, 2022; Corrales, 2006; Eccles, 2005; Keefer, 2013; Mangla, 2022; Wilder, 2014). These studies, however, frequently focus on singular power relationships, unit of analysis, or ideas, failing to offer a comprehensive understanding of the relative power of diverse stakeholders and its consequences for education reforms and delivery. Consequently, there has emerged a need for a conceptual framework that effectively captures and integrates these multifaceted factors (Hickey & Hossain, 2019; Wales, Magee, & Nicolai, 2016).

In response to this identified gap, political settlement analysis has emerged as a valuable approach within political economy research. By offering an integrated framework that considers the role of elites, formal and informal institutions, and de-facto power relations, political settlement helps in understanding and analysing not only the differential performance of states but also the directions reforms in formal governance structures might (or might not) take (Khan, 2010; Khan, 2018). It facilitates comprehension of the conditions under which broad-based pro-reform coalitions may arise, as well as the reasons and circumstances in which elite actors are more likely to commit to the adoption and implementation of educational reforms aimed at expanding access to schooling and improving learning outcomes (Hickey & Hossain, 2019).

Currently, limited number of studies have applied the political settlement lens to analyse performance variations in education delivery across developing countries. Wales, Magee and Nicolai (2016) applied the political settlements analysis to explore how political

context may shape opportunities and barriers for achieving progress on education outcomes and found that the prospects for improving education quality are most favourable in developmental states and poorest in spoils-driven hybrid states. Similarly, Hickey & Hossain (2019) employed the political settlement lens to examine the politics of learning crisis in six developing countries—each representing a particular type of political settlement. Their findings revealed that the commitment and capacity of elites to improve educational outcomes was systemically related to, and shaped by, by the type of political settlement. Levy (2022) adapted the political settlement analysis to group countries into distinct political-institutional contexts and explored the influence of these divergent contexts on education sector governance and outcomes. He found that political and institutional constraints can render ineffective many specialised sectoral interventions.

However, the current research on political settlements and education delivery primarily focuses on cross-country comparisons, overlooking sub-national and regional variations. There is a dearth of studies examining variations in sub-national performance in social service delivery. The latter is rather concerning given that the responsibility for delivering education, health and other social services lies with sub-national governments in most developing countries. Therefore, this research aims to address the aforementioned gap by applying the political settlement approach to sub-national performance in education delivery in Pakistan through a case study of school education in the Balochistan province. By an in-depth examination of a sub-national context, this study seeks to not only enrich the existing evidence on sub-national state capacity but also to advance the political settlement theory by applying it to sub-national contexts. The findings of this research will enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between politics and education sector governance and outcomes, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners on how to design policies that are more likely to succeed in specific sub-national contexts.

3. OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION REFORMS, FINANCING & OUTCOMES IN THE POST-DEVOLUTION PERIOD

In the post-18th amendment period, the Government of Balochistan (GoB) implemented a number of reforms in the legal, institutional, and governance framework of school education. These reforms included the enactment of the Compulsory Education Act 2014, the development of five-year sectoral plans, the devolution of certain financial and administrative powers to the district (District Education Authority and District Education Authority) and sub-district tier (clusters), and the introduction of a data-driven monitoring system (Real-Time School Monitoring System and Complaint Management System) (Kakar & Naveed, 2018; Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Additionally, to promote social accountability and engage parents and communities in school affairs, various stakeholder forums were established, including the Local Education Group (LEG), District Education Group (DEG), Local Education Council (LEC), and Parent Teacher School Management Committee (PTSMC) at the provincial, district, cluster, and school levels, respectively (Secondary Education Department, 2021a). The introduction of mother languages as compulsory additional subjects in schools was another significant step. These reforms aimed to enhance strategic planning, implementation capacity, monitoring, and accountability in the education sector, with an emphasis on improving learning outcomes (Secondary Education Department, 2013).

Policy reforms were complemented by increased budgetary allocations for education. The overall education budget of Balochistan witnessed a nearly seven-fold increase from PKR 13.8 Billion to approximately PKR 90 Billion between 2009-10 and 2021-22 (Finance Department, 2008-2020) (Figure 1). The average share of education in the provincial budget rose from 14.57 percent during 2007-2012 to 18.24 percent in 2013-2021, aligning closely with the global financing benchmarks set for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 04, which recommends allocating 15 percent to 20 percent of total public expenditure to education in low-and-middle income countries (Mundial & UNICEF, 2016). Furthermore, the development budget for education also experienced an eight-fold increase in nominal terms, from PKR 2.3 Billion to PKR 17.93 Billion between 2009-10 and 2021-22 (Planning and Development Department, 2007-2021) (Figure 2). The salaries of education employees also witnessed significant increments during this period (Figure 3).

The increased public spending has led to improvements in a select few schooling inputs such as physical infrastructure and classroom materials (Attaullah, 2021; Izzatullah, 2021; Kaleem, 2021). Similarly, the management reforms have ameliorated the data regime and strategic planning framework governing school education (Secondary Education Department, 2021a).

However, the enhancements in physical inputs and data regime have not translated into notable improvements in access, learning, or equity outcomes. In terms of learning outcomes, Balochistan appears to have recorded modest improvement in reading and arithmetic skills at the primary and middle levels in the post-devolution period (ASER Pakistan, 2022). Nevertheless, it’s noteworthy that this progress has been relatively sluggish in comparison to other regions of the country. In terms of accessibility, there has been an unfortunate increase in the proportion of out-of-school children, while the ratio of enrollments in public schools relative to the total school-age population has remained relatively static, increasing from 22 percent in 2014 to 23 percent in 2021 (Figure 4).

The cumulative impact of these developments is the widening interprovincial disparity in education outcomes between Balochistan and rest of the country since the devolution of authority in 2010. Balochistan lags behind the rest of Pakistan on nearly all outcomes of education (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Fig. 1. Share of Education Budget in Provincial Budget (2007-2021)

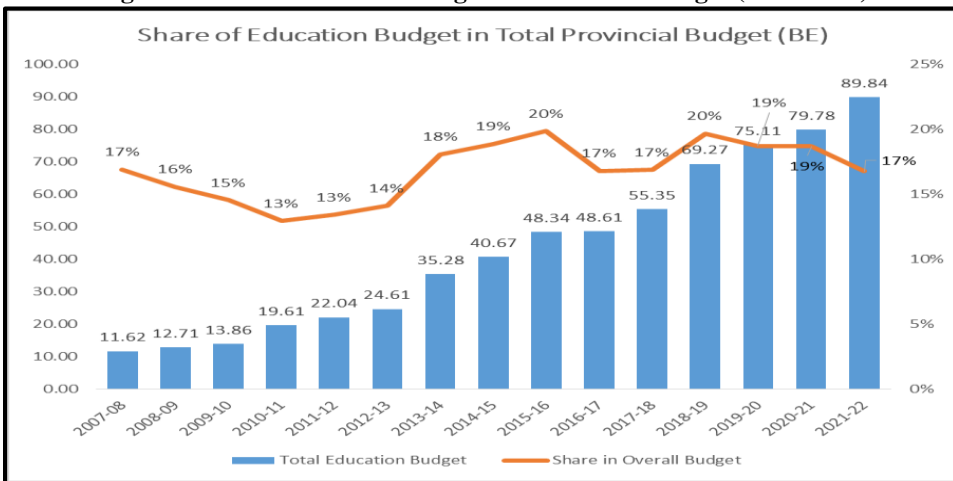


Fig. 2. Share of Education in Balochistan’s Development Budget (2001-2020)

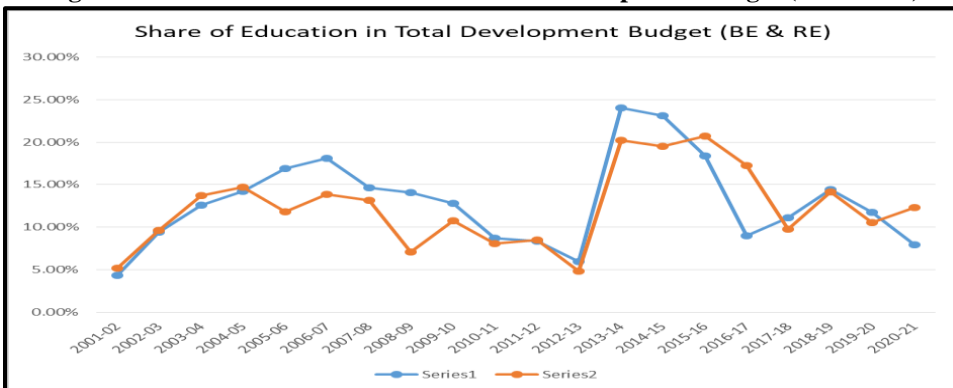


Fig. 3. Trends in Education Salary Budget (2011-2020)

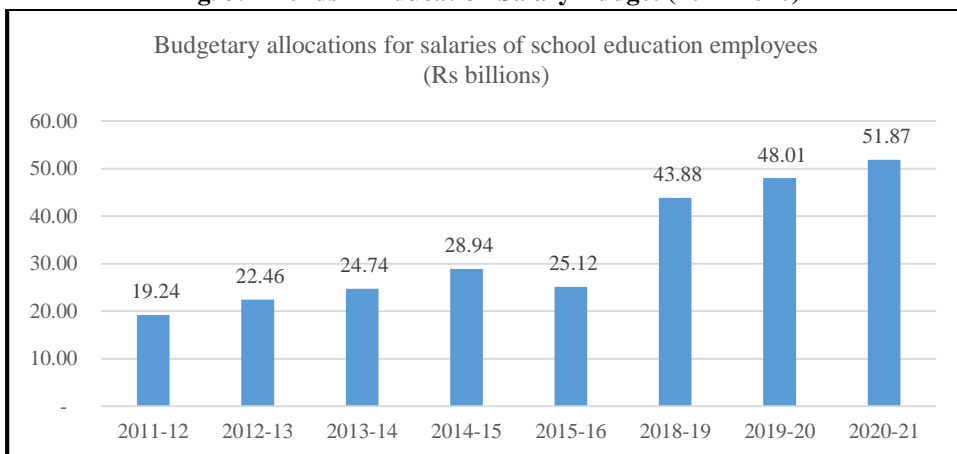
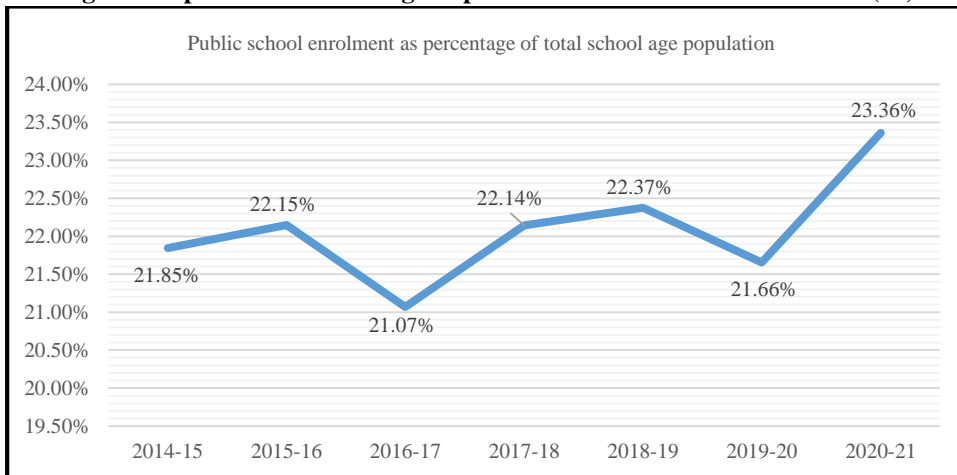


Fig. 4. Proportion of School-age Population Enrolled in Public Schools (%)



4. THE PROXIMATE DRIVERS OF STAGNANT EDUCATION OUTCOMES

At the proximate level, there are two major explanations for the slow progress of education outcomes. Firstly, learning outcomes aren't recording significant improvement because learning has been inadequately prioritised in education policy and practice. Secondly, expansion of schooling appears to have remained a strategic priority of education policy and practice but it hasn't experienced significant improvement either mainly due to the politically-driven, centralised, outdated and discretionary education planning and management practices, and ineffective accountability mechanisms. The latter has resulted in inefficient management of the limited physical, human and financial resources of SED.

4.1. Weak Alignment of Education Policy and Practice with the Goal of Learning

Critical examination of education planning, resource allocation and monitoring framework indicates that improving learning outcomes has not remained a strategic priority. This lack of prioritisation is evident, inter alia, in the budgetary allocation for education, with nearly 99 percent of development expenditures being channeled into physical infrastructure rather than soft aspects of education delivery, such as teacher training, textbook writing, and data and research (Planning and Development Department, 2007-2021) Although official documents and education sector plans acknowledge learning as a key objective (Secondary Education Department, 2013, 2021b), little policy attention and resources are actually directed towards achievement of learning objectives and targets set in sector plans (Baloch, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021a). In the absence of a robust commitment from the government towards inputs related to learning, the limited financial support for learning initiatives primarily originates from external donors (Kakar, 2022).

The weak prioritisation of learning can be attributed, in part, to the poor understanding of learning among key stakeholders situated on both the demand and supply-side of the education system. Politicians and bureaucrats often measure education quality in terms of tangible inputs like school infrastructure and teacher attendance (Barech, 2015; Kakar, 2022). School heads and teachers think about quality education in terms of availability of adequate facilities in school and punctuality and disciplined behaviour of students. Parents, including those who are relatively educated, measure education quality in terms of marks in exams and proficiency in English language (Secondary Education Department, 2021a).

Furthermore, the lack of measurement, monitoring, and reporting of learning outcomes in official data contributes to the under-emphasis on learning. Even the recent reforms in education data system fail to track progress in learning outcomes. Lastly, the traditional organisation of the secondary education department does not explicitly assign responsibility for improving and monitoring learning outcomes, leading policy-makers to overlook the severity of the learning crisis and equate poor learning outcomes with resource inadequacy.

As a result, learning remains missing from the agenda of politicians, bureaucrats, and parents alike. The absence of reliable data on learning outcomes implies that parents, civil society organisations, media, and government can overlook the quality of education. This explains why organised public demand for better education quality is almost non-existent.

Within the realm of school education, the only aspects of learning that garner considerable high-level policy attention are language policy and history textbooks. However, this attention too is driven mainly by ideological motives of nation-building rather than a genuine recognition of the importance of language policy in enhancing learning outcomes. In 2014, the Government of Balochistan enacted a legislation to introduce mother languages as compulsory additional subjects at the primary level (Kakar & Naveed, 2018). While the Act itself was adopted swiftly without much due diligence, the policy attention and resources that were subsequently required for effective implementation were not made available. Availability of trained teachers was not ensured and proper mechanism was not developed for teaching mother languages in areas with diverse population (Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Moreover, the political act of introduction of mother languages as additional subject rather than as medium of instruction imposed an additional burden on children by necessitating the learning of a third language alongside Urdu and English.

In conclusion, the weak prioritisation of learning in education policy and practice in Balochistan arises from inadequate understanding and a lack of emphasis on learning outcomes in official data. Without addressing these fundamental issues and transforming the mindset of key stakeholders, achieving meaningful improvements in learning outcomes will remain a challenge.

4.2. Fragmented and Incomplete Legal and Policy Framework

Over a decade has passed since authority over school education was devolved to provinces, the Government of Balochistan still lacks an approved education policy. The current education policy framework comprises of a mix of executive decisions, sector plans, acts, and departmental notices. In absence of a holistic education policy, five-year sector plans have only partially filled the gap.

The legal framework governing education delivery also exhibits significant gaps. Firstly, the Compulsory Education Act of 2014 is deemed overly idealistic in scope and fails to consider the resource constraints faced by the Secondary Education Department (SED) (Baloch, 2021). Secondly, although curriculum and standards were devolved to provinces, there is still a lack of provincial legislation to govern them. Notably, the adoption of the Single National Curriculum by the provincial government lacked proper due diligence and faced strong objections from the Bureau of Curriculum (D. G. Khan, 2021). Thirdly, in various instances, provincial legislation has been adopted, but the corresponding rules have not been formulated. For instance, the rules of the Compulsory Education Act of 2014 and other legislative acts related to the Balochistan Assessment and Examination Commission (BAEC), Mother Languages as Compulsory Additional Subject, and the Compulsory Education Act have yet to be approved (Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Consequently, this situation has created confusion surrounding roles and responsibilities and has impeded progress in their implementation.

Furthermore, the regulatory framework for private schools is deemed weak and underdeveloped. The existing framework purportedly aims to ensure the availability of essential facilities and maintain a minimum standard of quality in non-state schools. However, the lack of well-defined performance standards makes it challenging to monitor the performance of private schools and enforce compliance. Furthermore, this framework

primarily focuses on monitoring and penalising non-governmental actors rather than fostering them as partners in education delivery (Secondary Education Department, 2021a).

4.3. Centralised and Politically-driven Systemic Planning

The provision of education in Balochistan is characterised by a highly centralised, politically-influenced, and ad hoc planning process. Education planning lacks the foundation of both short-term and long-term plans. While the development of five-year education sector plans has partially improved strategic planning by ensuring the availability of a need-based medium-term plan, the efficacy of these sector plans has been eroded by poor implementation. Joint Education Sector Reviews conducted by SED revealed that merely 25 percent of the targets outlined in the Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013-18 were successfully achieved (Secondary Education Department, 2021a).

In the absence of evidence-based need-assessment studies and annual plans, operational and budgetary planning is conducted in an ad hoc manner, heavily influenced by the preferences of those in positions of authority, particularly the political leadership. Consequently, the process of providing essential education inputs, such as physical infrastructure, textbooks, teachers, trainings, and learning resources, is fragmented and poorly aligned with genuine needs of the education system. In order to elaborate this argument further, a comprehensive review and analysis of public investment planning and teacher recruitment is as follows:

Critical Review of Public Investment Planning for School Education: Available data indicates that the province possesses sufficient school infrastructure at the primary level when compared to the national average. A school is available for every 185 children of primary age in Balochistan compared to 253 children in Pakistan. The findings derived from empirical data are corroborated by the perspectives of community representatives and officials within the provincial education department. Consultations with these stakeholders highlight that the most substantial supply-side factor contributing to dropouts at the primary level is the insufficient availability and poor attendance of teachers (Attaullah, 2021; Izzatullah, 2021; Kaleem, 2021; Mengal, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021a). The limited availability of teachers, caused mainly by delays in hiring, is one reason why nearly one in every five public schools in the province remains non-functional (Secondary Education Department, 2022). Furthermore, these stakeholders have consistently emphasised the need to prioritise teacher availability, the provision of basic utilities such as water and electricity, and the deployment of transportation and mobility support to address the challenges posed by vast distances. Lastly these stakeholders advocate for well-designed enrollment campaigns and the provision of incentives to address demand-side issues related to poverty and cultural barriers (Baloch, 2021; Kakar, 2022; Mengal, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021a).

It is worth noting that both empirical data and qualitative research converge on the conclusion that the traditional approach of horizontally expanding the school infrastructure is not economically viable in Balochistan, given the province's scattered population. Innovative approaches, including the utilisation of digital technology tools

and the provision of transportation support to students and teachers, are recommended to meet the educational needs of the population effectively. Furthermore, research also supports demand-side interventions to address socio-economic drivers of out of school children crisis.

However, despite substantial evidence supporting the consolidation and efficient utilisation of existing schools and exploring innovative solutions, as well as demand-side interventions to address poverty, a critical examination of the development budget for education reveals a predominant allocation toward the construction of physical infrastructure. This singular emphasis on “brick and mortar” investments raises several concerns. Firstly, it indicates a weak alignment of public investment planning with genuine needs of education as highlighted by research, particularly the provision of missing facilities such as water, electricity, and mobility support at post-primary levels and demand-side interventions. While development funds have been allocated for the provision of missing facilities in schools, there is a strong bias toward “infrastructure,” with most of the funds being spent on classrooms and boundary walls. For example, although the number of schools with toilet facilities increased from 2,886 in 2014 to 5,867 in 2019 (Secondary Education Department, 2018, 2021c), most of these newly-built toilets remain without water and sewerage systems (Attaullah, 2021; Izzatullah, 2021; Kaleem, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021c).

Furthermore, a large chunk of the education development budget is allocated to expensive large infrastructure projects for boarding schools and university campuses, often neglecting other genuine needs related to schooling and learning. These projects typically take 5-10 years to complete and enroll only a fraction of the total school-age population. While most of these institutions provide better education than regular public schools, their per capita cost is significantly higher compared to regular public schools. In 2022, Balochistan was home to 15 Cadet Colleges and Residential Colleges, serving a student population of approximately 5,000. It is noteworthy that the operational expenditure per student per annum for these institutions amounted to PKR 450,000. This figure stands in stark contrast to the significantly lower per student per annum operational cost observed in conventional public schools, being only one-eighth of the aforementioned cost in FY 2022.

Secondly, the more concerning aspect is that even the “brick and mortar” investments are not directed to geographic areas where they are needed the most. Instead, decisions regarding the location of new schools and the upgrading and strengthening of existing ones are primarily influenced by political considerations (Attaullah, 2021; Baloch, 2021; Kazmi & Khan, 2018; Mengal, 2021; Yahya, 2022). Members of the provincial assembly identify development budget schemes without proper need assessment, then approve them as Members of Cabinet or provincial Assembly (Izzatullah, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Usually, members of the treasury and opposition benches are allocated a fixed share within PSDP. These MPAs have significant latitude in identifying projects within their allotted share without adequate due diligence, socio-economic and technical appraisal. The role of relevant technical sections and departments has been reduced to a mere formality. The Secondary Education Department, which is

responsible for developing project proposals based on the genuine needs of the education sector, often submits development project proposals at the behest of the incumbent Minister and MPAs, without a proper assessment of the actual needs of the education system. For example, in financial year (FY) 2018-19, around 395 development schemes were sanctioned in the budget. According to the Secondary Education Department, only 16 of these schemes were proposed by the department based on identified needs, whereas 380 schemes were identified by MPAs (Kazmi & Khan, 2018). Similarly, the Planning and Development Department, tasked with reviewing, scrutinising, appraising, and prioritising public investment proposals competing for scarce resources, endorses and approves the proposals received from SED without proper technical, financial, and socio-economic appraisal. Usually, projects lacking political backing and ownership get dropped, regardless of their technical soundness.

In addition to politically-driven planning, the fragmented and piecemeal approach to the construction and operationalisation of new schools and the upgrading of existing ones is also a significant reason for the growing ineffectiveness of development expenditures. The process of constructing new schools is not synchronised with the process of hiring the necessary human resources to make these newly-built schools functional. Consequently, the process of approving posts for new schools (Schedule of New Expenditures) and hiring against the approved posts often commences after the construction work is completed (Secondary Education Department, 2021b). Both approval and hiring processes are complex and frequently experience long delays. As a result, most new school buildings either remain idle for a number of years after construction (Kakar, 2022).

Critical Review of Teacher Recruitment: Another critical issue is the inadequate responsiveness of the education planning system to the issue of teacher shortage in public schools. Despite a substantial deficit in availability of teachers, the education system has not addressed this challenge effectively (Izzatullah, 2021; Wardag, 2021). Approximately 9,000 teaching positions remained vacant in 2022. The most recent large-scale teacher recruitment occurred in 2014-15 when 5,000 teachers were hired through a merit-based system (Kakar & Naveed, 2018). Since then, very few new teacher appointments have taken place, even as the construction and upgradation of schools has continued alongside teacher retirements during the same period. Consultations with stakeholders indicate that the introduction of a relatively merit-based and rules-based policy for hiring teachers in 2014, which reduces room for discretion and manoeuvring, explains why there is lesser high-level push for the recruitment of new teachers (Kakar, 2022).

The absence of qualified teaching staff not only contributes to the proliferation of non-operational schools within the province but also correlates with suboptimal learning outcomes in a substantial number of primary schools where a single teacher shoulders the entire pedagogical responsibility. According to EMIS data, the number of non-functional schools rose from 955 schools in 2014 to 3152 schools in 2021-22 (Secondary Education Department, 2018, 2022). Most of these non-functional schools were built in recent years but remained non-functional due to non-hiring of the necessary teaching and non-teaching staff (Izzatullah, 2021; Kakar, 2022).

The cumulative outcome of the politically-driven, fragmented and centralised education planning processes is that the effectiveness of growing public expenditures has become increasingly limited, resulting in stagnancy in access as well as learning outcomes. For example: the GoB spent nearly PkR 63 Billion from its development budget between 2014 and 2020 for improving education access outcomes (Planning and Development Department, 2007-2021). These expenditures indeed resulted in construction of at least 3000 new public schools, construction of buildings for nearly 3500 shelter less schools, construction of large number of additional classrooms, and establishment of four cadet colleges and BRCs.¹ However, the proportion of enrollments in public schools as a percentage of the total school-age children increased by mere 1 percentage point during the same period i.e. from 22 percent in 2014 to 23 percent in 2020.² These statistics imply that increased public spending on education might not achieve the desired results within the ambit of existing planning and monitoring processes.

4.4. Outdated and Discretionary Workforce Management Framework

The SED operates without a structured, data-driven workforce management framework and specialised institutional arrangements to oversee the extensive workforce and assets within the sphere of school education. The absence of a structured framework necessitates the issuance of notifications as needs arise, leading to a lack of consistency in human resource management (Secondary Education Department, 2021a). For example: the department notably lacks a well-defined transfer posting policy, rendering decisions in human resource management largely discretionary (Izzatullah, 2021; Kakar, 2022; Wardag, 2021). This discretionary approach has left the education system susceptible to individual influences and external pressures.

Secondly, the secondary education department lacks a dedicated unit responsible for the management and development of the workforce. This deficiency leads to unnecessary delays, policy inconsistencies, and discretionary management practices. Furthermore, the management of the approximately 74,173 employees, dispersed throughout every village and union council within the province, relies on an outdated and inefficient manual system. Routine tasks necessitate coordination among multiple segments of the system, resulting in unnecessary delays, heightened transaction costs, and difficulties in performance monitoring. While the Education Management Information System (EMIS) attempts to gather and consolidate data on teachers, this data remains incomplete. The absence of an automated human resource management information system has introduced significant inefficiencies into the system.

Thirdly, an additional challenge arises from the insufficiently specialised skills of personnel responsible for educational delivery. The education system notably lacks specialists in crucial domains, including teacher training, curriculum development, textbook authorship, assessments, data analysis, and education management (Baloch, 2021; Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Consequently, essential technical institutions charged with tasks related to curriculum, textbooks, and assessments are

¹ Author's calculations based on detailed review of Balochistan's development budget of education from 2014 to 2021.

² Author's calculations based on EMIS data 2014-2020.

primarily staffed with personnel possessing a generic skill set. Similarly, individuals responsible for overseeing the entire education system often lack specialised management skills, especially at the district and sub-district levels. The management of the education system is chiefly entrusted to two categories of personnel: generalist managers from federal and provincial civil services cadres, and education managers, primarily stemming from teaching backgrounds. Generalist managers have a supervisory role over educational provisions and wield the greatest authority. Although they lack an educational background but possess broad management skills.

On the other hand, district education managers receive no formal management training, either during their initial education or upon assuming managerial roles (SED, 2021). Furthermore, district education managers typically originate from the teaching cadre. After spending 15-20 years as educators, these managers often encounter challenges when attempting to assert authority and monitor the performance of their former colleagues. This situation presents a potential conflict of interest, as the managers are often highly susceptible to the influence and pressure exerted by teacher unions. Consequently, they struggle to address issues such as teacher absenteeism and related concerns at the district level.

In the absence of a structured, rules-based management framework, decisions concerning appointments, deployments, training, postings, and employee tenures are significantly influenced by external actors, including politicians, bureaucrats, teacher unions, and tribal leaders (Secondary Education Department, 2021b). This high degree of politicisation and vulnerability to external pressures has compromised the independence and impartiality of the education workforce, ultimately adversely affecting the quality of education imparted to children. Notable manifestations of the politicised and discretionary human resource management approach include:

- Frequent and abrupt transfer-posting of administrative secretary and heads of attached sections and organisations has become a common practice. For example, from April 2013 to December 2021, Balochistan experienced 13 different individuals serving as Secretary SED, with an average tenure of eight months. A period of relative stability was observed during Dr Malik's two-and-a-half-year tenure, during which the Secretary changed only twice. Similarly, the heads of attached departments are subjected to frequent, often unjustified changes in leadership. At the district level, District Education Officers (DEOs) and teachers also face frequent, abrupt, and often politically-motivated transfer-posting decisions (Attaullah, 2021). Notably, school heads and district education managers have minimal influence over teacher transfer and posting decisions. Consequently, many rural and remote schools remain without teachers as politically-connected educators secure transfers to urban areas (Izzatullah, 2021; Wardag, 2021; Yahya, 2022).
- Additionally, existing vacancies are often filled through ad-hoc appointments or by assigning additional responsibilities to current officers (Wardag, 2021). These ad-hoc practices have proven counterproductive to organisational capacity.

Table 1

Length of Tenures of Secretaries of Secondary Education Department (2013-2021)

S. No.	From	To	Duration (months)
1	22/04/2013	12/05/2013	0.70
2	19/06/2013	24/10/2014	16.17
3	24/10/2014	25/06/2016	18.00
4	27/06/2016	09/01/2017	6.40
5	24/01/2017	12/06/2017	4.63
6	04/07/2017	20/07/2017	0.53
7	21/07/2017	19/01/2018	6.00
8	19/01/2018	25/10/2018	9.20
9	25/10/2018	11/02/2020	15.57
10	12/02/2020	17/08/2020	6.17
11	17/08/2020	05/08/2021	11.63
12	17/08/2021	06/10/2021	1.67
13	06/10/2021	Date	6.00

4.5. Ineffective Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

The education system in Balochistan exhibits notable deficiencies in its oversight and accountability mechanisms, both at the systemic and individual levels. Systemic accountability, unfortunately, remains conspicuously absent across all tiers of the education system. At the highest echelons of governance, there exists no structured mechanism for periodic performance reviews of ministers. Similarly, the capacity and inclination of secondary education ministers to scrutinise the performance of the bureaucratic apparatus are constrained. Furthermore, the Secretary SED lacks a data-driven, results-oriented framework to gauge and evaluate the performance of attached units. Consequently, the educational landscape is marked by a conspicuous absence of mechanisms for measuring and reporting the performance of key stakeholders. The one domain within school education that garners significant high-level attention, and is associated with a relatively effective top-down accountability structure, pertains to the approval, execution, and oversight of development projects in school education (Baloch, 2021; Kakar, 2022).

In the absence of a comprehensive systemic accountability framework, limited individual-level accountability mechanisms do exist, albeit with a pronounced focus on teachers alone. The primary instruments of individual-level monitoring and accountability include Real-Time School Monitoring (RTSM) data and Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (PERs). However, both these tools exhibit significant shortcomings, offering, at best, a thin input-centric monitoring framework. Annual evaluations have become largely ineffective. Instances of unfavourable evaluations are exceedingly rare, if not non-existent. Similarly, RTSM primarily concentrates on monitoring teacher attendance, inadvertently burdening primary school teachers, the majority of whom manage all six grades of a primary school (Wardag, 2021). Beyond attendance monitoring, there exists no mechanism for assessing the performance of teachers, school administrators, education managers, affiliated organisation staff, or policymakers. A poignant reflection of the prevailing accountability deficit is encapsulated in the following statement from a middle school headmaster:

“I commenced my tenure at this school as a teacher in 2002. Since then, inquiries regarding attendance and school conditions have been made on only two occasions—2014 and 2021. Apart from these isolated instances, no personnel from the education department has probed into my performance or assessed the achievements of the school. When someone holds me accountable, I have the incentive to demonstrate my commitment to excellence. In the absence of such accountability, what impetus do I possess to strive for excellence?” (Attaullah, 2021)

In addition to the limited array of individual-level accountability mechanisms, various social accountability forums were established as part of the BESP 2013-18 implementation. These forums encompassed bodies such as the Local Education Group (LEG), District Education Group (DEG), Local Education Council (LEC), and Parent Teacher School Management Committee (PTSMC), which were established at the provincial, district, cluster, and school levels, respectively. While the establishment of these platforms did enhance community participation in school affairs to a certain extent, the majority of them have become non-functional due to insufficient community engagement and a lack of sustained government support (Attaullah, 2021; Izzatullah, 2021; Kaleem, 2021).

5. DEEPER DETERMINANTS OF STAGNANT EDUCATION OUTCOMES: A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT APPROACH

This section employs Mushtaq Khan’s analytical framework on political settlements to interpret the findings of the preceding sections (Khan, 2018). The political settlement framework offers insightful perspectives for comprehending the interplay between formal and informal institutions, as well as the *de jure* and *de facto* sources of power influencing education service delivery in Balochistan. It aids in uncovering the potential incentives of various stakeholders within an imperfect equilibrium of the system. The political settlement plays a crucial role in shaping the capacity and commitment of elites to education delivery (Hickey & Hossain, 2019). Furthermore, it influences the feasibility of implementing specific reforms in the short to medium term.

Various typologies exist for political settlements, each providing distinct incentives, opportunities, and constraints for public service delivery (Khan, 2010; Wales et al., 2016). The manner in which formal and informal power structures are organised in Balochistan aligns more closely with a fragile and predatory settlement characterised by a high degree of political exclusion, fragmentation, competitive clientelism, and personalised institutions. The primary features of the existing political settlement are as follows:

5.1. High Degree of Fragility and Exclusivity

The current political settlement exhibits weak legitimacy and a considerable degree of forced exclusion. This exclusion operates on two levels. First, pro-independence Baloch separatists challenge the very legitimacy of the State and employ violence to alter the political settlement. Second, the more prominent Baloch and Pashtun nationalist parties, although accepting the State’s legitimacy, find themselves excluded from the political settlement due to their relative reluctance to adhere to the informal

rules dictated by the most powerful player within the ruling coalition—the military (Haq, 2021; Kakar, 2020). The ruling coalition relies on repression and the distribution of political power and development funds to maintain its grip on power.

However, the current political settlement is highly unsustainable for two reasons. Firstly, the cost of sustaining the loosely-bonded ruling coalition within a fragile formal economy is exorbitant. Given that the most powerful actor within the ruling coalition lacks significant legitimacy and social support, there's a constant need to engineer formal political processes (Mengal, 2022). Moreover, as the loyalty of artificial leaders propped up by the military can't be trusted once they build a sufficient independent support base, the military continually produces new, compliant leadership. This mechanism is employed to preserve the coalition through the credible threat of replacing older, now assertive protégés with new ones. Secondly, the excluded groups enjoy more robust and widespread popular support, particularly among the educated middle class and youth. The social networks supporting these excluded groups include an overwhelming majority of the educated middle class, professional groups, and the bureaucracy.

5.2. Political Fragmentation and Low Elite Cohesion

The second defining aspect of the existing political settlement in Balochistan is the obstinately high level of political fragmentation and the corresponding low level of elite cohesion. This fragmentation derives from the prevalence of a tribal mode of social organisation, regionally-segregated ethnic diversity, and the province's limited political influence within Pakistan's majoritarian federal system.

Balochistan features a comprehensive tribal system characterised by clear leadership structures, lineage patterns, strong affiliations, and well-defined dispute resolution mechanisms. Tribal social organisation prevails in most areas of Balochistan, with possible exceptions being Mekran division and urban centres like Quetta. Tribal networks often serve as the default units for political mobilisation and collective action management. The ubiquity of tribal social organisation profoundly affects politics and service delivery. Firstly, tribal social organisation, with its vertically-aligned structure, discourages inclusive and horizontally-oriented class-based political mobilisation, favouring the targeted provision of public goods through patron-client networks (Gazdar, 2007). Secondly, tribal norms of in-group solidarity, reciprocity, and the credible threat of social sanctions often shape individual behaviour in ways that may promote disregard for and poor compliance with formal rules and processes (Lambsdorff, Taube, & Schramm, 2004). This has significant implications for management and accountability processes associated with the provision of public goods, especially at the local level, where tribal norms have eroded formal rules and accountability mechanisms.

Ethnic diversity in Balochistan amplifies the effects of tribalism on development outcomes. While ethnic diversity encourages ethnically-aligned political behaviour, the regional segregation of the two major ethnic groups motivates political competition, negotiation, and accommodation along ethno-regional lines. Moreover, ethnic diversity complicates the task of reaching a consensus on major development priorities or public sector reforms. It also facilitates the 'ethnicisation' of crucial decisions related to the allocation of public resources, goods and services, job distribution, and the creation of new administrative units (Gazdar, 2007).

In addition to tribalism and ethnic diversity, the majoritarian federal design contributes to political fragmentation in the province (Kakar, 2020). To begin with, it renders the province unattractive for nationwide political parties seeking federal-level power, thereby encouraging the growth of smaller regional parties. The combined factors of tribal and ethnic fragmentation, along with the majoritarian federal design, incentivise the growth and proliferation of small ethnic and regional parties, with appeal rarely extending beyond ethnic boundaries.

The low level of elite cohesion is further compounded by the escalating inter-elite competition for access to power, who have strong incentives to use institutions for distributing public goods among their patronage networks. The interaction between formal electoral processes and the informal institutions of tribal social organisation has strengthened and deepened patron-client networks over the years. Fiscal and administrative decentralisation has further intensified political competition among local elites for access to limited public goods.

The cumulative result is that the prospects of a single party securing a majority in the provincial assembly have significantly diminished, and multi-party coalitions have become a structural feature of the polity. Since its establishment as a province in 1970, no party has ever obtained an absolute majority in the provincial assembly (Mehdi, Naqqash, Tariq, & others, 2012a, 2012b). Furthermore, the number of coalition partners has progressively increased over the decades. Coalition politics complicates the agreement on significant policy shifts or reforms. Each faction head and party within a coalition typically wields veto power over key policy decisions and reforms. Similarly, nearly all government coalition members must be rewarded through a share of the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) and influence over personnel transfers to retain their support for the government. There is no political party that takes ownership of the province as a whole; politicians focus almost entirely on their immediate electoral constituencies. Coalition politics has also hindered and diluted accountability, making it difficult to attribute the performance of public sector institutions to a specific party.

5.3. Personalised Institutions

The third defining aspect of the political settlement in Balochistan is the highly personalised nature of its institutions. Political parties are controlled by individuals and dynasties who also shape and determine party policies and strategies. While nominal democratic mechanisms for decision-making exist, they remain weakly operational. Similarly, the provincial bureaucracy is highly politicised and governed according to personalised norms and informal rules, predominantly influenced by tribal and ethnic identities of the actors involved. The introduction of competitive electoral politics at a time when state capacity was underdeveloped and the provincial bureaucracy was relatively new has helped solidify patronage politics and enabled elite capture of public organisations (Hickey & Hossain, 2019).

5.4. Outsized Importance of Development Funds in Politics

The fourth significant feature of the political settlement in Balochistan is the outsized significance of the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). The highly fragmented political landscape, coupled with a negligible private sector

presence and a limited formal productive economy, means that powerful elites have come to utilise budgetary resources acquired through fiscal transfers to accumulate wealth and buy and sustain political loyalties. The development budget holds great political significance in this context. The military employs development funds and associated rent-seeking opportunities such as contracts and procurement opportunities to expand its business empire, reward loyal supporters, and cultivate new leaders. Civilian elites use these funds to maintain otherwise loose and fragile coalitions. The bureaucracy utilises them for corruption and rent-seeking opportunities. Additionally, the limited level of capitalist development means that emerging political entrepreneurs and businesses also focus on the PSDP to accumulate wealth. They build alliances with politicians to secure construction contracts or divert public investments for personal gain. This explains why an increasing number of projects in the PSDP are individual-centric rather than collectively oriented (Mengal, 2021; Shahid, 2018).

Consequently, the share in the PSDP has become a crucial point of contention in inter-elite negotiations and often leads to litigation or coalition break-ups (Buledi, 2022; Shahid, 2020). This behaviour was evident when opposition parties joined forces with dissidents of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) to table a vote of no confidence against Chief Minister Jam Kamal (Khan, 2021; Shahid, 2021). The driving force behind the opposition parties and BAP dissidents was the commitment from the new Chief Minister, also a member of BAP, that members of opposition parties would receive a fair share of the current and upcoming PSDP (Buledi, 2022; Notezai, 2023).

The high level of politicisation of the PSDP has not only institutionalised rent-seeking and clientelist distribution of public resources within Balochistan's political economy but also adversely affected service delivery. Nearly all high-level policy attention, time, and effort are dedicated to the PSDP projects, overshadowing the softer aspects of service delivery. Progress on PSDP projects takes precedence in almost all Cabinet, Ministerial, and other senior-level periodic progress review meetings (Baloch, 2021; Kakar, 2022).

5.5. Implications of Political Settlement for School Education

Short-term elite horizons and constituency-centric priorities: The highly fragile, fragmented, and exclusive political settlement in Balochistan carries significant policy ramifications, notably in the realm of school education. The most noteworthy policy consequence emanates from the conspicuously short-term horizons of political elites. These elites grapple with an inherent inability to make credible long-term commitments, thereby adopting a predatory approach to divert public goods toward their patronage networks. Their inclination toward investing in systemic education reforms remains limited due to uncertainties surrounding their capacity to derive long-term benefits from such endeavours.

Moreover, given that no political party possesses a support base that transcends ethnic boundaries, there is a notable absence of provincial ownership as a cohesive entity, discouraging the introduction of province-wide programmatic interventions in education. Instead, education provision gravitates toward constituency-specific and targeted delivery.

Domination of public agenda setting and accountability discourse by issues of conflict & legitimacy: The ethnic conflict prevailing in the region has exerted a considerable influence on public discourse and agenda setting. It has, in fact, overshadowed issues of service delivery, leading to a disproportionate focus on matters of conflict and the legitimacy of the ruling coalition. As a result, service delivery concerns occupy a lower rung on the agenda-setting ladder, receiving minimal attention in accountability debates. The military-led ruling coalition's primary concerns too remain centered on maintaining order, political control, and the semblance of stability, with education delivery relegated to a secondary priority.

Weak alignment of elite interest with access outcomes: Balochistan's lack of a critical mass of capitalist class, capable of advocating for government investment in education to produce skilled labour, has contributed to the misalignment of elite interests with improvement of learning outcomes as well as expansion of schooling. 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. The prime motivation for elites to invest in education lies in the necessity to build, sustain, and enlarge patron-client networks for electoral gains. The latter has resulted in considerable policy incoherence, even concerning access-related objectives. This dynamic underscores the pre-eminence of short-term, constituency-centric patronage politics in shaping education provision.

Significant disparities arise among political parties within the elite spectrum. The relatively ideological and representative political parties exhibit a vested interest in education provision, not only to build and maintain patron-client networks but also to secure legitimacy among their core supporters. This contrastingly explains the unprecedented surge in public financing, merit-based teacher recruitment, and the implementation of essential reforms in management and governance during Dr. Malik Baloch's two-and-a-half-year tenure with the National Party. These reforms predominantly benefited the educated middle class, a core support base. Most of these reforms survived the government change in 2015 but did not receive the same level of support. Conversely, the relatively non-ideological political parties leverage education primarily for patronage politics, showing little interest in systemic reforms. Both categories of elites prioritise education to access international development financing, albeit with variations in the underlying motivations.

The high political fragmentation and fragility of the political settlement contribute to the disjointed and incoherent nature of reform efforts, often yielding "occasional islands of success." These instances predominantly result in "institutional isomorphism and mimicry," where institutions imitate what is considered "good bureaucratic practice" rather than effecting substantial changes in ground realities (Aiyar, Davis, Govindan, & Kapoor, 2021).

Prevalence of politician-teacher nexus: Within Balochistan, the educational workforce operates within a highly politicised framework, heavily influenced by informal institutions and prevailing social norms. Teachers not only actively engage in various election-related responsibilities but also hold significant sway within their respective constituencies. Their involvement in politically significant tasks, such as census-taking

and election duties, coupled with politically-driven processes of teacher transfer and appointment (Attaullah, 2021; Izzatullah, 2021), has given rise to a nexus between teachers and politicians. This nexus has introduced significant inefficiencies in the education delivery system and hindered reform initiatives. On one hand, it has disrupted the management of the education workforce by promoting unwarranted transfer postings and ad-hoc appointments. On the other, it has eroded formal accountability mechanisms for the education workforce, as many individuals seek refuge in their tribal and ethnic identities to evade scrutiny.

Furthermore, this nexus has made education reform initiatives susceptible to resistance from teacher unions. These unions, characterised by their strong organisation and the ability to thwart reforms seen as impinging upon their core interests, wield substantial influence over political parties, prompting them to yield to the pressure exerted by these unions (Baloch, 2021). Political parties often appease teacher unions, as they play crucial roles in election campaigns and on Election Day.

Weak community ownership and engagement: The engagement and ownership of communities in school affairs represent a notable aspect of the education landscape. However, consultations with school heads and government officials reveal a palpable “lack of interest” on the part of parents in school affairs (Baloch, 2021). Several factors account for this disinterest: the relatively educated and well-off classes have opted for private schools, thus reducing their concerns about the state of public schools (Izzatullah, 2021); and the predominantly pessimistic outlook regarding potential returns from enrolling children in public schools, influenced by low literacy levels among relatively poor parents, has discouraged active engagement in school affairs (Secondary Education Department, 2021a). Consequently, a lack of a well-organised and influential constituency to exert pressure on the education system prevails at local and provincial levels. Additionally, hierarchical tribal structures and in-group solidarity norms impede ordinary parents from participating in school affairs or holding teachers and school administrators accountable (Izzatullah, 2021).

Field research yielded intriguing observations regarding community engagement. Schools, especially middle and high schools, function more effectively in areas where community ownership is strong or under the influence of local leaders. Notably, in instances where community leaders proactively engaged in school affairs, these leaders were not traditional tribal elders but, interestingly, ordinary political workers who had risen to leadership positions. Furthermore, the proliferation of madrassahs in rural areas has gained prominence. These madrassahs function autonomously without formal government or non-profit organisation support, largely due to strong community ownership and support. Community members perceive madrassahs not only through a religious lens but also as privately-owned ventures.

Crowding out of “soft” side of education provision: The monopolisation of the public policy space by the PSDP has crowded out softer issues of education provision. The high-level policy attention, time, and resources that should ideally be directed toward the monitoring and enhancement of school education holistically have been significantly absorbed by development projects (Baloch, 2021). Monthly meetings occur at the Cabinet, Chief Minister, Minister, or Chief Secretary Offices to monitor progress on PSDP projects. Conversely, meetings to monitor the softer and less spectacular facets of

education delivery are irregular and infrequent, sometimes not happening for years (Kakar, 2022).

Viewed through the political settlement framework, it becomes evident that elite interests in Balochistan do not align with the objective of enhancing either learning or schooling outcomes. Instead, these interests are primarily focused on providing targeted benefits to patronage networks. Consequently, the substandard quality of education has compelled and incentivised the more educated and affluent segments of society to disengage from the public schooling system. This disengagement, in turn, has resulted in the absence of an organised and influential constituency capable of exerting pressure on the education system at both local and provincial levels

6. CONCLUSION

The devolution of education to provincial governments following the 18th Constitutional Amendment in Pakistan presented an opportunity for significant change in education management and financing. An observable increase in public spending and the introduction of various educational reforms signified the commitment of provincial governments to improve education outcomes. However, the expectations of commensurate improvements in schooling and learning outcomes remain unmet. While improvement of learning outcomes has not remained the strategic priority of education provision, the expansion of schooling appears to have remained a strategic priority of education policy and practice but it has not experienced significant improvement either, mainly due to the politically-driven, centralised, outdated and discretionary education planning and management practices, and ineffective accountability mechanisms. The in-depth case studies of public investment planning, teacher recruitment, and transfer posting framework reveal the prevalence of high degree of politicisation, centralisation and discretionary practices in education management.

A deeper exploration of these issues through the “political settlement” lens reveals a critical point. The alignment of elite interests is neither directed toward the paramount goal of learning nor access. Instead, elite interests are predominantly rooted in patronage politics, thus motivating education delivery for short-term, clientelist, political objectives. This alignment, in turn, is moulded by the intricate, exclusive, fragmented, and personalised nature of the existing political settlement in Balochistan. The fragile and predatory nature of political settlement has adversely affected both the design and implementation of reform efforts. It has not only contributed to the disjointed and incoherent design of reform initiatives but also undermined the effectiveness of well-designed and well-intended reform efforts, especially those pertaining to improved monitoring and accountability. The cumulative outcome is the inefficient management of the limited physical, human and financial resources of SED, thus undermining the system’s ability to ensure the timely and reliable provision of necessary inputs for enrolment and student retention.

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made to ensure better alignment of elite interest with improvement of learning as well as access outcomes of education in Balochistan

- **Enhancing Inclusivity and Stability in the Political Settlement:** It is imperative to pursue strategies aimed at broadening and stabilising the existing political settlement. This entails considering political reconciliation with armed

militant groups and ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections to facilitate the election of authentic representatives of the populace.

- **Reforming Federal Design:** Exploring alterations to the federal design is essential. Options include creating incentives for the emergence of cross-ethnic political parties or enabling ethno-regional parties to secure a simple majority in the provincial assembly. This could be achieved either through augmenting the powers of the Senate or potentially dividing the province into two administrative entities, both of which have the potential to mitigate political fragmentation along ethno-regional lines.
- **Empowering Education Advocates:** Identify, engage with, and officially recognise individuals with a fervent commitment to education, especially within political parties and civil society. These education champions should be incentivised, engaged and supported to advocate for much-needed education reforms in public discourse, agenda-setting and accountability discussions.
- **Strategic Timing for Education Focus:** Recognise key political junctures and leverage them to intensify the emphasis on enhancing education outcomes. These opportune moments can serve as catalysts for meaningful change in the education sector.
- **Reforms in Public Investment Planning:** It is vital to reform the public investment planning processes so that align public investments respond to the actual needs of education system. The unhealthy influence of MPAs may be curtailed and the role of school heads, district tiers and technical sections may be enhanced in identification of public investment needs and development of project proposals.
- **Localising Administrative Affairs:** Decentralise the day-to-day administrative functions of the education system to lower tiers of governance. This approach promotes localised accountability and concurrently alleviates the unnecessary administrative burden at the provincial level.
- **Creating Political Incentives for Access and Quality:** Foster political incentives for prioritising both access to education and the quality of learning. This can be achieved through data-driven information and advocacy campaigns that shed light on issues related to out-of-school children and substandard education quality.
- **Strengthening of Social Accountability Mechanisms:** Steps may be taken to incentivise, support and strengthen community's engagement in the affairs of schools. This can be achieved through provision of direct or indirect support to already notified community engagement and social accountability platforms. Furthermore, advocacy campaigns targeted at community members may be launched. Support campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the detrimental impact of tribal social norms on the education system. These campaigns should also sensitise local communities to the necessity of active engagement in educational affairs.
- **Developing Data-Based Tools:** Construct data-based tools that enable civil society organisations and other stakeholders in the demand side of education to monitor and measure progress in education outcomes. This may include development of district-

wise or constituency-wise composite indices and publication of constituency-wise data on development expenditures. These tools should facilitate the attribution of progress or regression to specific political representatives.

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