

Political Instability and its Implications on Public Policy: A Comprehensive Analysis of Governance Transitions and their Effect on Educational Policies in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact of political instability on public policy in Pakistan, with a specific emphasis on the consequences of governance transitions for educational policies. The central question is: How do changes in government affect the formulation, continuity, and implementation of educational policies in Pakistan? Utilizing a historical perspective, the study traces Pakistan's political evolution and its influence on educational policies from post-independence to the present. The research aims to offer a nuanced exploration of the challenges and opportunities that arise as a result of governance transitions, with a specific focus on their impact on policy resilience and sustainability within the education sector.

Keywords: *Educational policy, Political evolution, Governance transition, Policy resilience*

INTRODUCTION

Political instability, characterized by frequent changes in government, has been a defining feature of Pakistan's political evolution since gaining independence in 1947. This research delves into the intricate relationship between political instability and educational policies, seeking to unravel the historical patterns and dynamics that have shaped the formulation, continuity, and implementation of these policies. The central inquiry revolves around the enduring question: How governance transitions and instability impacted the educational policies of Pakistan?

The significance of this inquiry is underscored by the pivotal role of education in shaping the nation's future. Education not only serves as a catalyst for socio-economic development but also plays a crucial role in fostering national identity and unity (Babrul and Amin, 2021). However, the persistent challenges posed by political instability, manifested through frequent changes in government, have created a complex landscape for educational policies. This research aims to contextualize these challenges within the broader historical narrative and providing insights into the factors influencing policy

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decisions. The disruptions caused by governance transitions and the implications for the long-term goals of the education sector.

By examining the historical trajectory, the research seeks to identify recurring patterns, shifts in policy priorities and the influence of political ideologies on educational policies. The study will not only explore the challenges posed by governance transitions but also investigate opportunities for building resilience and sustainability into the education policy framework. This research aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between political dynamics and educational policies in Pakistan. It's offering valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners striving for a more stable and effective education system despite the flux of political change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rechter's study (2018) employs a Systems Dynamics (SD) approach to dissect the persistent challenges entrenched in Pakistan's education system. While Rechter comprehensively addresses historical deficiencies such as corruption, lack of a standardized curriculum, and a shortage of qualified educators, an unexplored aspect within the study is the frequent transition of government structures and administrative policies impacting educational implementation and continuity. The study aligns with the broader acknowledgment of education's pivotal role in poverty reduction and social development, emphasizing the detrimental impact of a politicized education system on economic progress.

Pakistan's economic outlook, characterized by substantial national debt and a reliance on foreign assistance for education expenditure, further underscores the intricate challenges. The study, advocating for a shift from a linear to a systemic perspective, employs systems dynamics to identify leverage points and intervention strategies essential for transformative change. The complex interplay of political, economic, and educational factors highlighted in Rechter's work (2018) underscores the urgency and significance of addressing these issues for Pakistan to bridge the gap with its global counterparts.

Shamaila Amir's comprehensive examination (2020), delves into the current state of Pakistan's education system, with a specific focus on the persisting challenges of insufficient educational institutions and a shortage of qualified teachers since the nation's independence in 1947. While acknowledging the transformative potential of educational policies, the paper highlights a significant gap in the analysis – the limited attention given to the primary cause of instability: the frequent transitions of government. The paper recognizes that the political landscape in Pakistan has undergone frequent changes, impacting the formulation, implementation, and sustainability of educational policies. This aspect is pivotal in understanding the broader context within which educational challenges persist. The study underscores the need for a more nuanced examination that accounts for the intricate relationship between political instability and its direct implications on the educational landscape, ultimately providing a more holistic

foundation for informed policy interventions aimed at addressing Pakistan's education system challenges (Amir, Sharf and Khan).

In Allah Bakhsh Malik's (2019) nuanced literature review, a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's education system reveals a trajectory marked by numerous reforms stemming from its colonial legacy. However, the paper identifies a critical lacuna in the analysis by underscoring the limited attention given to a fundamental determinant – the frequent transitions of government and their profound impact on the educational landscape. The study posits that the ever-changing political landscape in Pakistan has significantly influenced the formulation, execution, and sustainability of educational policies, adding a layer of complexity to the challenges faced by the education system. While acknowledging the role of political motives, ideological slants, and vested interests in driving reforms, the study calls for an enhanced understanding of the implications of political instability on the continuity and effectiveness of educational initiatives. This professional critique accentuates the necessity for a more holistic examination that integrates the intricate interplay between political transitions and educational outcomes, providing a comprehensive foundation for informed policy interventions aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges within Pakistan's education system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative research, the methodology employed, is scrutiny of documents. The study draws upon a comprehensive range of secondary sources, including research articles, journals, government documents, and surveys. The scrutiny of documents approach involves systematically examining and interpreting the textual content within these sources to derive meaningful insights and identify recurring themes. This method allows for a rigorous exploration of the data, enabling a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Through a systematic and in-depth scrutiny of the gathered materials, this research aims to contribute valuable perspectives to the existing body of knowledge on the chosen topic.

Evaluating the Educational Policy of Pakistan

Post-Partition Era (1947-1958)

The post-independence era of Pakistan, from 1947 to 1958, was marked by political instability, changes in leadership. Including the aftermath of partition, insufficient budget, inefficient administration and the challenge of nation-building. During this period, the development of educational policies was influenced by the exigencies of a new state grappling with numerous challenges. The inaugural Educational Conference of 1947 served as a pivotal juncture in establishing the fundamental underpinnings of educational reforms in Pakistan during that era. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, revered as the Father of the Nation, underscored the paramount importance of upholding values such as honour, integrity, responsibility, character, courage, and selfless dedication to national service. This emphasis, as articulated by

Jinnah, was envisioned as a catalyst for fostering socio-economic development within the country.

Furthermore, the discourse at the conference highlighted the significance attributed to Islamic teachings, technical and vocational education, and the pursuit of universal primary education as integral components of the educational framework. The untimely death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1948 left Pakistan grappling with a leadership vacuum. Jinnah had played a crucial role in the formation of the nation and provided a unifying force. His absence created a power struggle among various political factions, leading to a lack of continuity in policy direction (Shapher, 2018). The resultant leadership crisis impeded the effective implementation of educational policies, as subsequent administrations struggled to establish a cohesive and sustained approach to educational development.

Since the establishment of Pakistan, several education policies have been formulated. Regrettably, there has been a conspicuous absence of resolute political commitment from successive governments in vigorously executing these policies. Despite their ambitious nature, these policies have encountered challenges in being effectively implemented in both substance and essence. During the 1947 educational conference the primary and secondary education committee was formed but the committee could not achieve its planned goals due to ill administration, successive transition in government and changes in leaderships.

The challenges in the education sector of Pakistan encompass issues of corruption, insufficient financial resources, and notable inconsistencies in the successive planning efforts of various political administrations. Corruption, identified as a predominant causative factor, has exerted a profound impact on Pakistan's education system (Quddus, 1990). The absence of a robust system of checks and balances, coupled with inadequate accountability measures, has provided fertile ground for the misappropriation of funds, unauthorized use of authority, and the dispensation of undue favours in matters such as fund allocation, transfers, promotions, and decision-making. Transparency International's designation of Pakistan among the world's most corrupt countries further underscores the gravity of the situation (Rahman and Khan, 2011).

The first five-year plans 1951 to 1957 for education improvement were not administered efficiently and a new five-year plan was adopted in 1955. The educational aspirations delineated in the Five-Year Plan (1955-1960) for Pakistan encountered formidable obstacles in realization, primarily attributable to the prevailing political instability and frequent transitions in governance during that specific period. The outlined objectives, aimed at both expanding and enhancing the educational landscape, faced challenges due to the tumultuous political environment characterizing the early years of the nation.

The incessant shifts in leadership and policy priorities resulted in a lack of sustained focus on the planned educational initiatives. Despite the hurdles, it is noteworthy that the plan did achieve a notable 28.5% success rate in its specified goals

over the five-year period. However, the challenges posed by political instability and governance transitions underscore the complex interplay between political stability, effective governance, and the successful realization of educational goals.

First Military Rule (1958-1969)

The imposition of martial law in 1958 in Pakistan, accompanied by changes in government and associated factors, had a profound impact on educational policies. Under President Ayub Khan's regime, the educational landscape underwent significant transformations in alignment with the broader goals of modernization and economic development. It emphasized upon character building, research, primary, secondary and higher education with a focus on discipline (Govt. 1960). The centralized governance model introduced during this period aimed to streamline educational administration, but it also led to a concentration of decision-making power, influencing policy formulation.

The earliest education policy, formulated in 1959 by the "Sharif Commission" under Ayub Khan's military government, stressed the need to create a homogeneous national identity based on Islam (Raja). Changes included a greater emphasis on science and technology, reflecting the priorities of industrial growth. Regrettably, the endeavours fell short of realizing the anticipated outcomes outlined in the report, primarily attributed to insufficient resource allocation, a dearth of political resolve, cohesive planning, and judicious execution. The recommendations of the Commission, particularly those concerning the extension of degree program duration, prompted agitation during the military regime, leading to subsequent withdrawal of the proposed implementation (Malik, 2019).

The educational policies during the first martial law regime in Pakistan, particularly in the second five-year plan (1960-1965), did witness some achievements, but they were also accompanied by notable challenges and criticisms. The regime under Ayub Khan made efforts to expand educational infrastructure. New schools, colleges, and universities were established, contributing to increase enrolment. The emphasis on technical and vocational education aimed at aligning education with the needs of industrialization was realized to some extent. Technical institutions were established to cater to the growing demand for skilled labour. The centralized governance model implemented during martial law reduced provincial autonomy, potentially hindering tailored approaches to address regional educational needs. Decisions made at the federal level might not have adequately considered the diverse contexts of different provinces. The latter years of the first martial law regime saw an increase in political unrest, which could have diverted attention and resources away from the education.

In response to the rejection of the Sharif Commission's report, also known as the Commission on Students Problems and Welfare (1964), by the student community in favour of a more progressive education policy, the Government of Pakistan instituted a subsequent Commission on Students' Problems and Welfare, led by Justice Hamoodur Rahman. Appointed in the backdrop of contemporary instability and policy discontinuity, the commission, in its findings, criticized the country's elitist education system. It

highlighted that such a system contradicted the principles of equality and social justice. The Commission emphasized that the prevailing notion of superior and inferior schools did not align with the principles of equality and social justice, as outlined in the Constitution's preamble, contributing to the ongoing challenges in educational policies (Skies, 2019).

Similarly, the martial regime failed to achieve the set goals in the third five years plan (1965-70) due to the contemporary political instability and ill administration. Moreover, following the military regime led by General Muhammad Ayub Khan, another military regime assumed power and introduced a new Education Policy in 1970. Regrettably, this policy faced non-implementation owing to the brief duration of the government, the separation of East Pakistan, political turbulence, and a lack of governmental ownership. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the Education Policy of 1970 reiterated key principles from preceding educational policies (1970).

Bhutto's Era and the Tumultuous Transformation of Education (1971-77)

In the wake of the tumultuous transition from martial law to civilian government, the Bhutto era emerged as a defining chapter in Pakistan's history, marked by profound political, social, and educational transformations. Against the backdrop of the 1971 war and the subsequent establishment of civilian rule, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's ascent to power brought about significant shifts, including the nationalization of the education system. This radical policy changes not only disrupted the continuity of previous educational initiatives but also had far-reaching implications for the stability and quality of education in the country. During the 1971 war with India, Pakistan lost East Pakistan and economic growth decreased; there was an increase in poverty and many other problems (Khushik and Diemer, 2018).

Mr. Bhutto and his recently appointed cabinet promptly responded to the imperative, and within three months of assuming the presidency, unveiled, through his Minister of Education, Mr. Abdul Hafeez Pirzada, a comprehensive education plan encompassing short-term and long-term objectives for the nation from 1972 to 1980. This initiative, titled The Education Policy, 1972-1980, was supplemented by an appendix, Martial Law Regulations, No. 118, endorsed by Mr. Bhutto in his capacity as Chief Martial Law Administrator on March 29, 1972. (Korson, 1974). This regulation inflicted significant harm upon the educational infrastructure in the nation. Prominent educational institutions such as Forman Christian College, Kinnaird College for Women, Gordon College in Rawalpindi, and the Kulyat ul Banat College run by Anjuman-e-Himayat-Islam in Lahore, were subjected to government takeover, resulting in substantial deterioration and near destruction (Khan, 2001). The nationalization policy led to deterioration of state schools and quality of education because of the absence of a strong state structure for managing and supporting state education (Ali, 2013).

The educational policy and fourth five-year plan (1970-75) remained unimplemented due to war with India and the partition of Bangladesh (Parveen, 2008).

The political instability contributed by the compliance of social and economic changes marked by changes in government intra-party politics and the overthrow of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in a military coup in 1977. These transitions disrupted long-term planning, impacted the timely execution of comprehensive initiatives like educational plans e.g. delaying of scheduled educational plan from 1975 to 1978.

Shaping Minds, Shifting Policies: Zia-ul-Haq's Martial Law and Education [1978-88]

The era of Zia-ul-Haq's martial law in Pakistan, commencing with the overthrow of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's civilian government, was a pivotal period marked by significant changes in educational policies. With the return of military rule, Pakistan once again was thrown into the abyss of political instability and ideological chaos. In July 1977, Zia-ul-Haq assumed power and introducing a new chapter in Pakistan's political landscape. Zia's administration initiated transformative measures in the education sector, aligning policies with his vision of Islamization and conservative values.

In 1979, the authoritarian ruler Zia ul Haq established an educational committee under the leadership of Dr. Abdul Wahid Halepota with the aim of aligning education with Islamic principles. This committee played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the Islamization of education. Dr. Halepota formulated a series of policies and guidelines to shape education according to Islamic ideals, fulfilling Zia's directives. The implementation of his strategy to establish cultural strongholds through Islamization led to the radicalization of the national curricula. Consequently, in the educational policy introduced in 1979 under the Zia regime, the subject of "Dinya'at" (knowledge about religions) was substituted with "Islamia'at" (the study of Islam exclusively). This alteration carried significant implications, particularly in a multicultural and multi-religious society like Pakistan, as it resulted in the abrupt exclusion of minorities from the national curriculum. Consequently, the concept of "Pakistaniness" began to be supplanted by a fervent interpretation of Islam (Awan, 2012).

In 1979, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan became embroiled in a protracted proxy war fuelled by American financial support and arms. American think tanks and numerous NGOs actively influenced Pakistan's national policies as they sought to cultivate an entire generation into extremism. During the conflict against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, both public universities and madrassas in Pakistan proved instrumental in recruiting fighters (Jamal, 2017). While they served the American global agenda effectively, they subsequently wrought havoc on Pakistan's social order after the conclusion of the jihad in Afghanistan. Dr. Ayesha Siddiqa articulates the historical influence of national security predominance and the subordination of education to the security discourse, particularly negatively impacting the fields of humanities (Siddiqa, 2011).

The state of government-operated schools and colleges is equally concerning due to the radical nature of the syllabus for various subjects. A comprehensive examination of

textbooks from the Punjab Text Book Board, covering grades 1 to 10 and encompassing three subjects (Urdu, Pakistan Studies, Islamic Studies), highlights a noteworthy imbalance. Among a total of 871 lessons, a significant proportion, specifically 318, focuses on religion, while 299 centre around Islam, and 261 delve into ethics with an Islamic perspective and characters. In contrast, a mere 100 lessons, solely cantered on ethics and advocating for peace and tolerance, are present in all the textbooks for these subjects. Additionally, the portrayal of non-Muslim characters is imbalanced, with 29 lessons favourably depicting them and 45 portraying them in negative terms. Despite the inclusion of 61 lessons that utilize religion to advocate for peace and tolerance, there are still 16 that promote a perspective not in favour of these values. Nationalism is a prevalent theme, with 98 lessons promoting responsible nationalism, and this sentiment is echoed in 70 lessons that concurrently incorporate religion and nationalism.

In 1978, the Fifth Five Year Plan (1978-1983) was initiated, coinciding with the introduction of the education policy in 1979. The objectives of the plan encompassed achieving universal enrolment by 1986-87 and raising the participation rate from 54 percent to 68 percent by 1982-83. It enhances the quality of instruction and curricula, providing free textbooks, extending in-service training facilities, and reforming the examination system. However, contrary to these goals, the participation rate experienced a decline from 54 percent in 1977-78 to 48 percent in 1982-83, attributed to political instability and chaos (Parveen, 2008). Similarly, the achievements of the sixth plan fell below the set targets, with noting that only 35 percent of the objectives were realized. The goal of establishing girls' primary schools remained unmet, and the participation rate at the primary level reached 64 percent as opposed to the target of 75 percent (Ahmad.M.Q, 1989).

The 1979 shift from "Dinya'at" to "Islamia'at" in the national educational policy had far-reaching consequences, excluding minorities from the curriculum and fostering a fanatical concept of Islam. The geopolitical landscape further influenced Pakistan's educational trajectory. The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked the beginning of a prolonged proxy war, fuelled by American dollars and arms. The role of public universities and madrassas as recruitment grounds during the Afghan jihad had consequences beyond the conflict's conclusion, impacting Pakistan's social order.

The state of government-operated schools and colleges remains a cause for concern due to the radical nature of the syllabus. A comprehensive analysis of textbooks reveals an imbalance, with a disproportionate focus on religious subjects. The portrayal of non-Muslim characters, the limited inclusion of lessons promoting peace and tolerance, and the prevalence of nationalism in the curriculum all contribute to a concerning narrative.

Political Flux, Educational Challenges: Pakistan's Journey from 1988 to 2000

The era encapsulates a tumultuous period marked by significant political shifts in Pakistan. Beginning with the end of General Zia-ul-Haq's military rule in 1988, the country experienced successive changes in government, oscillating between civilian

administrations and brief spells of military rule. This political flux, characterized by frequent transitions in leadership, had profound implications for the education system. The instability led to a lack of continuity in educational policies and hindered the effective implementation of long-term initiatives. The gravity of political problems can be assessed by the fact that between 1988 and 1999 eight prime ministers took the office (including four care-taker prime ministers during interim periods) where education often became a casualty of political manoeuvring.

The competing visions and policy reversals from different governments added to the challenges, making it difficult to establish a coherent and sustained approach to educational development. Amidst these political uncertainties, the education system grappled with issues ranging from curriculum changes to resource allocation, affecting the quality and consistency of education.

Launched in 1988, the Seventh Five Year Plan highlighted the persistent inadequacies within the education system, asserting that approximately 40 percent of children lacked access to education, contributing to a sustained high rate of illiteracy. Furthermore, primary education facilities were only available to 60 percent of children aged 5 to 9 years. Notably, deficiencies in physical infrastructure were evident in primary schools, with around 29,000 lacking buildings and 16,000 having only one classroom. The realization of the target for one teacher and one room for each class, deemed essential for ensuring quality education, appeared challenging and unlikely to be achieved in the coming years (1988).

Since 1990, there have been three official education policies, an action plan for Education Sector Reform (ESR), and several development plans, each demonstrating a discernible shift in language compared to their predecessors (Ali, 2012). A notable milestone in this trajectory was the formulation of the National Education Policy 1992, as reported by Minister Fakhar Imam. This marked the first instance in the country's history where the policy was developed in consultation with stakeholders. The turbulent return to democracy hinted at a potential normalization of the state, and the prospect of a forward-looking planning process in developmental sectors seemed to be a feasible aspiration (Bakhsh, 2019).

During the 1990s, Pakistan exhibited one of the lowest literacy rates globally, standing at 34% (Huebler & Lu, 2012). This figure reflected minimal progress compared to the 1980 census data, which had identified 26.2% of the population as illiterate (Bengali, 1999). In 1998, Pakistan ranked 142nd out of 160 countries in terms of literacy, underscoring a pervasive issue of high illiteracy rates (Bengali, 1999).

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-98) followed the basic principles and main objectives set out in 1992 educational policy. The plan proposed to increase participation of boys to 95.5% and of girls to 81.6% during the plan period until 1998 (Ali, 2012). Yet, the lack of stability and consistent governance created an environment of uncertainty, making it challenging to sustain long-term educational initiatives. Ill administration

further compounded these challenges, affecting the efficient execution of policies outlined in the plan.

Stability and Transformation: Education Reforms under Musharraf

The year 1999 witnessed significant political upheaval, marked by the overthrow of an elected Prime Minister's government by a military leader in October of that year. This alteration in government and the overall political landscape had repercussions on the education sector. Once more, there was a shift in priorities, with education receiving diminished attention compared to the imperative of establishing political and governance stability in the country (Khushik, 2018).

As per the 1951 census, the literacy ratio had declined to 13 percent compared to the time of Pakistan's Independence. The contemporary literacy rate was estimated at 38.9 percent, indicating a gradual increase of half a percent over the previous fifty years. This placed Pakistan at the 142nd position among 160 countries, and within the SAARC region, it held the 6th position—a disheartening scenario indeed (Bengali, 1999). Several critical issues and challenges were identified in elementary education:

1. A population exceeding 5.5 million primary school-age children (5-9 years) were not enrolled.
2. Approximately 45 percent of children dropped out of school at the primary level.
3. Teacher absenteeism was prevalent, particularly in rural areas.
4. Weak instructional supervision was noted at the elementary level.
5. About one-fourth of primary school teachers lacked formal training, and the existing training infrastructure appeared ineffective in enhancing instructional quality.
6. Learning materials were insufficient and of subpar quality, and teaching methods were perceived as stern and unsupportive for effective learning and student motivation (Bengali, 1999).

Since the 1970s, amidst the Cold War dynamics between the United States and the Soviet Union, Pakistan has been a recipient of educational and economic support from both the Arab world and the United States. This period witnessed a rapid establishment of numerous Islamic schools, with some directly participating in the "Jihad" during the Soviet-Afghan war. Following the "9/11" incident, Pakistan assumed a crucial role as the "front-line country" in the global war on terror (Xuefeng & Mahboob Hussain, 2020). In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, General Musharraf opted to become a significant ally of the United States during the 2001 war on terror. The United States, perceiving madrasahs as potential sources of terrorism, entered into a strategic partnership with Pakistan (Kronstadt, 2004).

This strategic decision influenced domestic policies, including those related to education. The increased focus on countering extremism and radicalization led to a scrutiny of madrasahs, which were often viewed as potential sources of militancy. In August 2001, the Islamabad government created a Pakistan Madrassa Education Board to

establish a network of “model madrassas” and regulate others (Kronstadt, 2004). Reforms in the education sector aimed at addressing these concerns, with efforts to introduce a more standardized and regulated curriculum. Additionally, the geopolitical shifts and security challenges brought about by the Afghan War had economic repercussions, impacting budgetary allocations for education. The priorities of resource allocation shifted towards security needs, affecting educational infrastructure and development projects.

Conversely, owing to the persistent Kashmir dispute, Pakistan and India have maintained a hostile and tense relationship since the partition, with the potential for local military conflicts at any given time. Consequently, due to the influence of the external political environment, Pakistan has consistently allocated a substantial portion of its budget to military and national defence, causing educational priorities to take a backseat to national security concerns. The development of education has, for an extended period, been routinely overlooked. According to statistics, Pakistan's expenditure on education typically hovers around 2% of the GDP, while the expenditure on national defence is consistently more than ten times that of education. In 2004, Islamabad was slated to allocate \$16 for national defence for every \$1 spent on education (Xuefeng, 2020).

The era of General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan, marked by a controversial rise to power through a coup in 1999, witnessed significant political instability and societal unrest. The Save the Judiciary movement, initiated in response to Musharraf's decision to dismiss Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in 2007, became a focal point of resistance against perceived illegitimate power-grabbing. The political chaos and social upheaval during this period had notable impacts on the overall education landscape in Pakistan. The turbulence in governance and the judiciary created an atmosphere of uncertainty, adversely affecting educational policies and their consistent implementation.

Contemporary Horizons: Exploring Civilian Governance in the Post-Musharraf Epoch of Pakistan

In the wake of General Pervez Musharraf's era, the return of civilian governance ushered in a new chapter in Pakistan's political landscape. Spanning from the post-Musharraf period to the present day, this era signifies a pivotal transition marked by a shift in leadership dynamics and a renewed emphasis on democratic principles. As the country grappled with the complexities of governance, social dynamics, and global challenges, the post-Musharraf era unfolded against a backdrop of evolving political narratives. This period saw the resurgence of civilian authority, shaping Pakistan's trajectory in the realms of governance, socio-economic development, and educational reforms.

With the restoration of democratic governance, the National Education Policy 2009 received official approval in September 2011, endorsed by the diverse political leadership of Pakistan. The policy articulates the imperative for the education system to furnish quality education to children and youth, empowering them to realize their individual potential and contribute to societal and national development. Additionally, the

policy aims to install a sense of Pakistani nationhood, along with fostering concepts of tolerance, social justice, democracy, and an appreciation for regional and local culture and history, all grounded in the fundamental ideology outlined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Bakhsh, 2019). The planning for this policy commenced three years prior to its formal announcement, involving various seminars and meetings to enhance its efficacy in achieving educational goals. Diverse stakeholders actively participated in the design process, offering valuable suggestions (Nabi, 2020).

However, when scrutinizing the objectives of this policy, it appears to be more of a comprehensive list of aspirations. Notably, the policy set the ambitious target of allocating 7% of GDP by 2015, which remained a lofty goal. The intention to develop a uniform curriculum for both public and private schools was also part of the policy's objectives but remained unfulfilled during the specified timeframe.

The 18th Amendment to Pakistan's constitution has transformed the relationship between the federal and provincial governments by scrapping the "concurrent legislative list." The Act (2010) grants the provinces substantial budgetary and legislative autonomy in the fields of education. The amendment affected the nation's educational system deeply. In the section of the Constitution related to fundamental rights, a new Article 25A has been included "Right to Education".

The national education policy of 2017 was implemented during the tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) and was officially announced by the Federal Minister of Pakistan. The primary focus of this policy centered on the expansion of public-sector colleges and universities nationwide. Emphasizing virtual education, the policy recommended the proliferation of virtual universities. Additionally, the policy advocated for the facilitation of private-sector universities in their establishment and encouraged the opening of more sub-campus of colleges and universities to enhance accessibility for students at local levels.

Special attention was directed towards special education, with a commitment to enrolling approximately 50% of special children in the special education sector by the year 2025. The policy explicitly designated a separate 5% allocation from the education budget for special education initiatives in the country. Nearly five years were expended in delineating roles and responsibilities, and despite the ongoing presence of an inefficient bureaucracy and a lack of priority by political administrations, challenges persist within the education authorities. This creates a convenient avenue and justification to evade the fulfilment of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets. The current scenario remains less than optimistic, with estimates and facts casting doubt on the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets (Khushik, 2018).

Observations following the decentralization process revealed certain drawbacks, notably a discernible enhancement in educational infrastructure in areas affiliated with the ruling party, which contradicts the objective of achieving equitable distribution of education. Additionally, the influence of political figures in the transfers and postings of teachers has led to either an excess or shortage of teachers in various schools. While

enrolment witnessed improvement, the corresponding increase in demand for teachers was not adequately addressed according to requirements (Nabi, 2020).

In the pursuit of reforming the education sector, the PTI-led government emphasized an "education emergency" in Pakistan, advocating for an equal system accessible to all citizens. A key proposal was in the increase of the education budget to 5% of GDP, a significant rise from the existing 2.1%.

During the policy announcement at a local hotel, PTI leader Shaukat Tarin, alongside prominent party members including Chairperson Imran Khan, highlighted the critical aspects of the initiative. Tarin outlined the grim state of the current education system, citing a national literacy rate of 58%, with even lower rates in rural areas (46% for women). Notably, only 25.7 million out of 44 million children in the 5-16 age group were enrolled in schools.

Tarin underscored challenges such as poor infrastructure, subpar learning outcomes, and high dropout rates in government schools. Additionally, he addressed the issue of 1.72 million students in madrassas, expressing concerns about their lack of recognition for employment purposes. A pivotal proposal in the policy was the autonomy of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) from government influence, aiming for complete independence. The policy's core principles included advocating for a unified education system, decentralization of governance, a gradual budget increase, adult education initiatives, teacher training, and integration of information and communication technology.

However, the current economic and political challenges in the country make it increasingly difficult to achieve these ambitious goals. The widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has further complicated the implementation of various policies, including education, adding to the challenges in reaching the set targets. Despite these hurdles, the policy remains under process and is actively striving to achieve its goals.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan's educational trajectory since independence has been shaped by a complex interplay of political, social, and economic factors. The initial years were marked by significant challenges arising from political instability, corruption, inconsistent policy implementation, and budgetary constraints. Throughout different eras, the recurring theme of inconsistent educational policies and achievement is closely tied to the political instability and frequent transitions of government.

In Ayub Khan's era, the efforts towards modernization faced obstacles such as centralized governance and struggles to establish a unified national identity. The subsequent Bhutto's era brought about notable changes, including the nationalization of education, impacting both stability and quality. However, political instability and delayed initiatives hindered effective long-term planning.

Zia-ul-Haq's martial law period emphasized Islamization, impacting the curriculum and leading to lasting consequences. The post-Zia era witnessed inconsistent policies due to political flux, while the 1990s saw persistent low literacy rates despite reform efforts. Post-Musharraf, the return to civilian governance emphasized democratic principles, yet challenges persist, including unmet targets exacerbated by the complexities introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Throughout these eras, the main reason for the inconsistent achievement of educational policy goals remains political instability and the frequent transition of government. Despite hurdles, Pakistan's educational journey reflects resilience and determination to navigate complexities. Various reform initiatives demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the education system. However, challenges such as political instability, inconsistent governance, and external factors like the Afghan War and the Covid-19 pandemic continue to pose formidable obstacles. The multifaceted nature of these challenges underscores the imperative for sustained efforts, long-term planning, and consistent policies to achieve a more stable and equitable educational landscape in Pakistan. While progress has been made, the ongoing commitment to addressing these issues remains crucial for the nation's educational development and the empowerment of its future generations.

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