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**Implementation of Education
Policy in Pakistan:
A Systematic Literature Review**

Anjeela Khurram

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review aims to develop a systematic literature review, with an intention to identify the main themes in research so far envisaging the causes and barriers to efficient implementation of education policies in Pakistan. To achieve this end, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) has been employed to set guidelines for data collection. Data (92 research articles) from research studies over the period 2017-2024 on topics related to education policy implementation in Pakistan have been extracted from the databases like Google Scholar, Pub Med, JSTOR and PDR etc. This review extends a well-researched critique of Pakistan's educational policies, offering valuable insights into the historical and contemporary challenges faced by the sector. A study offering a succinct review on various elements identified in the extant research attributing towards the poor implementation of education policies in Pakistan is non-existent. This study bridges this gap. This systematic literature review aims to highlight the variables and factors offering friction to the smooth sail of the efficient implementation of education policies. Findings from the extant literature have been clubbed into major themes and subthemes, indicating various inherent drawbacks in policies and multiple barriers offering friction to implementation of these policies. Some overlapping themes have been delineated for conceptual boundaries to ensure theoretical clarity. Many themes can help in informed decision-making. For instance, one major finding of this SLR posits that ineffective implementation of education policies in Pakistan is the product of ineffective policy making and governance mechanisms.

Keywords: Systematic Literature Review, PRISMA, Education Policy, Implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1947, various educational policies have been devised and revised during the civil and military regimes in Pakistan. Yet, educational policies have not produced the desired educational outcomes and goals to achieve quality, equity, accessibility and many others so far. Multiple successive educational policies have been introduced to improve the educational indicators in Pakistan. However, the implementation of education policies must confront significant hurdles, showing retarded progress. One major cause attributed to this failure can be the fact that the policy-making in the education sector in Pakistan has been plagued by overwhelming unrealistic goals that seem too good to be achieved. Lessons learnt from the past failures, estimations from the real time data, and evidence-based policy-making have never been the part of the policy-making in the education sector in Pakistan. Admittedly, policies in black and white seem appealing and promising. However, the gap between policy making and its implementation in the education sector springs out because of the poor planning, lack of accountability mechanisms, underfunding, political interference, nepotism, corruption and ignoring the contextual demands etc. For instance, the current 62.3 percent literacy rate shows that Pakistan still lags decades to achieve 100 percent literacy rate to achieve the target of compulsory primary education for its children, even after more than 75 years. These statistics depict the inherent weaknesses in education policies, resulting in ineffective implementation frameworks. Likewise, the global perspective of education is to develop a knowledge economy to have a competitive advantage (OECD, 1996). The investment by governments in education reflects the degree of importance a country gives to its education sector by investing to develop its human capital (Dissou, Didic, & Yakautsava, 2016). In Pakistan, the education budget allocations have not been up to the recommended international benchmarks (4-6 percent of GDP). This underfunding affects the construction and maintenance of infrastructures and provisions adversely, deteriorating the overall quality of education. Unfortunately, Pakistan's score on the Human Development Index (HDI) with the value of 0.540 shows its global ranking of 164 out of 193 countries. Its HDI ranking has deteriorated over time. Extant literature undertaking the analysis of education policy documents, plans, reforms, projects and programmes shows various caveats failing the education sector of Pakistan to prioritise its human resources development to ensure a productive labor force in Pakistan.

This systematic literature review (hereafter SLR) unveils the inherent weaknesses in the policy making process vis-a-vis various challenges and obstacles hindering the effective implementation of educational policies in Pakistan. Extant literature confirms that previously the centralised policy making process, ignoring the contextual factors, causes impediments at grassroots level. Likewise, not only has the poor and inadequate resource allocation been a retarding factor for the effective implementation of the education policies, but at times the allocated resources have not even been utilised fully and efficiently. Similarly, political and bureaucratic interferences and unrest, Economic instability, inadequate institutions, lack of qualified staff, institutional inefficiencies, poor governance mechanism, and non-uniform medium of instruction policies are some other factors extracted through this SLR, responsible for the failure of optimal implementation of the educational policies.

Though extant literature is replete with research on various aspects of education policies and their relationship with the educational outcome indicators. Yet, no study has been conducted to present a succinct review on various elements identified in the extant

research attributing towards the poor implementation of education policies in Pakistan. This study bridges this gap. This systematic literature review aims to highlight the variables and factors offering friction to the smooth sail of the efficient implementation of education policies. To achieve this end, a systematic literature review using the PRISMA framework has been carried out on 92 research articles, published during 2017 to 2024.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Admittedly, the significant role the education sector can play in the socio-economic growth of an economy is hard to challenge. Thus, education is taken as a milestone and a pillar for the development of an economy. Advancement in education is proportionally linked with the employment rate in a country (Bakari & Hunjra, 2018). In the context of Pakistan, the policy-makers have been trying to bring improvement in the education system of Pakistan perpetually, focusing on providing universal education to all to achieve 100 percent literacy by 2030 (Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 2017). However, the students' low enrollment rate and less survival rate (Pakistan, Ministry of Education, 2018) are depicting the ignorance of the contextual factors in policy making on the part of stakeholders.

Table 1

<i>Key Goals for the National Economic Transformative Plan in the Education Sector</i>		
Key Indicator	Target	Reference from Research
Increase Early Childhood Education Enrolment Rate	24 percent	
Net Primary Enrollment	From 64 percent to 72 percent	LR05, LR10, LR13,
Increase Primary Completion Rate	28 percent	LR16, LR18, LR21,
Increase Lower Secondary Completion Rate	43 percent	LR22, LR36, LR66, LR72, LR91
Increase Upper Secondary Completion Rate	57 percent	
Increase Tertiary Enrolment	13 percent	
Increase Literacy Rate	10 percent	LR03, LR13, LR36,
Increase Education Spending	From 2.1 percent to 4 percent of its GDP	LR46, LR91
Access to Higher Education	From 9 percent to 15 percent	LR01

Source: URAAN Pakistan.

The current government on realising the deteriorating economic conditions in the country has taken an initiative to bring economic transformation by achieving the targets set in 5Es National Economics Transformational Plan (2024-2035). The 5Es outline five key pillars for transformational progress in the country to achieve the SDGs and to join the league of upper Middle-Income Countries by 2035¹. *Equity, Ethics and Empowerment* constitute the fifth pillar of 5Es. This pillar has been connected to one of the CPEC 2.0

¹ https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/uraanpakistan_book.pdf

five corridors, i.e., *Livelihood Enhancing Corridor*. One domain of the fifth pillar is to improve and expand access to education to enhance capital development in the country. To achieve the end, the key goals for the National Economic Transformative Plan are shown in Table 1.

Therefore, it becomes imperative to unfold the challenges and issues the education sector confronts either due to inherent policy flaws or negligence towards the obstacles offering friction to its implementation. Thus, this SLR after taking a stock of the literature to explore and highlight the causes identified in the extant research proposes that to realise the objectives set in URAAN Pakistan, the initiative should emphasise on the optimal allocation and use of educational resources to improve delivery and quality of education in the country. National educational standards that align with international best practices should be established to steer the nation in one direction. To improve educational delivery, pedagogical approaches with focus on student-centered integrated technology should be adopted. Policy implementation is defined to achieve the goals and objectives following guidelines set (Khan, 2016). In Pakistan, after policy formulation, the main steps of policy implementation like evaluation of results of the policy to establish its effectiveness have mainly been ignored. For an effective implementation, managing the implementation process vigilantly is equally imperative (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Any negligence in this regard can lead towards ineffective implementation. In the context of education policies in Pakistan, setting ambiguous goals and objectives in the policies attributes towards its short fall (Ashraf & Hafiza, 2016). Therefore, this SLR brings to light the important factors responsible for education policies implementation failure.

Multiple educational policies have been formulated for the development of Pakistan, but the inherent flaws in these policies have never been addressed. Table 2 presents a summary of the various education policies in Pakistan, since its genesis in 1947.

Table 2

A Historical Overview of Education Policies of Pakistan

Education Policy	Key Objectives	Regime	Gaps
1947	The 1st educational conference for the reconstruction of the Education system. M Ali Jinnah The 1st Chairperson Various committees (a) Scientific Research & Technical Education Committee, (b) Adult Education Committee (c) University Education Committee, (d) Primary and Secondary Education Committee, (e) Women's Education Committee (f) Committee for Scheduled Caste & Backward Classes Education (g) Cultural Relations Committee etc.		Report submission in Nov 1947. No implementation due to political
1959	Establishment of universities Schooling systems must associate constructively with other systems National language as medium of instruction Compulsory education till the age of 10 years Religious education was declared compulsory	Ayub Khan	Implementation failure due to limited resources and disparaging

Education Policy	Key Objectives	Regime	Gaps
	till middle level, secondary (optional) The equivalent extension of boys' and girls' education ² . Character construction, essential primary education focus on science and methodical education, three year degree programme, eradication of illiteracy, formation of academic grants commissions etc.		circumstances of the country ³ .
1970	More budget allocation for primary education (2652 million rupees) Induction of technological and scientific education to produce skilled manpower, ⁴ Decentralisation of the education administration (educational units). Set the target to achieve the goal of compulsory universal free primary education by 1980 (100 million people including 90 percent from urban areas & 10 percent from the rural areas) ⁵	Yahya Khan	Limited resources and weak position of the state as well as the separation of East Pakistan
1972 ⁶	Promotion of the ideology of Pakistan Gender equality in universal education up to 10th class	Zulfikar Ali Bhutto	Low economic rate, & wars b/w Pakistan & India.
1979	Focus on scientific & technological education Focus on possessing & promoting religious ideologies along with the promotion of scientific & technical education, Equal educational opportunities for male & female, Curriculum revision, Merger of madrassas to create a linkage between technical and scientific education	Zia-ul-Haq	Lack of planning & financial resources.
992	Urdu medium of instructions with separate educational institute for males and female Promotion of Islamic values through education Improvement in female education Demand oriented curriculum Expanding the span of graduate and post graduate studies	PML(N) Government	Change in the politics of Pakistan
1998	Introduction of idea of multiple textbook Diversification of curriculum Development of National Testing Services Expansion and emphasis on technical and science education Upgrading the quality of <i>Deeni Madaras</i> Teacher training programmes both pre and in	Pervez Musharraf	Untrained teachers & lack of quality education

²<http://shoaibahmed86.yolasite.com/resources/pep.pdf>

³Lingard, B., & Ali, S. (2009).

yolasite.com/resources/pep.pdf

Third Five-year plan. Islamabad: Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan.

⁵Government of Pakistan (1970). The new educational policy. Islamabad: Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, Government of Pakistan.

⁶The real contributor towards the change in educational system.

Education Policy	Key Objectives	Regime	Gaps
2009–2015	<p>service</p> <p>Introduction of a comprehensive monitoring system. *</p> <p>Quranic principles & Islamic practices were made as an integral part of the educational curriculum</p> <p>Universal primary education</p> <p>Provision of basic educational facilities & opportunities to people with an aim to expand basic education for creating opportunities for higher education in Pakistan⁷</p> <p>Incentives for the private sector</p> <p>Introduction of computer courses at all levels</p> <p>Promoting research in higher education</p> <p>Grant for affiliation of <i>Madradas</i></p> <p>Budget allocation for education would be 7 percent of the national GDP by 2015</p> <p>Literacy rate will be enhanced to 86 percent by 2015</p> <p>Teachers' minimum qualification at the elementary level will be a bachelor's degree with a B.Ed. and for secondary and higher secondary master's degree with a B.Ed. by 2018</p> <p>Focus on "Early Childhood Education-ECE" for children aged 3-5</p> <p>The uplift of educational quality with the help of six pillars, namely teacher, curriculum, (free) textbooks, assessment, learning environment and taking education as an important element in their life</p>	<p>PPP's Government</p>	<p>Long wish list (allocation for education will be 7 percent of GDP by 2015). Lesser budget allocations, administrative hurdles</p>
2017–2025	<p>To build more public sector colleges & universities and their sub-campuses</p> <p>To support the private sector universities to uplift their educational standards and increase virtual education</p> <p>Importance of special education with enrollment of 50 percent special children by 2025 & also allocation of 5 percent separate budget for special education⁸⁹</p>	<p>PML (N) Government</p>	<p>Lesser budget allocations, administrative issues.</p>

Despite the revised policy-making in the education sector time and again, the policy makers have hardly considered the reasons for the failure and potential recommendations highlighted by the researchers to get insight. The extant literature

⁷ Government of Pakistan (1998). National Education Policy 1998-2010. Islamabad: Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan.

⁸ Government of Pakistan (2017). National Education Policy, 2017. Islamabad: Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan.

⁹ Sajid, A. R. (2012, Dec. 26). Educational Policies of Pakistan—Where Pakistan Stands? The Educationist. Retrieved from <http://educationist.com.pk/educational-policies-of-pakistan-where-pakistan-stands/>.

identifies the strengths and weaknesses of Pakistan's National educational policies, which can be capitalised for knowledge mapping. Therefore, this SLR has been carried out to examine the extent the various aspects of education policies have gathered scholarly attention in Pakistan. This is an exhaustive review of the literature to identify themes, limitations and recommendations proposed by different scholars. Thus, this SLR addresses the following research questions:

Q 1. What major themes the researchers have explored so far in the context of education policies in Pakistan?

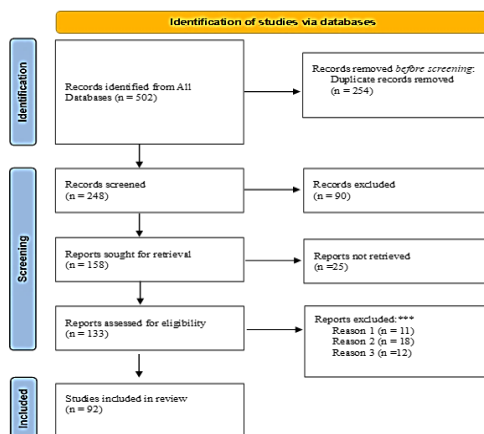
Q 2. What different approaches/models have been employed to examine these themes?

This SLR offers a systematic approach to search, select and analyse the relevant studies on the aspects related to implementation of education policies in Pakistan, as per predefined criteria. The interplay of policy-making, policy reviews, implementation, challenges, socio-political impacts within the context of Pakistan's education system make the basis of the theoretical framework for this SLR. This SLR posits that various underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and socio-political factors play a decisive role in the education policy formulation in Pakistan. The gulf between the central government directives and local-level adaptations becomes evident by examining the results of their implementation like perpetuating inequalities, showing caveats in accessibility and inclusivity. It seems that these policies serve the interests of some specific stakeholders and do not align with national development goals to achieve economic competitiveness. A mapping of the extant research in this SLR shows not only the areas where the literature is concentrated, but the under-explored domains as well. This SLR has helped in identifying common themes, and patterns in the literature that have been explained in the findings section. The SLR of the extant research highlights multiple challenges that hamper the effective execution of education policies. The governance mechanism of the education sector in Pakistan has been tarnished by institutional inefficiencies, corruption, mismanagement of resources, political interference, lack of transparency, and poor monitoring. Instances of ghost schools and ghost teachers, unmeritorious hiring, lack of robust evaluation mechanisms to track progress and assess the impact of policies are the indicative of the corruption within the system. This SLR pinpoints the multiple concerns raised by the research, regarding the deteriorating educational standards. Similarly, this SLR brings to light various indicators to show the current situation of education progress as well as various variables in the extant research, attributable to the poor implementation of the education policies in Pakistan. In short, the chunk of literature concentrated with main challenges, opportunities, indicators, themes and recommendations has been summarised in this SLR in Table 3. Likewise, this synthesis has identified the less explored domains dealing with the implementation mechanism, thus paving avenues for future research.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This systematic literature review follows the Moher, et al. (2015) guidelines for preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) to extract the most relevant information from the literature for this review. PRISMA framework ensures the replicability and quality of the review process (Pussegoda, et al. 2017). The PRISMA guidelines are structured around four different steps: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. These guidelines have enabled a systematic examination of extant research using a review protocol to describe the article selection (inclusion and

exclusion) criteria, search strategy, data extraction, and data analysis procedures have been developed (see Figure 1).



***Reasons mentioned in the main methodology section

3.1. Identification–Search Strategy and Data Sources

For this review, the articles have been extracted from Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR and *The Pakistan Development Review* (PDR) using the keywords like “Education Policy”, “Implementation” and “Pakistan”. The use of multiple databases avoids the possible omission of relevant studies (Salvador-Olivan, et al. 2018). Using these keywords, some 502 documents have been retrieved from these databases. Before selecting articles, the inclusion and exclusion criteria have been defined. The articles have been downloaded, and their references have been imported to excel sheet. Here, 254 duplicate articles have been removed.

3.2. Screening–Selection of Studies

Titles and abstracts of the remaining 248 retrieved documents have been screened to determine paper eligibility for their inclusion in this SLR. This has helped with the selection of 158 articles from the retrieved documents, after removing 90 articles. In the next step, the full text of potentially relevant studies has been reviewed for final inclusion. Before this, the selection criteria have been established according to the research question

3.3. Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria are the primary standards required for the design of high-quality research protocols to include inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic reviews (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). For an SLR, the inclusion criteria are the key characteristics of the research articles under examination corresponding to the research objective. For this SLR, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are mentioned in Table 2.

Table 3

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies mentioning the keywords.	Studies that do not focus on Education Policy Implementation in Pakistan (11 studies excluded)
Studies published in English.	Studies dealing with other aspects like higher education, madrassas etc. (18 studies excluded)
Studies available with full text.	Books, book chapters, reports and conference proceedings (12 studies excluded)
Studies published from 2017 to 2024	Studies published prior to 2017
	Studies published in a language other than English

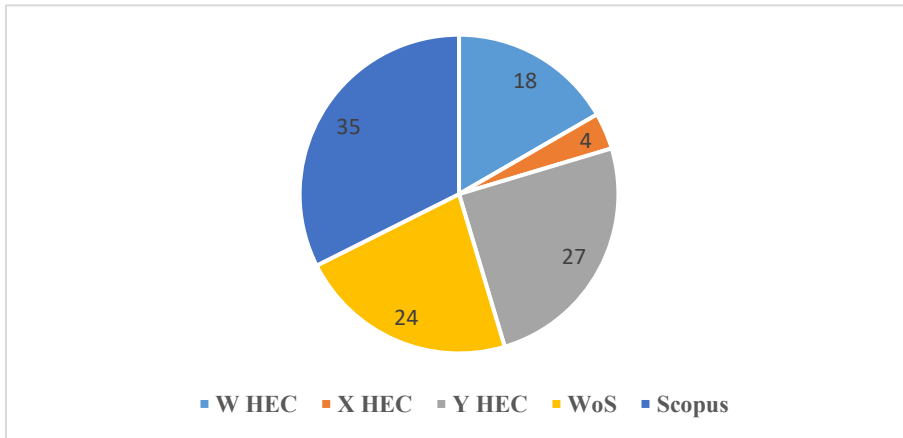
This SLR includes 92 studies that investigate the various aspects dealing with the implementation of education policy in Pakistan. Since there are hundreds of thousands of studies available on the web, a chronological filter of 2017-2024 for the year of publication has been applied. The search produced 92 research articles and have been incorporated into the final data set.

3.4. Compilation of the Corpus of Analysis

The selected articles have been organised in alphabetical order by their year of publication.

These articles have been coded (see Appendix 1). The thematic content analysis of the articles has been conducted.

Fig. 1. Index wise Distribution of the Selected Articles

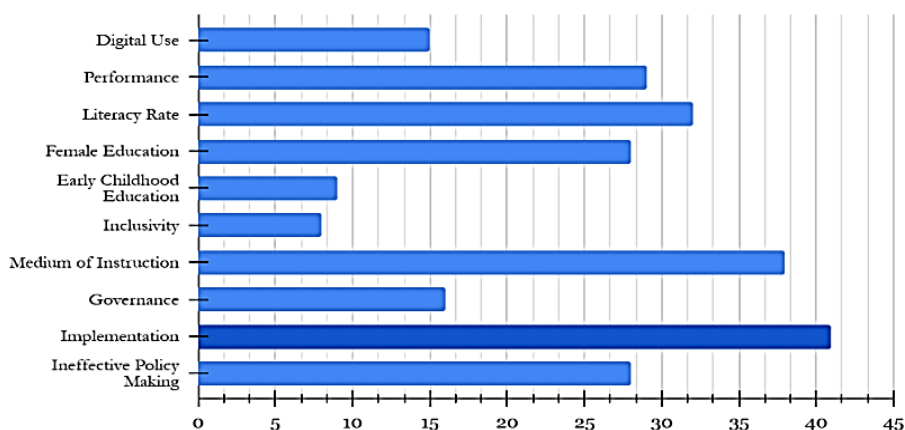


4. FINDINGS

After conducting thematic analysis of the selected articles (n=92), I have extracted multiple sub-themes and the key themes the researchers have explored so far in the context of education policies in Pakistan, thus addressing the first research question of this SLR. After getting familiar with the sub-themes, it has been realised that these sub-

themes can be clubbed into main themes, depending upon their relevancy and interconnectedness. The theoretical framework for this SLR has helped in identifying the key themes in extant research. The extracted sub-themes, themes and their related studies with codes have been summarised in Table 3, which also shows the frequency of the themes that have emerged during the thematic analysis. To know the different approaches employed to examine the themes in the selected articles, I came across mixed results. The qualitative studies are predominant in the selected articles (n=71) as compared to quantitative (n=14) and mixed method studies (n=7). Figure 2 shows the Index wise distribution of the selected articles. The articles (n=92) have 1214 total citations. The frequency of the main themes appearing is shown in Figure 3. The themes extracted are explained as follows.

Fig. 2. Frequency of the Themes as Merged after SLR



4.1. Ineffective Policy Making (28) (LR01, LR02, LR07, LR08, LR09, LR10, LR15, LR17, LR20, LR21, LR27, LR35, LR37, LR55, LR74, LR78)

An education policy can neither be formulated nor be implemented in a vacuum (Skolnik, 2010). Policy making context like culture, history, regions, political and stakeholders' influence, and resilience are the factors that determine the outcomes of an educational policy. In the context of Pakistan, both micro and macro factors affect policy formulation and its implementation. The systematic review of the extant literature suggests that the involvement of bureaucrats not educationists, lack of research-based policy making, influence of foreign aid, incapable policy makers are the major reasons for ineffective policy making in Pakistan (Ahmad, et al. 2021, 2022; Ali & Ahmed, 2023; Anwar, et al. 2017; Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Aslam, et al. 2022). In the context of Pakistan, one can posit that researchers and policy-makers abode within total distinct communities with different orientations, values, viewpoints, and timelines (Muzzaffar & Ayesha, 2013). This is apparent in policy making scenarios in Pakistan. Similarly, ignoring policy gaps (Ambreen, 2022), class divide, ethnicity, national integration, social cohesion, regional disparity, socio-economic factors (Akram, 2020; Khan, 2018; Khan, et al. 2020b; Shah, 2021) and local needs and contexts (Anwar, et al. 2017) are some other factors attributing to flawed policy making. For effective policy making, the need is to promote real time competencies, focusing on innovation, risk and social transformation (Abbas & Hussaini, 2022) and to ensure the local government reforms (Farooqi & Forbes, 2020).

Table 4

Key Themes and Sub-themes Extracted from Systematic Literature Review with Codes

Themes/Areas for Improvement	Sub-Themes	Codes of Studies
Ineffective Policy-making (28)	Promote real time competencies, focus on innovation, risk & Social transformation, Class Divide, Ethnicity, National integration, social cohesion, regional disparity, Socio-Economic Factors, Policy gaps, Involvement of bureaucrats, No Educationist, Lacks Research, Local government Reforms, Ignoring local needs and context, Foreign Aid, Weak Policy-makers etc.	LR01, LR02, LR07, LR08, LR09, LR10, LR15, LR17, LR20, LR21, LR27, LR35, LR37, LR55, LR74, LR78
Implementation (41)	Lack of coordination, Resistance to change, Communication, Teachers' attitudes, Administration irregularities, Uneven Implementation across provinces, Political Unrest, Lack of political will/Govt role, Financial Constraints, Implementation, Material Constraints, Qualified Staff, Conflicts.	LR02, LR08, LR09, LR12, LR14, LR17, LR21, LR22, LR26, LR32, LR40, LR46, LR47, LR51, LR59, LR64, LR65, LR77, LR82, LR83, LR89
Governance (16)	Transparency, Monitoring and Evaluation, Lack of documentation, Monitoring Mechanism, Accountability, Corruption.	LR07, LR09, LR10, LR17, LR22, LR65, LR68, LR85, LR86, LR88, LR90
Medium of Instruction (38)	Translanguaging, Apathy towards local languages, English Status symbol/Colonial legacies, Exclusion Factor, Bilingual Policy, Bilingual MOI, EMI/MOI, Mother tongue/Regional Language, Multilingual groups, Teachers Qualification.	LR03, LR06, LR11, LR12, LR23, LR24, LR28, LR31, LR32, LR44, LR54, LR58, LR60, LR61, LR62, LR63, LR78, LR87, LR91, LR92
Inclusivity (8)	Infrastructure, Trained Teachers, Inclusivity, Multi-religious Curriculum, Children with Special Needs (CWSN)	LR09, LR49, LR51, LR71
Early Childhood Education (9)	ECE Facilities, ECE Qualified Teachers, Awareness, Overcrowded classrooms, Teachers Behavior, Contextualized Curriculum ECE.	LR05, LR10, LR21, LR72, LR72
Female Education (28)	Low Enrollment, Community Engagement, Poverty, Policy Reforms, Collaboration, Self-Interests, Economic Growth, Culture, Demographic Growth, Resource Allocation, Inequality, WASH, Separate Schools, Security, Gender Disparity.	LR13, LR18, LR21, LR28, LR29, LR36, LR42, LR43, LR45, LR54, LR55, LR64, LR65, LR73, LR85, LR90
Literacy Rate (32).	Falling Standard, Quality of Education, Curriculum, Accessibility, MOI, Teachers Qualification, NER, Schools/Infrastructure, OOSC (Gray line Children).	LR04, LR09, LR16, LR18, LR19, LR22, LR28, LR29, LR36, LR38, LR40, LR43, LR48, LR52, LR53, LR66, LR68, LR69, LR71, LR75, LR78, LR79, LR81, LR82, LR85, LR86, LR91

Themes/Areas for Improvement	Sub-Themes	Codes of Studies
Performance (29)	Teachers Performance, Academic Outcomes, STEM, Science Education, Awareness, PPP, Private Schools outperform Public Schools, Resource Allocation, Trust Deficit, Islamic Ideology, Federal control, Teacher Training, Examination System, Stratification of Education Opportunities.	LR02, LR09, LR16, LR25, LR27, LR28, LR30, LR37, LR39, LR47, LR48, LR49, LR50, LR51, LR52, LR72, LR76, LR77, LR80, LR85, LR87, LR88, LR91
Digital Use (15)	Technology Integration, Lack of Preparedness, Digital Divides, Blended Learning, Infrastructure, Management, Teachers' ICT Training, Lack of Technical Skills and Tool Shortages, Electricity Issues	LR02, LR08, LR50, LR51, LR59, LR67, LR82, LR84, LR85

4.2. Implementation (41) (LR02, LR08, LR09, LR12, LR14, LR17, LR21, LR22, LR26, LR32, LR40, LR46, LR47, LR51, LR59, LR64, LR65, LR77, LR82, LR83 and LR89)

The thematic analysis of the selected articles for this SLR has resulted in the emergence of the following sub-themes, which all have been clubbed into the major theme “implementation”. These sub-themes have been mentioned in these articles 41 times. The sub-themes posit some factors contributing towards poor implementation of the education policy in Pakistan. These are lack of coordination, resistance to change, communication gap, teachers' attitudes, administration irregularities, uneven implementation across provinces, political unrest and qualified staff (Abbas & Saeed, 2021; Ahmad, et al. 2021; Ali, *et al.* 2024; Ali, 2017; Ambreen, 2022; Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Asghar & Bhatti, 2023; Jamal & Dubash, 2018; Kakar, 2023). Likewise, lack of political will to improve education indicators across the country, the dormant role played by the government role, the conflicts are some other attributes (Ambreen, 2022; Jamal & Dubash, 2018; Nabi & Nazir, 2020). Financial constraints (Ali, 2017; Ambreen, 2022; Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Asghar & Bhatti, 2023; Jamal & Dubash, 2018; Kakar, 2023; Muhammad, et al. 2024), and material constraints (Channa, et al. 2021) are other factors worsening the situation. Investment in education is often seen as a key element of the economic development process. The public sector is mainly contributing towards financial resources for education. Figures show that the portion of public expenditure on education in Pakistan is around 2.3 percent of its GDP, which is very low if compared to the countries like Bangladesh (2.5 percent), Thailand (4.2 percent), South Korea (4.6 percent), Iran (4.7 percent), Malaysia (6.2) etc.

4.3. Governance (16) (LR07, LR09, LR10, LR17, LR22, LR65, LR68, LR85, LR86, LR88, LR90)

Bad governance in the education sector in Pakistan has been a question mark for many decades. Through effective monitoring and evaluation, governance can be ensured. However, monitoring and evaluation have hardly been the embedded part of any policy making, leaving loopholes for inefficiencies and making the education sector vulnerable. The extant literature highlights the issues of transparency, monitoring and evaluation (Ahmad, et al. 2022; Akram & Yang, 2021; Ambreen, 2022; Asghar & Bhatti, 2023; Naz, et al. 2020; Nisa et al., 2021), lack of documentation (Ambreen, 2022) and accountability

(Akram, 2020; Asghar & Bhatti, 2023). Similarly, lack of a monitoring mechanism to monitor the progress of the policies is non-existent in Pakistan (Wilson, et al. 2022; Yasin, et al. 2023; Yousaf, et al. 2023; Nisa, et al. 2021). While, corruption is eroding this growth (Nabi & Nazir, 2020).

4.4. Medium of Instruction (38) (LR03, LR06, LR11, LR12, LR23, LR24, LR28, LR31, LR32, LR44, LR54, LR58, LR60, LR61, LR62, LR63, LR78, LR87, LR91, LR92)

English being the language of the elites has been used both officially and informally. Rooted back to the colonial legacy, English has been considered a status symbol and an excluding factor in the education sector as well (Abdullah, 2020; Ahmad & Gujjun, 2022; Jabeen, 2023; Yasmin, *et al.* 2023). However, English as a medium of instruction demands proficient and qualified teachers (Channa & Panezai, 2019). Extant research on English as a medium of instruction (Ashraf, 2018; Jabeen, 2023; Manan, 2019) advocates the need of considering the conceptual clarity of the students that can better be achieved using their mother tongue (Asif, *et al.* 2020; Yasmin, *et al.* 2023). Though translanguaging is a cognitive ability (Ali, *et al.* 2024; Ashraf, 2018), however, an apathy prevails towards local languages in the educational institutes (Asif, *et al.* 2020; Manan, 2019).

Some researchers have explored the prospects of bilingual policy for medium of instruction (Ahmad & Gujjun, 2022; Jabeen, 2023), still the conflict between the language policies and planning in the education sector and the real practices show the caveats inherited in the policy making process. This draws the attention to consider the multilingual groups while devising the policies (Ashraf, 2018; Jabeen, 2023).

4.5. Inclusivity (LR09, LR49, LR51, LR71)

Extant literature proposes various methodologies to cater to the children with special (CWS) needs in schools, focusing on the initiative taken to include the children with disabilities in the mainstream (Kazimi & Kazmi, 2018; Kamran & Bano, 2024). This necessitates that educators should be trained enough to teach CWS needs (Kamran & Bano, 2024). Pakistan, being the signatory of various global conventions and agreements, has been committed to remove the gender differences in education and guarantee equal admittance at all stages of education and vocational training for the disadvantaged, including persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and marginalised children by 2030 (United Nations 2015). Marginalisation (Basit, Ashfaq, et al. 2022; Bughti & Kazimi, 2021), the lack of physical and human resources, professional development of teachers (Ehsaan, Khan, & Gulzar, 2020; Ashraf, Bashir, & Fatima 2020; Kamran & Bano, 2024), the lack of community-based Collaborations (Kazimi & Kazmi, 2018), curriculum modifications, recognition of all types of disabilities (Gilani, Waheed, & Lakhvi 2020). Another important factor to be considered is the religious pluralism in Pakistan, thus, there should be the inclusion of a multi religious curriculum as well (Kamei, 2018; Pajwani & Chaudhary, 2022).

4.6. Early Childhood Education (ECE) (9) (LR05, LR10, LR21, LR72, LR72)

The children comprising 3 to 5 years are included in the ECE age group. ECE has been formally recognised in the NEP by the public sector in Pakistan. To achieve the goals set to ensure ECE in Pakistan, there should be adequate ECE facilities in the schools (Ahmad, et al. 2019; Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Qurban & Amin, 2019). Likewise, the

teachers should be qualified to cater with the children of this age cohort (Ahmad, et al. 2019). There should be Contextualised Curriculum ECE prevalent in the classrooms (Ahmad, et al. 2019, Akram & Yang, 2021). In the public sector, mostly the classes are overcrowded, therefore, the need is to ensure a proper teacher student ratio, so that the children can get sufficient attention (Qurban & Amin, 2019). Teacher behavior towards students and mass awareness are also important factors (Arshad & Zamir, 2018; Qurban & Amin, 2019).

4.7. Female Education (28) (LR13, LR18, LR21, LR28, LR29, LR36, LR42, LR43, LR54, LR55, LR64, LR73, LR85, LR90)

To achieve gender equality and equity in education by 2013 has been one of the major objectives of national education policy. Various factors prove hurdles to achieve this goal. The school proximity directly restricts females' mobility, thus dropping their attendance rate. Therefore, female education is greatly determined by proximity of schools determines female enrollment rate (Nisa, et al. 2021; Hussain, et al. 2022; Naz, et al. 2020; Shah & Padda, 2023; Yasin, et al. 2023). In Pakistan, the cultural stricture accords a subordinate status to females, thereby denying their equal access to education (Khan, et al. 2020b; Ali, et al. 2021). In the face of the current demographic growth and poverty, parental choice favors sending their male offspring to schools rather than their female ones (Ali, et al. 2021; Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2022; Arshad & Zamir, 2018).

Likewise, the separate schools for male and females, facilities of WASH and security are factors to facilitate female enrollment and retention in the education system (Gao, et al. 2024). The community engagement and collaborations, and policy reforms to eradicate this gender disparity in enrollment rate can result in economic growth of the country (Barrera, et al. 2022; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Muhammad, et al. 2024; Nabi & Nazir, 2020; Jamal, et al. 2023).

4.8. Literacy Rate (32) (LR04, LR09, LR16, LR18, LR19, LR22, LR28, LR29, LR36, LR38, LR40, LR43, LR48, LR52, LR53, LR66, LR68, LR69, LR71, LR75, LR78, LR79, LR81, LR82, LR85, LR86, LR91)

The target to achieve 100 percent literacy rate has been hurdled by various factors like accessibility to the schools and school infrastructure (Akram, 2020; Amir, et al. 2020; Gao, et al. 2024; Zia, et al. 2021). The medium of instruction other than the mother tongue or Urdu, curriculum, teacher qualifications and quality of education have been another factor responsible for decreasing survival rates in schools (Akram, 2020; Aman & Saeed, 2019; Amir, et al. 2020; Asghar & Bhatti, 2023; Awan, et al. 2023; Gao, et al. 2024; Hafeez, et al. 2016). These standards are falling, and it is becoming a challenge to maintain NER at schools (Afzal & Qadir, 2022; Aman & Saeed, 2019; Barrera, et al. 2022). Special measures are required to deal with the issue of the out of school children (Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2022).

4.9. Performance (29) (LR02, LR09, LR16, LR25, LR27, LR28, LR30, LR37, LR38, LR39, LR47, LR48, LR49, LR50, LR51, LR52, LR72, LR76, LR77, LR80, LR85, LR87, LR88, LR91)

This SLR has extracted various themes explaining the reasons behind the poor performance of the education system like federal control (Abbas & Saeed, 2021), Islamic ideology (Kamei, 2018; Qurban & Amin, 2019), trust deficit (Yousaf, et al. 2023). Old-dated examination system (Akram, 2020), stratification of education opportunities

(Yasmin, et al. 2023), and no evaluation of teachers' performance (Hali, et al. 2021) are some reasons that can be attributed to the poor academic performance in the education sector (Asim, et al. 2021; Beg, et al. 2019; Khan & Irshadullah, 2018; Kakar, 2023; Hali, et al. 2021). To improve the quality of education, the government has taken the initiative of public private partnership (PPP) (Aman & Saeed, 2019; Kalim & Bibi, 2019). The education outcomes show that public schools outperform the private ones (Khan, 2017). Similarly, the intervention of STEM in schools has also improved the results, owing to better resource allocation (Awan, et al. 2023; Wilson, et al. 2022; Sahito & Wassan, 2024; Shah, et al. 2019). Similarly, interventions to train teachers have also shown good prospects (Kamran & Bano, 2023, 2024; Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020; Zia, et al. 2021).

4.10. Digital Use (15) (LR02, LR08, LR50, LR51, LR59, LR67, LR82, LR84, LR85)

In the era of this digitalisation, it becomes imperative to have technology Integration in the education system (Abbas & Saeed, 2021; Kamran & Bano, 2023; Kamran & Bano, 2024; Lynch, et al. 2024). However, the lack of preparedness (Kamran & Bano, 2023), insufficient infrastructure (Lynch, et al. 2024; Siddique, et al. 2023), management practices (Ahmad, et al. 2021), lack of technical skills, and tool shortages, electricity power failure (Abbas & Saeed, 2021; Nayazi, et al. 2023), and digital divides (Wilson, et al. 2022) have been impeding the process. For blended learning ((Soomro, et al. 2018; Wilson, et al. 2022), it is important that teachers should have ICT trainings (Nayazi, et al. 2023).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review explores and highlights various impediments slowing down the effective implementation of education policy in Pakistan. This SLR proposes that to realise the objectives set in URAAN Pakistan, the initiatives should emphasise on the optimal allocation and use of educational resources to improve delivery and quality of education in the country. National educational standards that align with international best practices should be established to steer the nation in one direction. To improve educational delivery, pedagogical approaches with focus on student-centered integrated with technology should be adopted.

Since its genesis, Pakistan has witnessed the devising of multiple education policies. However, these policies have not served the purpose of achieving 100 percent literacy rate and universal primary education rate across the country. Foremost, there is an urge to increase and optimise the education budget to a minimum of 4 percent of GDP in line with international recommendations. The repetitive formulation of policy in a sector itself shows the inherent flaws embedded in the policies devised. Each new policy is regime influenced. New policies are devised into isolation. Globally, liaison among academia, policymakers and industry exists not only for effective policy making as per demands and needs, but also to ensure the prospects of effective implementation. This practice has been non-existent in the case of Pakistan. The academic scholars and policymakers in Pakistan are believed to be lodged in disjointed domains with their distinct orientations in terms of values (Muzzaffar & Ayesha, 2013). Therefore, this literature review is an attempt to take a stock of the extant literature to underpin the attributes (extracted from the literature review of research studies (n=92) from 2017 to 2024) causing impediments for the smooth sail of these policies to achieve their objectives. This SLR has tabulated the reasons identified in the extant literature, which can be used by the policymakers for knowledge mapping (Table 3). This review has

diagnosed the problems the policy-makers can consider to bridge the policy gaps. For instance, this review study consorts various factors responsible for flawed policymaking as pointed by multiple researchers like, ignoring local demands and contexts (Anwar, et al. 2017), ethnicity, social cohesion, class divide, regional disparity, national integration, and socio-economic factors (Akram, 2020; Khan, 2018; Khan, *et al.* 2020b; Shah, 2021) and many others.

The systematic literature review of the extant research posits that the objectives set in these policies are too ambitious to be realistic. Given the diverse socio-political context in Pakistan, this SLR suggests that for an effective implementation, the unique challenges and opportunities in Pakistan should be taken account of while formulating education policy. The policy-makers should take into consideration the demands emerged among masses because of the existing disparities like regional, lingual, social class in the diverse context of Pakistan to ensure an integrated and inclusive education system in Pakistan. This Systematic Literature Review presents multitudes of factors that one way or the other show the reasons for the failure of educational policies to achieve the set goals. This failure starts even before the policy formulation stage, when no principal stakeholder heeds to conduct the needs analysis in various regional contexts. Similarly, policy makers should opt for the data-driven, evidence-based policy-making to be beneficial to all beneficiaries, not to serve the personal and political interests of the stakeholders. The need is to define and establish some concrete *national education standards* and the regime should be a means to achieve those ends. Likewise, for an effective and transparent implementation, the need is to introduce the audit mechanism for budget, digitised systems of monitoring the implementation measures of education policies at federal, provincial, and district levels. With an efficient monitoring and evaluating system, real-time progress can be tracked to make informed adjustments to policies. The education policy should serve the purpose of developing the human resource capital of Pakistan.

This literature review brings forth various issues and caveats embedded in the education policies and has been identified by the eminent researchers. This stock of extant research offers valuable insights for policymakers to consider informed decision making that should be evidence-based for effective implementation to improve the educational landscape of Pakistan.

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LR01	Abbas & Hussaini, 2022	2022	Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
LR02	Abbas & Saeed, 2021	2021	SSRN 3842557
LR03	Abdullah, 2020	2020	New Horizons
LR04	Afzal & Qadi, 2022r	2022	EduLine: Journal of Education and Learning Innovation
LR05	Ahmad, et al. 2019	2019	Global Regional Review
LR06	Ahmad & Gujjun, 2022	2022	European Journal of Language Policy
LR07	Ahmad, et al. 2022	2022	Perennial Journal of History
LR08	Ahmad, et al. 2021	2021	Psychology and Education
LR09	Akram, 2020	2020	Journal of Social Sciences Advancement
LR10	Akram & Yang, 2021	2021	International Journal of Humanities and Innovation
LR11	Ali, 2020	2020	IARS' International Research Journal
LR12	Ali, et al. 2024	2024	Pakistan Social Sciences Review
LR13	Ali, et al. 2021	2021	Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review
LR14	Ali, 2017	2017	Globalisation, Societies and Education
LR15	Ali & Ahmed, 2023	2023	Policy Futures in Education
LR16	Aman & Saeed, 2019	2019	Journal of Elementary Education
LR17	Ambreen, 2022	2022	Pakistan Journal of Social Research
LR18	Ambreen & Mohyuddin, 2022	2022	Pakistan Journal of Social Research
LR19	Amir, et al. 2020	2020	Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
LR20	Amwar, et al. 2017	2017	Journal of Education in Black Sea Region
LR21	Arshad & Zamir, 2018	2018	JECCE
LR22	Asghar & Bhatti, 2023	2023	Voyage Journal of Educational Studies
LR23	Ashraf, 2018	2018	Current Issues in Language Planning
LR24	Asif, et al. 2020	2020	sjesr

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LR25	Asim, et al. 2021	2021	International Education studies
LR26	Aslam, et al. 2019	2019	Oxford Review of Education
LR27	Aslam, et al. 2022	2022	Sage Open
LR28	Awan, et al. 2023	2023	Voyage Journal of Educational Studies
LR29	Barrera, et al. 2022	2022	Review of Economics and Statistics
LR30	Beg et al., 2019	2019	National Bureau of Economic Research.
LR31	Channa & Panezai, 2019	2019	The Qualitative Report
LR32	Channa, et al. 2021	2021	Asian Englishes
LR33	Faizi, et al. 2020	2020	Pakistan Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences Research
LR34	Fakir, et al. 2024	2024	International Journal of Educational Management
LR35	Farooqi & Forbes, 2020	2020	Public Management Review
LR36	Gao, et al. 2024	2024	European Journal of Education
LR37	Khan, 2017	2017	Pakistan Journal of Education
LR38	Hafeez, et al. 2016	2016	Pakistan Development Review
LR39	Hali, et al. 2021	2021	International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies
LR40	Hassan, et al. 2023	2023	IBA Business Review
LR41	Hoque, et al. 2024	2024	Human Resources Management and Services
LR42	Hussain, et al. 2022	2022	The Mind-Journal of Psychology
LR43	Islam & Asadullah, 2018	2018	PloS one
LR44	Jabeen, 2023	2023	International Journal of Multilingualism
LR45	Jamal, et al. 2023	2023	Russian Law Journal
LR46	Jamal & Dubash, 2018	2018	European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
LR47	Kakar, 2023	2023	Pakistan Development Review
LR48	Kalim & Bibi, 2019	2019	Journal of Social Sciences Advancement

Code	Author(s)	Year	Journal
LR49	Kamei, 2018	2018	Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in
LR50	Kamran & Bano, 2023	2023	International Journal of Inclusive Education,
LR51	Kamran & Bano, 2024	2024	Pakistan Development Review
LR52	Khan & Irshadullah, 2018	2018	PUTAJ- Humanities & Social Sciences
LR53	Khan, 2018	2018	Journal of Religious Studies
LR54	Khan, et al. 2020a	2020	sjesr
LR55	Khan, et al. 2020b	2020	Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language
LR56	Khan, et al. 2019	2019	Review of Economics and Development Studies
LR57	Khushik & Diemer, 2018	2018	Social Science Learning Education Journal
LR58	Burke, 2019	2018	0
LR59	Lynch <i>et al.</i> , 2024	2024	Educational Review
LR60	Majoka & Khan, 2017	2017	Italian Journal of sociology of education
LR61	Manan, 2017	2017	Language Sciences
LR62	Manan, 2019	2021	0
LR63	Azeem, et al. 2021	2021	Sage Open
LR64	Muhammad, et al. 2024	2024	Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom
LR65	Nabi & Nazir, 2020	2020	Pakistan Journal of Social Research
LR66	Nawaz, et al. 2021	2021	Global Regional Review
LR67	Nayazi, et al. 2023	2023	Life Science Journal
LR68	Naz, et al. 2020	2020	Pakistan Development Review
LR69	Naz, et al. 2023	2023	Business review
LR71	Pajwani & Chaudhary, 2022	2022	Human Rights Education Review
LR71	Paynter, 2018	2018	Global Majority E-Journal
LR72	Qurban & Amin, 2019	2019	Global Regional Review
LR73	Rehman, et al. 2023	2023	JECCE

Code	Author(s)	Year	Journal
LR74	Richter, 2019	2019	The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries
LR75	Rind, 2023	2023	Current Issues in Comparative Education
LR76	Sahito & Wassan, 2024	2024	Sage open
LR77	Shah, et al. 2019	2019	Language in India
LR78	Shah, 2021	2021	Pakistan Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation
LR79	Shah & Padda, 2023	2023	Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
LR80	Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020	2020	Issues in Educational Research,
LR81	Siddique, et al. 2019	2019	Pakistan Development Review
LR82	Siddique, et al. 2023	2023	Journal of Positive School Psychology
LR83	Sikandar, 2017	2017	Pakistan Development Review
LR84	Soomro, et al. 2018	2018	International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications
LR85	Wilson, et al. 2022	2022	UNICEF
LR86	Yasin, et al. 2023	2023	Journal of Human Dynamics
LR87	Yasmin, et al. 2023	2023	Perennial Journal of History,
LR88	Yousaf, et al. 2023	2023	International Journal of Innovation in Teaching and Learning
LR89	Zahid, et al. 2018	2018	Research Journal of Political Science
LR90	Nisa, et al. 2021	2021	Pakistan Journal of International Affairs
LR91	Zia, et al. 2021	2021	European Journal of Sustainable Development Research
LR92	Zulfiqar, et al. 2019	2019	Journal of Research (Urdu)

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